The image features a large, light gray watermark logo on the left side, consisting of a stylized 'U' and 'G' intertwined. To the right of the logo, the text 'Uignou' is written in a large, light gray font, with 'THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY' written below it in a smaller, light gray font. A vertical line separates the logo from the text.

BLOCK 2
RESISTANCE, MOBILISATION AND
CHANGE



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UNIT 6 MOBILITY AND CHANGE*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Mobility in Caste
 - 6.2.1 Levels of Mobility
- 6.3 Sanskritization and Westernization
 - 6.3.1 Sanskritization
 - 6.3.2 Westernization
- 6.4 Secularization
 - 6.4.1 Education
 - 6.4.2 SC's and OBC's
 - 6.4.3 Industrialization and Urbanization
- 6.5 Class and Social Mobility
 - 6.5.1 Significance of Class Mobility
 - 6.5.2 Class Mobility and Class Formation
 - 6.5.3 Industrialization and Mobility
 - 6.5.4 Education and Mobility
 - 6.5.5 Intergenerational and Intragenerational Mobility
- 6.6 Social Mobility and Classes in India
 - 6.6.1 Social Mobility in Agrarian Classes
 - 6.6.2 Industrialisation of Social Classes
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 References
- 6.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you would be able:

- to outline the processes and factors that influence mobility in caste;
- to describe the nature of mobility in class and the factors influencing it; and
- to highlight the factors influencing class mobility in India.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Sorokin has made pioneering contribution to the analysis and study of social mobility and has contributed to conceptualization, types and channelization of it. He differentiated between societies that are 'closed', rigid, immobile and impenetrable and those that are 'open', plastic, penetrable or mobile. The nature of stratification has a bearing on the nature of mobility; while caste system is often associated with 'closed society' where avenues for mobility are rare, restricted and few, classes are found in 'open' societies' which offer ample

*Adapted from ESO-04, Unit 29

opportunities for mobility through achievement. It is important to investigate into the nature of mobility in caste and class to find out how far they conform to the generalization mentioned by Sorokin.

6.2 MOBILITY IN CASTE

While the general impression has been that caste is a 'closed' system of stratification, yet in reality it is far from true. No society is static and even in the traditional set up where ascription was the prime determinant of one's ritual and occupational standing, access to rewards and resources and social mobility both upward and downward was not totally absent. Social mobility in the caste system is evident in the increasing discrepancy between caste and occupations, withering away of jajmani obligations, the rigidity regarding purity and pollution and acceptance of secular lifestyle. In the olden days, Srinivas points out, there were two major sources of mobility. First was the fluidity of the political system, which made it feasible for new castes to assume the status of Kshatriyas and exercise power.

Second was the availability of marginal land which could be brought under cultivation. As a consequence of these two available routes to upward mobility, leaders from dominant castes such as Reddis, Marathas could seize political power and claim Kshatriya status.

The medieval Pala dynasty of Bengal was Shudra in origin. The Patidars of Gujarat originated as peasant caste. When the leader of a dominant caste escalated the rank of raja or king, it became a source of mobility for the other members and this was strengthened by adoption of practices and life styles of the upper castes.

6.2.1 Level of Mobility

Mobility has taken place at the level of individual, family and group. Sharma has made a careful analysis of these levels of mobility.

- i) **Mobility of an Individual within a family:** Some individuals even though of low caste, may have better status and prestige compared to other members of their family. This may be on account of one's personality traits such as integrity, honesty, acquisition of education and other achievements. Similarly an individual of higher caste may lose his position on account of misdeeds and slothful habits. This may result in downward mobility for the individual. The individual mobility is therefore a consequence of the individual's capabilities or lack of it and hence does not influence the prestige of the caste and is least corporate in nature.
- ii) **Mobility of a minority of families within a caste:** This kind of mobility is linked to socio-economic and political aspects of the families. The improvement in status could be the result of acquisition of land and education which is further reiterated by emulating the practices of higher caste with regard to dress, lifestyle and rituals. Mobility of this type is not cooperate in nature and can be viewed as '**horizontal mobility**' rather than '**vertical mobility**' which bridges the gap between status distinctions. Burton Stein points out that this trend was predominant in the medieval period.

- iii) **Mobility of a majority of family or group:** This kind of mobility is 'corporate' in nature. It involves collective state of prestige, honour, status and is therefore marked by changes in socio-cultural practices regarding purity and pollution. Certain castes improve their positions by discarding practices regarded as impure and degrading. Sanskritization was the chief process which helped these castes to move up in hierarchy and legitimize their claim to upward mobility.

6.3 SANSKRITIZATION AND WESTERNIZATION

There are several features and processes of mobility. We now turn to these.

6.3.1 Sanskritization

M.N. Srinivas formulated and contributed immensely to the concept of Sanskritization as a process of mobility in caste. He refers to Sanskritization as a "process by which a low Hindu caste or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently 'twice born' caste" (Srinivas 1966). Sanskritization has been prevalent throughout history and has assumed various forms. It has been used as a mechanism to bridge the gap between secular and ritual rank. Whenever a caste achieved secular power it tried to legitimise its status by acquiring traditional symbols of high castes by adopting their customs, rituals, beliefs and ideas such as vegetarianism and teetotalism. Besides, they tried to obtain the services of Brahmin priests, visited pilgrimage centres and acquired knowledge of sacred texts.

The census recording was considered an excellent source of making claims to higher status. This claim according to Srinivas was upgraded in subsequent operations. For example if in one census the caste claimed to be Vaishya, in the subsequent operations it would lay claim to Brahmin or Kshatriya caste. This attempt was followed by attempts made by the castes to emulate the lifestyle of the respective caste they laid claim to. The status attributes of highly ranked warrior ruler category i.e. Kshatriya and the Brahmin served as model or most upwardly mobile groups.

Another very significant pattern of Sanskritization involved increasing Puritanism on the part of the castes who rejected superiority of the twice born e.g. the Koris of eastern Uttar Pradesh refused to accept water from Brahmins. Such a process of **de-sanskritization** contributes to crystallization of new groups and greater political mobilization. **Re-sanskritization** is another process in the endeavour to attain mobility. In this case formerly westernised or modernised groups discard many symbols of modernization and revert to traditional sanskritic life styles.

From the above discussion, it is clear that Sanskritization was a process of social mobility which resulted only in **positional changes** for particular castes and their sections i.e. the individual castes moved up or down the hierarchy while the structure remained the same.

6.3.2 Westernization

Srinivas defines "Westernization as the changes brought about in Indian society and culture as result of over 150 years of British rule, the term subsuming changes occurring at different levels of technology, institutions, ideology and values".

(Srinivas 1966) Westernization is therefore a vast, multidimensional and a complex process which impinged upon various domains through a number of institutions and hence had a significant bearing on caste mobility. It not only altered the existing set up but also opened fresh avenues and doors for social mobility. A large number of inter-related factors are responsible for this.

Under British rule, land became a saleable commodity and this had far-reaching consequences for mobility. The members of a low caste who could afford to buy land could now become upwardly mobile and those who lost their rights to lands suffered downward mobility.

Activity 1

Observe the society in a suburban village near you. How far does social interaction confirm the westernization thesis? Make notes and compare with other students in your study centre.

The introduction of new means of communication served to dilute the restrictions and inhibitions associated with caste.

The British rule provided fresh avenues for social mobility altering the nature of pre-existing institutions such as schools and colleges which opened their doors to all castes and establishing new ones such as army, bureaucracy and law courts which recruited members on the basis of merit and hence provided ample source of mobility. Most of the new economic opportunities generated under the British rule were taken advantage of by the upper castes who availed of the educational facilities. This is not to say that the lower castes were unaffected by them, for example, Bailey mentioned how the prohibition policy resulted in the relative prosperity of Ganjam and Bord Distillers. Similarly Srinivas cites the example of Noniyas of Western U.P. and Kolis of Surat coast who benefited from new employment opportunities resulting from railway, road and canal constructions. The Telis (oilmen) all over eastern India became wealthy on account of larger market and trade for oil.

Westernization accelerated the mobility process in more ways than one. On the one hand it was a desirable mechanism of attaining mobility, on the other, it generated mobility also because the 'westernized' became a model by emulation for the others.

It must be noted that westernization did not begin and end with British rule. It provided tracks which furthered and accelerated the mobility process. It set the ball rolling which gained further momentum after Independence. Independent India took over the rationalistic egalitarian and humanitarian principles from the British and created further room for mobility.

- i) **New Legal System:** The British rule resulted in the political integration of the country into a single administrative unit with a uniform and homogeneous pattern of law and order grounded in the principles of rationalism, humanitarianism and egalitarianism. These laws were sometimes in contradiction with the pre-existing ones. For example under the traditional law, punishment varied according to the caste of the person committing the offence, while the British laws treated everyone equally. The Caste Disabilities Removal Act and Abolition of Slavery were a great leap forward

towards upliftment of lower castes. These laws were efforts in the direction of bridging the gap between lower and higher castes.

Box 6.1

The principles of universalism and egalitarianism which have guided the legal system in India after Independence have fostered social mobility among the lower castes. The new civil, penal and procedural law has done away with the inequities inherent in traditional law. Another important contribution of the new legal system was the creation of consciousness of positive rights. The abolition of untouchability and adoption of protective discrimination' policy have proved immensely beneficial for the lower rung of society.

The principle of universal adult franchise, adoption of Panchayati Raj System have altered the distribution of power, strengthening the hands of the weaker sections and restricting the appropriation of power by the upper castes. Similarly land reforms have been a major force affecting mobility. Ceiling of holdings have proved a blow to the status and prestige of zamindars and a boon for peasant cultivators who have attained ownership rights

- ii) Adoption of Reforms: Whenever efforts are made at reforming the society it generates opportunities for mobility. Buddhism, Jainism and later Sikhism have disregarded the rigidities associated with purity and pollution. They have advocated against the prevalent inequities and established a new egalitarian order within the sects. Similarly the Christian missionaries during the British rule proselytized the most oppressed castes. They extricated the untouchables from a life of misery and exploitation and provided them education and health facilities. This enabled them to find new employment opportunities and attain higher status and prestige than before.

The educated liberal reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Dayananda in their endeavour to reform society got abolished evil practices such as *Sati*, child marriage, human sacrifice etc. To alleviate oppression and elevate the status of lower castes, they tried to infuse elements of rationality and modernity into Hindu religion. This they did by doing away with dogma and rituals associated with Hindu religion and weakening the clutches of Brahmins who they regarded as the oppressors. The new religious sects like AryaSamaj, Ramakrishna Mission, and BrahmoSamaj were egalitarian and were against disabilities and discrimination based on caste. They have played an important role in imparting education and modern knowledge and hence raising the status of their members.

Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar fought vociferously for the upliftment of the untouchables and their efforts bore fruits in the form of abolition of untouchability and the provision for protective discrimination. This has generated large scale upward social mobility among the under privileged sections of the society.

6.4 SECULARIZATION

The term “secularization” implies that what was previously regarded as religious ceases to be such and it also implies a process of differentiation in the various aspects of society, economy, polity, laws and morality becoming increasingly discrete in relation to each other. In the traditional set-up the principle of purity and pollution was the prime determinant of the status, ranking, occupation and the general lifestyle. With increasing emphasis on rationality and education the notion of purity and pollution weakened and today it is common to see people of different castes work together in factories or rub shoulders against each other in buses and trains and even dine together in restaurants. Together with this, the manner of dress in the modern society serves to blur caste distinctions. The new law based on universalism and the constitutional recognition of equality for all citizens and the declaration of India as a secular state has served to abolish discrimination based on caste.

6.4.1 Education

Education was the prerogative of the Brahmins and ‘twice born’ castes in the traditional set up. During the British rule educational institutions were opened to all and knowledge had a secular and rational basis. Acquisition of education opened avenues for individual and group mobility. Those trained in modern education could find jobs in army and bureaucracy which gave impetus to upward mobility. Besides this, education instilled in the minds of people, the new principles of justice, liberty and equality. The educated elite fought against discriminations on the basis of caste.

Education had such a deep impact on the pace and patterns of mobility that it created a new middle class. After independence, in an effort to uplift the SC, ST and OBC’s through education, seats have been reserved for them in educational institutions. Since then these benefits have been appropriated by a small section. It has resulted in new cleavages among these sections. These cleavages are an aspect of mobility patterns based on those who have and do not have access to education.

6.4.2 SC’s and OBC’s

Under this section we will analyze two main modes of mobility i.e. **mobility through conflict** and mobility on account of **protective discrimination**.

For years the backward sections who were oppressed remained submissive and servile, but under British rule they improved their status and tried to legitimise it through Sanskritization. But simultaneously, the upper castes leaped forward by usurping new opportunities. The gap between the upper and lower castes widened and this they tried to bridge by laying claim to economic and political resources. These under-privileged castes consolidated themselves against the upper castes in the form of Caste Sabhas. The anti-Brahmin movement dates back to 1870’s in Maharashtra and was led by dominant castes such as Kammas, Reddis, Nayars etc in the South. The most significant movements were launched by Mahars under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar. The other movements include those of ‘Dalit Panthers’ who united all sections of depressed people.

Activity 2

Talk to various strata of people and find out how far protective discrimination will help the SC's and OBC's. Compare your notes with other students in the study centre.

These movements are illustrations for horizontal mobility and endeavours at vertical (upward) mobility. Pradeep Bose has identified two main mobility courses i.e. **movement for consolidation** and **movements for assertion**. In the former the caste associations tried to raise their status through census operations and petitioning the rulers. These moves were legitimized through Sanskritization and maintaining distance from equivalent castes. For example Kayasthas and Bhumihaar in Bihar, in their mobility efforts represented economic grievances and deprivations. These castes formed associations to this pattern.

The backward sections have found opportunities for upward mobility on account of 'protective discrimination' policies which involves reservation of seats in educational institutions, freship and scholarships, Besides, there are reservations in jobs and legislative bodies. These welfare measures have benefited only a small section who have claims to much higher status than their counterparts of the same caste resulting in further divisions in the castes.

6.4.3 Industrialization and Urbanization

Industrialization accelerated the rate of social mobility in various ways. It provided employment opportunities which emphasized achievement and qualifications rather than caste. In the factories, jobs were hierarchically graded according to qualifications and experience rather than ritual ranking. These employment opportunities were open to all and proved a source of upward mobility for the landless labourers.

Industrialization brought with it a new work set up and work culture based on technical division of labour and uniform standards. In the factories workers from different castes worked together on the same machines irrespective of considerations regarding purity and pollution.

Box 6.2

Most of the industries are city based and this generates migrations of work force to cities which results in urbanization. The urbanization induced by industrialization had far reaching ramifications on social mobility. In the city the lifestyles and residential patterns are no longer ordained by caste and have served to mellow down caste distinctions. The cosmopolitan set up is also responsible for inter caste marriages.

The mobility in cities is largely on account of achievement through education and new occupational avenues. Class as a system of stratification is replacing caste. But caste divisions are also simultaneously crystallizing in the form of caste associations, federations etc. Urbanization has created greater avenues for both vertical and horizontal mobility. Horizontal mobility characterizes both caste and class in cities. Formation of caste associations is an example of the former and job transfers is an illustration of the latter.

Check Your Progress 1

Tick the right answer in the following questions.

- i) Sanskritization refers to:
 - a) Speaking in Sanskrit
 - b) Spreading knowledge in Sanskrit
 - c) A process of mobility in caste
- ii) Westernization refers to:
 - a) Brain Drain
 - b) Changes brought about on account of British Rule.
 - c) Aping the western culture.
- iii) What is 'Protective Discrimination' ?
 - a) Policy of reservation of seats in educational institutions, legislative and jobs for weaker sections
 - b) Policy for the upliftment of the upper classes.
 - c) Oppression and exploitation of the untouchables
- iv) Tick the factors which have generated mobility in caste:
 - a) Education
 - b) Legal Reforms
 - c) Industrialization
 - d) Urbanization.

6.5 CLASS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

We will now discuss the significance of class and social mobility below.

6.5.1 Significance of Class Mobility

Classes are a very significant and pervasive dimension of stratification and the analysis of mobility along class lines is of crucial significance not only as an end in itself but also on account of its ramifications on other social processes. The extent of mobility has been used as a measure of the "openness" of industrial society and high mobility rates are an indication of the society being characterized by achievement rather than ascription and that it is meritocratic where individuals reap regards on the basis of their personal qualities rather than through inherited wealth and positions.

Class mobility is a crucial factor for the understanding of class formation. Also, study of class mobility can provide indications of life choices of the members of society i.e. the impact of one's class of origin on life choices. Besides this, the responses and reactions of those undergoing mobility are important for analyzing social stability and expansion. Together with these the extent of social mobility has been used as a measure of "openness" of industrial society and high mobility rates are an indication of society being characterized by achievement rather than ascription.

6.5.2 Class Mobility and Class Formation

The most crucial aspect is class formation. A large number of scholars have shown keen interest in this area of study. Karl Marx was concerned about the relationship between class formation and action on the one hand and the extent of mobility between class positions on the other. He was of the view that proletarianization was inimical to the process of class formation. Also in advanced capitalist societies, the expansion of middle class is based on recruitment from the proletariat. Marx also recognized that a certain degree of immobility is seen as an indispensable prerequisite for the emergence of class consciousness. Similarly, Weber too emphasized the significance of social mobility for class formation. Weber recognized immobility as a chief determinant for social and cultural identity of a class.

Westergaard and Resler reiterate the crucial part played in shaping of class structure as a whole by the division, between those who own the capital and those who do not. They also recognise the importance of mobility and lack of it as a factor influencing peoples responses to their class situation, class consciousness and class organization. Like Westergaard and Resler, Giddens too visualizes mobility as a process of central importance to class formation. But for Giddens, its importance lies not only in the development of class consciousness and organisation as classes for themselves, it also extends back as recognizable social phenomena i.e. as 'classes in themselves'. Giddens is of the opinion that greater the restrictions on mobility i.e. greater the immobility, greater the chances for formation of distinct identifiable classes in terms of reproduction of life chances, cohesion and class solidarity. Similarly in a society with constant flux and greater mobility rate, class distinctions are blurred. Mobility is a basic source of class 'structuration' i.e. it is the rate and pattern of mobility that will determine the extent to which classes may be recognized as collectivities of individuals or families occupying similar locations. Secondly, the extent of mobility may be taken as a significant indicator for prevailing modes of class action.

Parkin has argued that class conflict is to an important degree expressed in the formation of strategies of exclusion adopted by advantaged groups. Mobility rates and patterns serve to reveal the effectiveness of exclusion and potential success for solidarism.

6.5.3 Industrialization and Mobility

In the analysis of mobility processes and patterns the term class is not used strictly in the sense as used by Marx or by Weber. Rather class is viewed in terms of occupational groupings because occupation is an aspect of one's merit, education and qualifications and it determines one's status, prestige and salary which in turn influences the consumption patterns and life chances.

Industrialization has introduced a lot of changes not only in the economic sphere but in all realms of society. Industrial societies are referred to as 'open' societies where the opportunities for mobility are available in plenty. The high rates of mobility in industrial societies are attributed to rapid economic change which necessitates occupational, geographical and social mobility to make optimum and efficient use of available talent. It is on this account that Lipset and Zettergerg feel that industrialism creates uniform mobility patterns. Duncan and Blua emphasise on a number of factors generated by industrialization that have a

bearing on mobility patterns. They are of the opinion that industrialization is connected with growing rationalism which accounts for universalistic criteria for selection and upgrading occupational division of labour, weakening of kinship and neighborhood ties.

The emphasis on achievement as a criteria for selection in industrialization has generated both upward and downward mobility. While it is clear that upward mobility is the result of the recognition given to merit, downward mobility is the result of lack of inheritable positions of the elites.

Industrialization affects occupational patterns. In every industrialized or industrialising society there is an increase in the proportion of professional, official, managerial and whitecollar positions and decline in the proportion of unskilled labour jobs which create a surge of upward mobility. More and more people are required to manage industry, for administration and for distribution of goods and services.

6.5.4 Education and Mobility

The impetus on achievement and qualifications as determinants of one's merit has resulted in the increasing emphasis on education and training to obtain them. Education has attained a key role in facilitating mobility especially in the industrial societies. The increasing specialization and division of labour presuppose the existence of qualified personnel who can handle specialised tasks. These specialists whether in the field of industry, law, or medicine are trained and educated in specialised branches of knowledge. These educational and training facilities are open to all in the industrial societies. In the traditional set up, it was imparted to a very small number of people in the guilds which then restricted mobility. Education has been used as a route to attain upward mobility. Educational attainment is a major determinant of career mobility and deeply affects the patterns of inter-generational and intra-generational mobility discussed below.

6.5.5 Intergenerational and Intragenerational Mobility

It refers to mobility or shift (upward or downward) vis-a-vis one's parents' class. If a son or a daughter of a supervisor becomes an unskilled labourer it would be **downward mobility** and if the same person's son or daughter becomes a manager it would amount to **upward mobility**.

One of the first major studies on inter-generational mobility was conducted in England and Wales by David Glass in 1949. It was found that intergenerational mobility was quite high and about two-third of the persons interviewed were in a different occupational category from that of their father. Most of the mobility was short range i.e. people were found in categories close to their father. Upward mobility was more common than downward mobility and was mostly concentrated in the middle levels of the class structure.

Another significant study was conducted in Western Europe and U.S. It was found that cross-class mobility was about 30% for all western industrial societies and that most of the mobility was short range. They found that intergenerational mobility links the effect of family background on the occupational and social placement of individuals. Educational qualifications have a bearing on mobility patterns. Those with higher qualifications were found in non-manual occupations.

Also, with similar educational attainments, some manual workers entered in manual jobs while those of non-manual workers entered manual jobs. Only college education enabled some manual workers to enter non-manual jobs. According to Lipset and Bendix, poverty, lack of education, lack of exposure are other factors that affect mobility.

Later studies by Hauzer and Hout have confirmed that short range mobility is greater than long range and that mobility is more likely in the middle of socio-economic hierarchy than at its peak. Intra-generational mobility i.e. where the individual changes social position during his/ her career. For example a clerk may be promoted to managerial cadre during his/ her career. It has been found that work like mobility is generally less than inter-generational mobility, its degree depends on the first job. Work life mobility decreases with age i.e. it does not increase much after the age of 35 years. Although it is not the rule, yet worklife mobility is largely upward. It has been found that intra-generational mobility is also linked to educational qualifications and more specific the educational qualifications and the more specific the educational training, less the scope for mobility. According to Lipset and Bendix self-employment is one of the few means of acquiring higher positions and mobility among manual workers.

6.6 SOCIAL MOBILITY AND CLASSES IN INDIA

Very often it is expressed that classes in India are a result of social mobility induced by British rule in India. This statement is far from true because classes did exist in pre-British times too. However, it cannot be denied that in the traditional set up caste system was a more predominant system of stratification. In the present set up, classes and castes have co-existed as dynamic systems and have interacted to create a complex and multidimensional empirical reality. It is only for analytical purposes that the following different class strata are being identified

6.6.1 Social Mobility in Agrarian Classes

In the traditional set up, gold could be bought or sold and was a source of great prestige. During the British rule, land became a saleable commodity and it had serious repercussion on the nature of agrarian relations and on social mobility.

The introduction of land reforms in the 1950s which aimed at abolishing the intermediaries, such as the Zamindars and providing land to the tiller generated vertical mobility - both upward and downward. While some tenants could buy surplus land and become upwardly mobile, others were thrown out by the Zamindars who claimed to be the cultivators. This resulted in the pauperization of the landless labourers, land reforms were also a source of downward mobility for the Zamindars. They lost their right to extract taxes and share from the cultivators which was a source of their wealth. They were left with fragmented holdings which could not support their feudal lifestyle. With the introduction of legal measures such as introduction of panchayats and universal adult franchise, they felt uncomfortable, since their influence and power waned.

Green Revolution programme launched by the government in 1960's has also altered the pattern of inequalities in the villages. The emphasis of this programme was on the use of high yielding variety seeds and use of fertilizers for increasing productivity. But these seeds and fertilizers also required other basic infrastructural

facilities such as tubewells for regular water supply. These along with other requirements cannot be afforded by small peasants. A new class of '**Progressive Farmers**' have come to characterize the villages under the Green Revolution Programme. They have large land holdings and can afford to invest in resources like tractors, pumpsets, power threshers etc. These progressive farmers are entrepreneurs who invest in land to reap profits. They are a distinct class who are separated from the small farmers and from the agricultural labour whom they employ; Green revolution has thus further reinforced social inequality.

The increasing prosperity of the rich landlords at the cost of pauperization of the workers has generated conflict and strife in the agrarian set up. Political mobilization of the agrarian classes on an all India basis started during the freedom struggle. This continues even today, although the spread and intensity of mobilization varies across regions, classes and time periods.

It is now clear that a large number of processes have influenced the nature of agrarian classes and mobility among them. There have been measures and mechanism for the formation of new castes and the upward and downward mobility of the existing ones.

6.6.2 Industrialisation and Social Classes

Urbanization is not a new phenomenon for Indian society. During the pre-British period, there were a large number of cities with a district pattern of ranking and administration. After industrialization, the resultant urbanward migration has been rapid and enormous. This has grossly affected the nature of the social classes. There are four major classes that can be identified in an urban set up. These include:

- i) **The capitalists/bourgeoisie:** The Britishers introduced modern industrialization in India. The setting up of industries, free trade and new markets gave impetus to trade and commerce. The traders became wealthier and took to industry. It is noteworthy that even today a large number of industrialists hail from trading castes and communities such as Marwaries in Rajasthan, Gujarati Baniyas and Jains in the west, and Chettiars in the South. The merchant class was the first to become capitalist. Certain artisans and craftsmen who availed of the new economic opportunities also set up small scale factories. The Jatavs of Agra studied by Lynch have taken to shoe manufacturing. Some landowning castes too become industrialists, these include Patidars of Gujarat, Naidus and Reddies of Andhra Pradesh. Industry has expanded immensely after independence and diversified into all fields ranging from iron and steel, textiles, automobiles, electronics to aeronautics. The class of industrialists has become economically and numerically stronger.
- ii) **Entrepreneurs Traders and Shopkeepers:** Urban society was always comprised of entrepreneurs who included traders and shopkeepers. These classes have flourished and expanded with the growth of cities and towns and cashed on the rising demands of new goods and services in them. This class would include entrepreneurs running restaurants, marriage bureaus, video libraries and others like property dealers, grocers, launderers, dry cleaners, and vegetable vendors who are a direct link between suppliers of goods and services and consumers. A large number of people have become wealthy by joining this rung of class structure in the cities while some have diversified and expanded in their traditional occupations and arts such as

Dhobis taking to dry cleaning and barbers opening beauty parlours. Others have established absolutely new enterprises and other consumer durables, travel agencies etc.

- iii) **Professional Classes:** This class has undergone vast changes in its nature and complexion on account of the changes introduced under the British rule and after independence. The British required a large body of professionals for various purposes. They felt it was cheaper to educate Indians for the same. Hence a large number of educational institutions were established to train professionals. This class included doctors, lawyers, managers, bureaucrats, scientists, technocrats etc. With the expansion of the tertiary sector, this class has expanded both in size and prestige. Even though it is a highly heterogeneous class comprising those ranging from clerks to C.A.'s, Babus to bureaucrats, yet one factor that characterizes them all is that they have achieved their status through qualifications that befit their positions. The members of this class have made use of education and training to attain their positions. Another common feature of this class is that a large majority of them are salaried employees of state or private sector, they are neither direct rulers nor economic producers like industrialists or peasants.
- iv) **Working Class:** Studies have shown that the earliest working class population comprised of pauperized agricultural labour who were landless or impoverished peasantry who had mortgaged their land. The latter joined the labour force on a short term basis as 'target workers' to earn a fixed sum of money to be able to get back their land, others joined as seasonal workers in search of work during slack periods in agriculture. These workers worked in factories and textile mills, plantations, and in informal sectors; what characterized them all was the abject living conditions in slums.

With the expansion of industry in recent decades, the working class has expanded and diversified into various industrial set ups in all parts of the country. They have organized themselves into unions to enter into better bargaining positions with their employers. These trade unions have political affiliations and have raised their leaders to positions of power, prestige and mediators between management and workers. The workers have provisions for both intra and inter-generational mobility. They can opt for change in the industrial unit they work for, on the basis of pay structure and work conditions. Besides vertical mobility, the workers also depict horizontal mobilization in terms of labour unions, clubs and associations etc.

Check Your Progress 2

Tick the right answer in the following questions.

- 1) Inter-generational 'Mobility refers to:
 - a) Mobility during a person's worklife.
 - b) Mobility on account of Migration.
 - c) Shift of mobility (upward or downward) vis-a-vis one's parents
- 2) The factors responsible for mobility in the agrarian set up in India are:
 - a) Land Reforms
 - b) Green Revolution Programme

- c) White-Collar job
- d) a) and b)

6.7 LET US SUM UP

It can be noted from the above discussion on social mobility that even in the so called 'closed' system of stratification, there is constant effort among members to improve their social positions through the means available to them. As we have seen in India, some of the mechanisms and processes involved in social mobility were culture specific as is the case of Sanskritization. The new avenues for mobility provided by education, urbanization and industrialization were quickly united for advantageous shifts in hierarchy.

Industrialization and urbanization have played a vital role in generating mobility both in the caste and class societies by emphasizing the role of achievement and skill acquired through education, these twin processes have widened the horizons for vertical and horizontal mobility.

In India, caste mobility and class hierarchy co-exist, intermingle and have resulted in a complex and multi-dimensional pattern of stratification and mobility where the two may or may not be co-terminus!

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6.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) c
- ii) b
- iii) a
- iv) a, b,c and d

Check Your Progress 2

- i) c
- ii) b
- iii) c

GLOSSARY

Sanskritization: It is a process of social mobility in caste whereby a low caste may change its customs, lifestyle, rituals and ideology in the direction of high castes mainly Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Emulation is the main process involved here.

Westernization: It is a term used to describe the changes that came about as a result of British rule in India. These changes include those at the level of technology, institutions, ideology etc. Westernizations opened new doors for mobility at the level of individuals and castes.

Horizontal Mobility : Refers to shifts in position in a society which does not involve movement between strata.

Intragenerational Mobility : This is mobility which occurs within different generations of people. **Intergenerational Mobility :** Refers to mobility within the time span of two or more generations.

Agrarian: Rural, dependent on agriculture.

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UNIT 7 ETHNIC MOVEMENTS IN INDIA*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 The Concept of "Ethnicity"
- 7.3 Ethnic Identity
- 7.4 Forms of Ethnic Identity And Assertion
 - 7.4.1 Linguistic Ethnicity
 - 7.4.2 Communalism
 - 7.4.3 Tribal Movements
 - 7.4.4 Ethno-Nationalism
 - 7.4.5 Regionalism
 - 7.4.6 Casteism
- 7.5 Factors Responsible for Ethnic Upsurge in India
- 7.6 Theoretical Approaches to Ethnic Movement
 - 7.6.1 Primordialist Approach
 - 7.6.2 Instrumental Approach
 - 7.6.3 Modernization Approach
 - 7.6.4 Social Constructionist Approach
- 7.7 Major Ethnic Movements In India
 - 7.7.1 Ethnic Movement in Punjab
 - 7.7.2 Ethnic Movement in North East
 - 7.7.3 Ethnic Movement in Gorkhaland
 - 7.7.4 Dravidian Movement
 - 7.7.5 Ethnicity in Assam
- 7.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.9 References
- 7.10 Specimen Answers to Check your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you would be able to:

- Understand the meaning of ethnicity in India;
- Identify the issues/problems involved in the ethnic movement;
- Know the approaches to ethnic movement
- Analyze the major ethnic movements in India

7.1 INTRODUCTION

India is a multi- ethnic, multi- religious, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic country where national unity is given priority. Different ethnic groups have been asserting

their ethnic rights and privileges through different types of movements. Ethnic movements in Assam, Punjab, North-East states, West Bengal and Kashmir have created a separate consciousness for the minorities to establish their identity in these states. Some ethnic movements are democratic and peaceful while others are separatist movements engaged with ethnic violence. So ethnicity has been a prime issue in nation and Nation-State.

The term ethnicity has been a popular term in academic discourse which refers to ascriptive identities like caste, language, religion, region etc. The term *Ethnicity* was first used by the French nationalist and scientist, Georges Vacher de la Pougé, in 1896 to describe the “natural and counterfeit” cultural, psychological and social characteristics of a population, and in order to distinguish the latter from the concept of race which he defined as a series of physical characteristics (Vacher de la Pougé, 1896). The term ethnic has Latin and Greek origins – *ethnicus* and *ethnikas* both meaning *nation*. Etymologically, ethnicity refers to a band of people (nation) living together who share and acknowledge common customs. Ethnicity refers to social traits like nationality, tribe, and religious faith, shared language, shared culture, and shared traditions that are shared by a human population.

7.2 THE CONCEPT OF "ETHNICITY"

International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines ethnic group as ‘a distinct category of the population in a larger society whose culture is usually different from its own. The members of such a group are, or feel themselves, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race or nationality or culture’. They form their group when they are denied their rights, liberties and equality by the majority group. The members are physically and socially isolated from the larger community.

Ghosh (2003) defines Ethnicity as *"the process of formation and reformation of consciousness of identity (real or supposed) in terms of one or more social-cultural-political symbols of domination/subjugation of a group(s) or community by another that emerge out of the processes of assimilation, acculturation, interaction, competition and conflict"*. T.K. Oommen opines that the ethnic group is a group of people who share a common history, tradition, language and life-style, but are uprooted from and/or unattached to a homeland. Ethnicity is a processes which creates a sense of ethnic consciousness among the members of an ethnic group and mobilizes the members of same caste, language and religion to articulate their economic and political interest.

Max Weber writes: “ethnic groups are those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.” (Hutchinson and Smith 1996, 35).

7.3 ETHNIC IDENTITY

Ethnic identity is determined at birth, inbuilt in human nature, and passed from generation to generation. Fredrik Barth (1969) argued that ethnic identity was a means to create boundaries that enabled a group to distance themselves from

one another. Barth was quite forceful about his position as he strongly maintained that ethnic boundaries define a group and not the “cultural stuff that encloses it” (Sollars, 1996, p. xxii).

Rajni Kothari, an eminent social scientist (1988) has argued that the process of formation of ethnic identity gets momentum when domination of the majority over the minority becomes an evident fact. Often, the dominant majority tries to assimilate and integrate the minority into the so-called mainstream. Kothari has therefore linked the ethnic movements in India with the movements of marginalised people and of those seeking indigenous authenticity. Pathy (2000) also equally argued that the Indian state has followed the western model of nation-state and undermined tribal identities. It has also deprived them of much of their land, livelihood, language, religion and culture. The western assumption of nation-state as a melting pot leading to a homogeneous national culture has not proved to be a myth. The tribal, non-tribal or Hindu-Muslim interactions in India did not result in the extinction of any particular culture in India. The massive presence and relevance of minority (and majority too) identity groups in India is a lesson for us.

Oommen (1997) analyzes that the success of any ethnic identity movement also depends to a large extent on the manner in which state and union government handles it.. There is enormous evidence to suggest that demands have been conceded by the state only when the concerned movement demonstrates its political clout. For instance, the demand for a separate state or administrative unit in the whole of North East India, Punjab, Darjeeling, Uttarakhand or Jharkhand was not conceded till those movements achieved political significance. But in doing so, the state has perpetuated conflicting situations indirectly and contributed to the proliferation of similar movements. The success of Mizo or Naga revolt in the North East had inspired all other groups of the area to launch similar kind of movement. All the major insurgent groups of North East today maintain underground linkages so as to exert greater pressure on the Indian State. The static response, thus, paradoxically becomes a catalytic agent for the emergence of ethnic movements. Even when the state tries to manage tensions through cooption of the movement’s leadership, the attempt backfires in the long run by giving birth to a new leadership aspiring for a better placement. In the case of Tripura, the process of ‘concessional democracy’ for more than two decades became counterproductive as terrorism has gradually become an ‘industry’ with contending political parties wooing this or that rebel group (Ghosh 2003).

Veena Das (1990) and Imtiaz Ahmad (1984) show how economic and political rivalries fuel communal tensions and movements. In the Shah Bano case elites and professional communalists contributed to the fabrication and distortion of identities (Zoya Hasan 1989). In all these cases, the symbolic and cultural aspect of ethnicity and communalism depended on political expression and mobilization for their outburst. Writing some 60 years ago Nehru rightly projected that ‘the communal problem is not a religious problem, it has, nothing to do with religion’ (quoted from T.N. Madan 1993: 550). The articulation of ethnic identity and assertion in India primarily takes the following forms:

7.4 FORMS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ASSERTION

There are six forms ethnic identity and assertion in India. These are discussed below

7.4.1 Linguistic Ethnicity

Language has always been a cornerstone of ethnic identity. Every ethnic group has its own language and the members of ethnic group build their ethnic identity through their own language. The Dravida Kazhagam movement took shape in Tamil Nadu in 1940s and 1950s. In this movement there was a strong opposition from the Dravidian language speakers against the adoption of Hindi as the national language by the government of India. Vanaik (1990) says linguistic ethnicity came into existence in India along with the growth of the national movement. He argued that unlike religion, linguistic consciousness is never a powerful contender for separate nationhood because for most Indians, linguistic consciousness co-exists non-antagonistically with national consciousness. Oommen (1990) writes comparing language and religion, he says that language has more legitimacy than religion for administrative restructuring.

7.4.2 Communalism

The concept of religious assertion and communalism has posed a great danger to the national integration. When ethnic groups try to establish their identity through religion, they breed conflict and threaten the community life. History reads that communalism has been a major source of communal conflict in the country. Bipan Chandra holds that communalism in India is a modern phenomenon. It has its roots in British imperialism and emerged out of modern politics based on mass mobilization and imaginary communal interests. The British policy of “divide and rule” in India sowed the seeds of antagonism and distrust between the Hindus and the Muslims so deep that the process of bridging the chasm between the two communities is still far from over.

There has been a constant conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India owing to the interest of both the communities to establish their religious dominance. The Sikh riots in 1984, Gujarat violence in 2002, Hindu –Muslim clashes in Ayodhya in 1992 have witnessed several communal riots and caused the loss of several innocent lives across the country.

7.4.3 Tribal Movements

Tribals are the indigenous groups who lived in the forest land. They have been historically neglected and ruthlessly oppressed at the hands of the landlords, money lenders and government officials. They have been displaced from their land, as a result of for which they have lost their livelihood resulting in huge dissatisfaction among them. They developed hatred towards the non-tribals (DIKUS) who grabbed their parental land and displaced them from their own *jal*, *jungle* and *jameen*. They have been in a fight with the mainstream people. The tribals continued their movement to assert their ethnic identity. The maverick tribal leaders from Oraon, Mundas, Maikda tribe etc., in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand and North-East India fought against the imperial rulers to protect their lives and livelihood. After independence, the tribal movements were directed for

maintaining cultural identity or for demanding a separate state or for asserting their status as caste Hindus through Sanskritization process.

7.4.4 Ethno-Nationalism

The problem of ethno nationalism did not get much attention from the international studies because many theorists considered that this problem is not a major threat to international peace. But it gained momentum in internal national studies. According to Walker, the concept “denotes both the loyalty to a nation deprived of its own state and the loyalty to an ethnic group embodied in a specific state, particularly where the latter is conceived as a nation-state. In ethno-nationalism, a group develops a loyalty to its nation which is marked by the desire of an ethnic community and the community to have absolute authority over its own political, economic, and social affairs. This denotes the pursuit of statehood on the part of an ethnic nation.

K N Panikkar (2011) writes that periodically ethnic identities and loyalties surfaced in Indian polity, using different strategies and methods. Unfortunately, the state responded to the aspirations of these marginalised groups by methods that relied more on force, and this led to greater alienation of these communities. Ethnic conflict takes place when mobilized identity groups struggle for autonomy and power in an established nation or a newly formed state.

7.4.5 Regionalism

Regionalism refers to a blind loyalty towards one’s own region. Regionalism helps to form ethnic groups and develop ethnic consciousness to assert their right based on a particular region. India has many ethnic differences and these ethnic differences create solid ground for regional feelings which invites danger to national integration. Due to strong movements, the union government responded to recognize union territories like Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and other North-eastern territories to the status of state. Goa became a state in 1987. The movements for the three new states (created in 2000)—Chhattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand out of Bihar and Uttaranchal out of Uttar Pradesh— were long-drawn but became vigorous in the 1990s. And the most recent one, is that which led to the division of Andhra Pradesh, creating a separate Telangana state, a movement which started in the 1950s.

7.4.6 Casteism

Casteism is a blind group loyalty towards one’s own caste or sub-caste. It works for the social, economic, political and other interests of its own group., Beteille (1992: 51) argues that within the broader frame of ethnicity, caste has a rather ambiguous position. The caste system may be viewed as a particular case of ethnic differentiation. Caste plays a very important role in Indian politics. The Bahujan Samaj Party (a Dalit based party) in the state of Uttar Pradesh and Rashtriya Janta Dal (a party of intermediate castes) in the state of Bihar have reflected the dominance of caste politics in India. Now the caste groups are sharing common interests and share common socio-cultural traits to strengthen their solidarity. Stephen Barnett (1975) refers “the modern transformation of caste to ethnicization”(Reddy 2005: 547)

Commenting on caste -based ethnicity, Rudolph and Rudolph (1967: 32-36) hold that in a representative democracy like India, numerical strength is of great

significance. It is in the interest of all castes to come together. That is why there is a spurt in caste associations and caste federations. Rudolph and Rudolph calls these associations “para communities”. These para communities enable caste members to come together and pursue social mobility and economic gains and political power collectively. According to Reddy (2005: 547), and for Susan Bayly (1999), the ethnic character of caste lies in its becoming an urgent moral mandate in Independent India, a bond of collective virtues and obligations on the basis of which public-spirited people should take decisive action when they hear the call to arms”.

7.5 FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ETHNIC UPSURGE IN INDIA

For Rajni Kothari (1988) ethnic upsurges are a consequence of the homogenising trend of modern states and of their technological/educational imperatives. A host of social scientists have also suggested that while culture and cultural variations are not completely irrelevant in the study of ethnicity, political processes have greater impact on such formation. For Dipankar Gupta (2003), ethnicity is basically a political process. Cohen (1974) has also argued that ethnicity does not require a cultural or historical explanation; contemporary politics and ‘structural conditions’ are the keys to understand the phenomenon.

Priya Arya (2016) explains some of the critical factors responsible for inflamed ethnicity in India:

- 1) India is a plural society. It is characterized by a large diversity in its population with multitudes of castes and several religious, linguistic, cultural and racial groups living here. Because of intense competition for scarce economic resources and the heightened consciousness among people of different groups to preserve their age-old cultures, India has always been vulnerable to assertions of ethnic identities.
- 2) Lopsided economic development of the country because of which some groups feel that they have been marginalised and completely left behind in the process of development, makes them highly susceptible to the politics of ethnicity.
- 3) Representative parliamentary democracy in India where different ethnic groups (castes, religious groups, linguistic groups etc.) compete for political power by stressing on horizontal solidarity and consolidation of shared interests.
- 4) Increasing politicization of caste and religion: Caste and religious identities are often whipped up by political leaders to mobilize people for their vested interests and petty political mileage.
- 5) Fear among minorities (both linguistic and religious) that they might get assimilated into the dominant culture, leading to the dilution of their cultural heritage. Hence, there is an increasing stress on ethnic identity to forge horizontal solidarity. Such feelings have also increased because of the process of globalization and cultural homogenization occurring everywhere. Cultural globalization is causing even the Hindu majority to assert itself and is spawning Hindu revivalism in India.

- 6) Intense feeling of alienation among the tribes of India because of faulty development policies, leading to forced displacement from their age-old habitats, lands and forests reducing them to abject poverty.

7.6 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ETHNIC MOVEMENT

There are mainly four approaches to the study of ethnicity. These approaches are respectively discussed below

7.6.1 Primordialist Approach

The primordialist approach believes that ethnicity is based on primordial ties. This theory argues that “ethnic groups exist due to the traditions of belief and action towards primordial objects. The members are bound by common blood, descent, ancestors, family, belonging, roots and solidarity.

According to Barth (1969) this is a ‘taken-for-granted’ model of ethnicity and it has four theoretical features:

- i) Ethnic groups are biologically self-perpetuating;
- ii) Members of this group share basic cultural values manifest in overt cultural forms;
- iii) The group is a bounded social field of communication and interaction; and
- iv) Its members identify themselves and are identified by others as belonging to that group.

McKay (1982) suggests that though this approach can account for the emotional strength of ethnic bonds, it tends to be deterministic and static. It assumes that members of ethnic groups have little choice about their sense of attachment. As against such a view, ethnographic evidences suggest that ethnic identification is not given, static or trans-historical. They are rather fluid and in a state of flux. Mere membership of a group does not transform a social category into a ‘subjectively self-conscious community’. According to Paul Brass (1991), certain primordial attachments like language, kinship, or caste are variable. Again, migration may create new attachments with land. Instrumentalists like Brass also argue that ethnic attachments do not necessarily belong to non-rational part of human personality.

7.6.2 Instrumental Approach

This approach believes that one can change one’s ethnic identity for political or economic reason to get benefit. One prefers to accept the ethnic identity which gives him more benefits. This approach argues that ethnic identity is created and maintained by the individual to obtain social, political and material advantages.

This approach is the brainchild of Fredrik Barth (1969), who argued that “ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. Weber argues ethnicity is a consequence of collective political actions rather than its cause. Even though an ethnic group appears to be a particular form of status group for Weber, he did argue that possibilities for collective action rooted in ethnicity are ‘indefinite’.

Barth, in his "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries" (1969) has accentuated that ethnic identity is generated, confirmed or transformed in the course of interactions. Ethnicity is a relational concept as it takes at least 'two' to be ethnic. Ethnicity is also a matter of politics, decision making and goal-orientation. The shift from a static to an interactional approach was carried on further to argue that people can and do shift as well as alter their ethnic ascriptions in the light of circumstances and environment. Following the same logic, Paul Brass (1991) has argued that ethnicity arises out of specific types of interactions and competition among the elites. Ethnic identity formation is seen by him as a process in the dynamics of elite competition and manipulation.

7.6.3 Modernization Approach

The modernization approach to ethnicity believes that due to influence of modernization, the attachment to primordial loyalty to ethnic groups will decline. The identity groups are a temporary phenomenon. The ethnic identity will be assimilated with modern nation state due a shift from traditional society to a modern one. The modern phenomena like industrialization, nationalism and capitalism are undermining the importance of ethnic identity. The emergence of global modern state will affect the structure and function of ethnic group and will sideline the cultural differences gradually.

Gupta (1996) exemplifies that the Punjab agitation, which began with some secular demands like Chandigarh as capital of Punjab, water sharing between Punjab and Haryana and territorial tribunal to settle the dispute was ethnicised by the Central Government and the Congress Party for political gains.,

7.6.4 Social Constructionist Approach

Ethnicity is a social construct that divides people into different groups based on the attributes like physical appearance, cultural backgrounds, and ancestral heritage.

Jenkins (1997: 40) has identified four elements of this model:

- a) ethnicity emphasizes cultural differences
- b) ethnicity is cultural;
- c) ethnicity is to some extent variable and manipulable; and
- d) ethnicity as a social identity is both collective and individual, externalised and internalised.

The ethnic meanings and collective identities change in form and content as circumstances change. Cultural traditions as boundary markers are, therefore, 'invented' and put into place according to selective agendas whose rationale is entirely determined by contingent circumstances (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

7.7 MAJOR ETHNIC MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Ethnic differences generate ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict has been a social identity issue. Ethnic conflict arises due to non fulfillment of economic and political need of ethnic groups. When the ethnic groups are apprehensive about their existence they resort to conflict which results in ethnic violence. As Vesna

Pesic, a professor at the University of Belgrade said, ‘ethnic conflict is caused by the “fear of the future”, lived through the past.

India has witnessed several ethnic movements which are respectively stated below

7.7.1 Ethnic Movement in Punjab

The Khalistan movement was carried out by a section of Sikhs to create a separate Sikh country. The movement got intensified in the Punjab in 1970s and continued till the early 1990s. A group of Sikh leaders started demanding more autonomy for the state before the Central government. They demanded a separate country, Khalistan. In June 1984, due to violence the Indian Government ordered a military operation, *Operation Blue Star* to clear Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar and thirty other Gurdwaras (Sikh Place of Worship) of armed terrorists who were resorting to violence in Gurudwaras

Indira Gandhi, the then Indian Prime Minister was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards which resulted in thousands of Sikhs being massacred in 1984 in anti-Sikh riots. Subsequently Punjab insurgency saw several secessionist militant groups becoming active in Punjab, supported by a section of the Sikh movement. Indian state controlled the insurgency in the early 1990s.

7.7.2 Ethnic Movement in North-East

There are several ethnic movements in the North-east region. In this region large number of tribal people have not been assimilated with the mainstream culture due to physical inaccessibility, socio-linguistic and religious distinctiveness. Majority of them are converted to Christianity. The first tribal group, the Nagas began a movement for an independent state. After a long struggle they succeeded in creating a separate state as Nagaland in 1963. Similarly second ethnic problem with tribals of North East is that of Mizos. Mizos also continued their struggle to get autonomy by establishing a separate state following which Mizoram’s status of Union territory was changed to statehood.

7.7.3 Ethnic Movement in Gorkhaland

The recent ethnic movement in India is the Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling which demands a separate state of Gorkhaland. Subash Ghising formed the Gorkha National Liberation Front in 1980. Ghising’s main demand was for a new state of Gorkhaland for India’s Nepali-speaking citizens. He resorted to violence and scare tactics. He also planned to create a “Greater Nepal”. This movement was supported by Nepal with the demands that Indian-origin people get Nepali citizenship in the Terai. Bimal Gurung, a leader of the Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha has been trying to ignite Gorkha anger and emotions to achieve the goal of a separate state. He propagates that Gorkhaland is our birth right. We will not budge one step from this demand.

7.7.4 Dravidian Movement

The Self respect movement or Dravidian Movement began in 1925 under the maverick leadership of E.V Ramasamy. The objective of this movement is to achieve a society where backward castes have equal human rights, and encouraging backward castes to have self-respect. The two major concepts of Self-Respect Movement were Anti-Brahmanism and Self-Respect Marriages.

The Justice Party was formed in the Madras Presidency of British India in 1916. It mainly focused on removing Brahmins from the higher positions. Gradually, the non-Brahmin replaced the Brahmins in every sphere and destroyed the monopoly over education and the administrative services which the Brahmins had previously held. In 1947, when India attained independence, Periyar called for members of the Dravida Kazhagam to boycott the celebrations. According to him, the Indian National Congress was dominated by Brahmins. He predicted that an independent India would bring South Indians, especially Tamils, under the dominance of Brahmins and North Indians. The leadership of the movement argued that imposition of the North Indian Hindi language, Brahminical Hindu religion and Aryan culture were detrimental to the development of the Dravidian identity. Therefore, the Tamil ethnic movement had demanded, stopping of the imposition of Hindi language secession from India.

7.7.6 Ethnicity in Assam

The conflict between indigenous Bodo tribals and ethnic Bengali Muslim settlers began in Assam in 1952, with subsequent violent clashes occurring in 1979-1985, 1991-1994, and 2008. In 2012 the riots and violence between Bodos and Bangladeshi Muslims erupted in the districts of Kokhrajjar, Chirang, and Dhubri. In this violence 77 people were killed and over 400,000 displaced from the violence, including both Bodos and Bangladeshi Muslims. The bodos resented the Bangladeshi immigration due to the consequent loss of land and cultural identity. After the riots there have been widespread protests across the northeast demanding “early detection and deportation” of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. The Bodos have established relationship with other indigenous tribal communities in Assam to collectively address the issue. Similarly the All Bodoland Muslim Student’s Union (ABMSU) has threatened to declare jihad and take up arms against the state.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below to answer the question
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit

1) What is Ethnicity?

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2) What is Ethnic Identity?

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3) What are the theoretical approaches to understand Ethnicity?

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4) What are the major Ethnic movements in India?

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7.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit the concept of ethnicity is defined. 'Ethnicity' has been a popular concept in academic discourse. The concept 'ethnic identity' is well explained. The members of an ethnic group are bound by common language, common history, common culture and common territory to build their ethnic identity. Again different approaches to ethnic movement such as Primordialist approach, Instrumentalist approach, and modernization approach are discussed to understand the concept of ethnicity. India has witnessed different major ethnic movements. Ethnic movements in North east states, Assam, Kashmir, Punjab and ethno-politics in Uttar Pradesh are explained in this unit.

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7.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Ethnicity is a concept referring to a shared culture and way of life. It is recognized by common language, religion, material culture such as clothing and food, and cultural products such as music and art. Ethnicity creates social solidarity and social conflict in the society.
- 2) Ethnic identity is different from personal identity. It refers to ethnic awareness, ethnic self identification, ethnic attitudes and ethnic behaviours. The members of an ethnic group are identified for their group thinking, perceptions, feelings and behavior.
- 3) The Primordialist theory argues that “ethnic groups exist due to the traditions of belief and action towards primordial objects. The members are bound by common blood, descent, ancestors, family, belonging, roots and solidarity. The instrumentalist approach believes that one can change his ethnic identity for political or economic reason to get benefit. The modernization approach to ethnicity believes that due to influence of modernization, the attachment to primordial loyalty to ethnic group will decline. The identity groups are temporary phenomenon.
- 4) India has witnessed different major ethnic movements. The ethnic movements in Kashmir, Punjab, north eastern states, and the Bodo ethnic movement demanded a separate statehood by building a separate ethnic identity.

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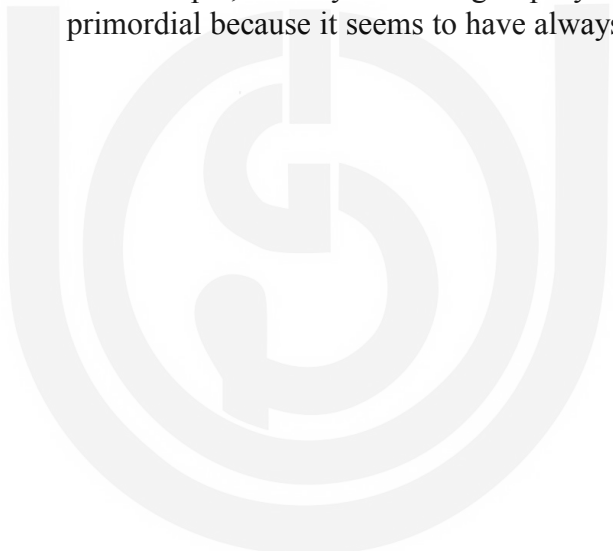
GLOSSARY

Race: Race is widely considered as a basis of categorization of human beings in various categories depending upon their physical features. However, since race is a social construct, this categorization of human being is socially based and categorized.

Ethnic group: Ethnic group is a group of people who share common history, language, cultural, heritage, and connectivity with a common myth of origin.

Ethnicity: Ethnicity is the sense of belongingness of an individual or group to a particular ethnic group.

Primordial : Existing from the beginning. That is why it is said to be very basic. For example, identity to one's group by way of language, ethnic stock etc. is primordial because it seems to have always existed.



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UNIT 8 PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Conceptualizing Peasant and Peasant Movements in India
 - 8.2.1 Peasant
 - 8.2.2 Peasant and Caste Interface in India
 - 8.2.3 Peasant Movements in Indian context
 - 8.2.4 Radical and Reformative Movements
- 8.3 Phases of Peasant Movements in India
- 8.4 Radical Peasant Movements in India
 - 8.4.1 The Santhal Rebellion of 1855
 - 8.4.2 The Maratha Uprising of 1875
 - 8.4.3 Champaran Satyagraha (1917-18)
 - 8.4.4 Moplah Rebellion in Malabar (1921)
 - 8.4.5 Tebhaga Movement in Bengal (1946-47)
 - 8.4.6 Telangana Movement (1946-52)
 - 8.4.7 Naxalite Movement in West Bengal (1967-71)
- 8.5 Changing pattern of Agrarian Structure and Peasant Movement in Contemporary India
- 8.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.7 References

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to understand:

- Peasant and peasant movements
- Classification of peasant movements in India in phases
- Emergence of radical peasant movements in India

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Social Movements are social processes and are parts of social progression. These are broadly considered as sustained organized or collective efforts aiming to changes in thought, beliefs, values, attitudes relationships and major institutions in society or to resist any change in the societal arrangements.(H Blumer 1951; Haberle 1972; Guesfield 1971).Social movements emerge as manifestation of collective discontent against existing social, economic and political arrangements. Though the collective actions vary with time and space the important components such as ideology, organization, objective and leadership play a role in varying degrees in any social movement (SinghaRoy, 2005).

Agrarian movements in India can be broadly classified into two main categories. The first category includes the movements related to poor, small and marginal agriculturists whose economic condition and survival is mainly attached to agriculture and are termed as peasant movements. The second category includes those of more affluent agriculturists who can produce sufficient surplus from the agriculture.

8.2 CONCEPTUALIZING PEASANT AND PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

8.2.1 Peasant

Social scientists have broadly underlined the subordinated, marginalized and underdog position of the peasantry in human society. In the sociological and the anthropological literature peasants have widely been described as *culturally* ‘unsystematic, concrete tradition of many, unreflective, unsophisticated and the non-literati constituting the mosaic of the “little tradition” (Redfield 1956), ‘incomplete’ and a ‘part society with part cultures’ (Kroeber 1948). *Politically* they are found to occupy an ‘underdog position and are subjected to the domination by outsiders (Shanin 1984), unorganized and deprived of the knowledge required for organized collective action (Wolf 1984: 264–65). In *economic terms*, they are identified to be small producers for their own consumption (Redfield 1956), subsistence cultivators (Firth 1946) who produce predominantly for the need of the family rather than to make a profit (Chayanov 1966). *Historically*, peasants have always borne the brunt of the extreme forms of subordination and oppression in society. However the specific socio-economic conditions of their existence have largely shaped the roles of the peasantry in social change and transformation (SinghaRoy, 2005).

8.2.2 Peasant and Caste Interface in India

In India, the term ‘peasant’ is ambiguous and used differently by different authors or variously by the same, author in different studies. On the one hand, it is used for those agriculturists who are homogeneous, with small holdings operated mainly by family labour, and on the other hand, it includes all those who depend on land including landless labourers, as well as supervisory agriculturists (Shah 2004). Peasants in India broadly represent a vast mass of landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, poor artisans and small and marginal cultivators. They have a close social interface with the socially deprived, such as the scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, other backward classes and women. The so-called “outcastes” of the Varna hierarchy in the real sense of the term form the core of the peasantry in rural India. In the localised vocabulary, peasants are called by terms like “kisan”, “krishak”, “roytu”, “chashi”, etc, more or less indicating cultivators who cultivate land with their own labour and also the categories, namely, “adhiar” and “bhagchashi” (sharecropper and tenant) and “majdoor”, “majur”, “collie”, “pait”, “krishi” “shramik”, etc, agricultural labourers. These terms signify specific cultural connotations to indicate the marginalised and inferior status of peasantry in Indian society. Thus peasants are socially and economically marginalised, culturally subjugated and politically dis-empowered social groups who are attached to land to eke out a subsistence living (SinghaRoy 1992: 21-231)

8.2.3 Peasant Movements in Indian Context

Scholars [Rao 1989; Dhanagare 1976]; Mukherjee 1979 have viewed peasant movements as a distinct variant of social movements and have endeavored to analyse these in terms of their linkages with changes in the organisation of production and class conflict. At an operational level, peasant movement has been conceptualised by SinghaRoy (1992) as an organised and collective effort of the peasantry (subsistence and small producers, tenants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers) to bring about change in the pattern of ownership, control and use of land, share of agricultural produce, wage structure, credit and institutional support system and in other aspects of socio- economic life that have subjugated them in agrarian society (SinghaRoy 1992: 21-231).

There is hardly any reported instance or literature on peasant uprisings in pre-modern India. Scholars attribute this to the traditional social structure prevalent in Indian villages that was organized through caste system and provided framework for all social activities and relations between various groups that induced lower castes to accept their place in the social order. This also made the central government largely superfluous and hence peasant opposition was less likely to take the form of massive peasant rebellion. However, it is largely accepted that the revolutionary potential of a particular class hinges largely on the structure of power alignment and class alliances in a given society, at a particular time and peasantry class in India is no exception (Shah 2004). Changes in the mode of production in agriculture have disturbed the traditional agrarian relationships which also led to peasant unrest. Under British rule, land became a marketable commodity and commercialised agriculture developed during the late nineteenth century.

The impoverishment of the Indian peasantry was a result of the transformation of the agrarian structure during the colonial period due to:

- a) Colonial economic policies,
- b) Ruin of the handicrafts leading to overcrowding of land,
- c) The new land revenue system,
- d) Colonial administrative and judicial system

The peasants suffered from high rents, illegal levies, arbitrary evictions and unpaid labour in Zamindari areas. In Ryotwari areas, the Government itself levied heavy land revenue. The overburdened farmer, fearing loss of his only source of livelihood, often approached the local moneylender who exploited the former's difficulties by extracting high rates of interests on the money lent. Often, the farmer had to mortgage his hand and cattle. Sometimes, the money-lender seized the mortgaged belongings. Gradually, over large areas, the actual cultivators were reduced to the status of tenants-at-will, share croppers and landless labourers. The peasants often resisted the exploitation, and soon they realized that their real enemy was the colonial state. The periodic recurrence of famines coupled with the economic depression during the last decades of the 19th century further aggravated the situation in rural areas and consequently led to numerous peasant revolts.

8.2.4 Radical and Reformative Movements

Peasant movements can broadly be categorised as ‘radical’ or ‘reformative’, depending on their particular combination with ideology, form of mass mobilisation, and orientation towards change. Radical movements are those that use non-institutional mass mobilisation, guided by an ideology of rapid change in the social structure. Though these movements are usually short-lived, they may be spread over a large geographical area. A reformative peasant movement, in contrast, uses institutionalised mass mobilisation, is guided by an ideology of gradual social change, and tends to exhibit a longer life span. Peasant movements, however, are not discretely radical or reformative; rather one may be an extension of another over a period of time (SinghaRoy 1992:21-231).

8.3 PHASES OF PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Though there can be many classificatory systems used by different scholars for analysis, on the basis of period the peasant movements in India can broadly be grouped in three distinct time phases (Mehta1965: 14 -16).

- 1) **The initial phase (1857-1921):** Characterized by the sporadic growth of peasant movements in the absence of proper leadership.
- 2) **The second phase (1923-1946):** Marked by the emergence of the class conscious peasant organizations.
- 3) **Post – independence phase:** this era witnessed the uninterrupted continuity of the agrarian movements due to the failure of the ruling party to resolve any of the basic problems of the working masses of rural India.

The initial phase

During this period the main reason for a series of spontaneous peasant uprising in different parts of the country was high handedness of zamindars or landlords along with the excessive rates of land revenue. The situation in the rural areas was aggravated by periodic recurrence of famines and economic depression during this period leading to a number of peasant revolts. Notable peasant movements of this phase are:

- The Santhal rebellion of 1855
- The Maratha uprising of 1875
- The Bengal tenants struggles 1870-85
- The Oudh Insurrection
- The Punjab Kisan struggles in the last phase of the 19th century.
- Champaran Satyagraha (1917-18)
- The Kheda satyagraha(1918)
- Moplah Rebellion in Malabar (1921)

Champaran and Kheda were the prominent movements led by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

The Second Phase:

The peasant movements initiated by the Indian National Congress in 1917-18 were restricted to seeking relief against the excessive rates of land revenue, and were in no case directed against the zamindars (Desai, 1979: 744). The Congress policy of safeguarding the interests of zamindars and landlords led to the emergence of independent class organizations of kisans in rural India. Consequently, the kisan organizations came into existence in different parts of the country.

The Kisan Sabha movement started in Bihar under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati who had formed the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in 1929 in order to mobilize peasant grievances against the Zamindari attacks on their occupancy rights. Gradually the peasant movement intensified and spread across India. In Andhra Pradesh it launched anti-settlement agitation against Zamindari zulum in 1927. Also a powerful struggle was initiated against the oppressive forest laws in South India in 1927. Similar movements were led in Uttar Pradesh and other parts of India against the tyranny of zamindars (Basavaraja 2015).

All these radical developments on the peasant front culminated in the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress (INC) in April 1936 with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati elected as first president. All India Kisan Sabha was composed of radical forces within and outside Indian National Congress, and was also supported by Congress Socialist Party and later the Communist Party of India (Ibid 2015).

Communists were the major force that mobilised the peasants. Communist Party of India (CPI) started serious engagement with the peasantry after the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha. CPI increased its membership in the peasant front and set the stage for the most revolutionary struggles in the countryside. The CPI adopted itself to work at the grass root level and in the countryside through the Kisan Sabhas which initially was not a class based organization and rich farmers were well represented in it. In 1941-43 the All India Kisan Sabha passed into the hands of the CPI which under Swami Shajanand tried to build the Kisan Sabha as an organisation of the rural poor and thus alienating the rich and the middle farmers. By 1944-45 the CPI had complete control over the Kisan Sabha (Dhanagare, 1980). Thus, the Kisan Sabha became an organisation of the poor peasants, tenants, sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers. It is with this base that it could launch and lead agrarian struggles in the pre-independence period. The Tebhaga movement in Bengal (1946-47) and the Telengana movement (1946-51) in the former Hyderabad state were led by the Communists (Mehta 1965).

Post-independence era

In Independent India it has been the Left parties, who have been the main organisers of the peasants. Mobilisation has taken place on different issues like increase in agricultural wages, land to the tiller, etc. and the principal target has been the rural rich on whose mercy the landless labourers and the marginal peasants depend. Initially, CPI hoped that Congress government would bring about radical programmes to alter the landholding pattern in the countryside. Since the established Communists accepted the parliamentary form of struggle, independent India has not witnessed any major armed uprising in the countryside till the Naxalbari revolt in 1967.

The land reforms and community programmes meant for promoting capitalist farming in India have only intensified the agrarian crisis. The Government has not only failed in providing relief to the vast bulk of deficit farmers and agricultural proletariat, its agrarian policy has also aggravated their miseries. This resulted in discontent in agrarian society even after independence and led to a series of peasant struggles in different parts of the country (Rao 2015).

Both the mainstream Communist parties, the CPI and the CPI (M) have formed peasant organisations like the Kisan Sabhas and organisation of agricultural labourers for mobilising the concerned sections. They have achieved limited success in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura and in some other states. Similarly the CPI (M-L) has formed its peasant front, the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) which is now active in many of the districts of Bihar and Jharkhand. It is organizing the rural poor and also the middle peasants by taking up issues which affect them. The non-parliamentary Left, like the Marxist Coordination Committee (MCC) or the Peoples War Group (PWG) have been mobilizing the rural poor in states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra and using violence as a strategy to address the question of the rural poor (SinghaRoy 1992).

Non communist Praja socialist party (PSP) was involved in several movements related to peasants in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in the post independence period upto 1960s. The Republication Party of India, a non-Marxist party, combined the cause of the agrarian proletariat and led their struggle at an all India level. In South India there were agitations known as tenants agitation, such as Kagodu Satyagraha in Karnataka during 1950-51 and Uttara-Kannada during 1950-70 etc., over the issues like forcible ejection, debts and rents. In the 1960's Charan Singh emerged as the champion of the farmers' in the Indo-Gangetic belt of Northern India. He favoured the blending of Nehruvian and Gandhian strategies of development (Basavaraja 2015).

In Punjab Kethbari Zamindari union came into existence in 1972 that led six major struggles till 1980. Tamilnadu Vyavasigal Sangam (TNVS) was inaugurated in 1966 under the leadership of Narayana Swamy Naidu that carried out four important agitations between 1970's and 1980's. Formation of Maharasta Shekari Sanghtan under the leadership of Sharad Joshi and Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha (KRRS) under the leadership of Prof. M.D. Nanjundaswamy have created an atmosphere of widespread movements across the regions of the Indian Union (Mehta 1965).

We shall now discuss briefly a few of the prominent radical peasant movements organised in the colonial as well as post-colonial India

Check Your Progress

- 1) Elucidate the peasant movements in the Indian context.

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- 2) Discuss the various phases of peasant movements in India.

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8.4 RADICAL PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

8.4.1 The Santhal Rebellion of 1855

The Santhal rebellion, also known as a Santhal Hul, classified as a tribal movement by many scholars, took place at present day Jharkhand and part of West Bengal (at the foothills of Rajmahal). It was a rebellion against the British colonial authority and against the zamindars, whom the Britishers had given ownership of land that peasants had traditionally cultivated and had imposed heavy rents. The rebellion was also directed against moneylenders who charged huge interest on borrowed money and government officials who were autocratic and indifferent to the grievances of Santhals. The Santhals were getting evicted from their land and settlements due to their failure to pay taxes and debts. Thus they became tenants on their own land or even bonded labourers (Sarda 2017, Venkateshwarlu 2015).

The revolt broke out in July, 1855 when thousands of Santhals assembled at Bhogandih village and declared themselves free. The movement was organized and led by two brothers namely Sidhu and Kanhu who claimed that they received messages from supernatural powers to put an end to the ‘zhulum’ of officers and the deceit of merchants. They attacked zamindars and moneylenders to drive them out. This triggered a series of conflicts between the English East India Company’s army and the Santhals. The Santhals fought bravely with their traditional weapons, such as, bows, arrows, axes and swords but they didn’t stand a chance against the sophisticated firearms used by the East India Company troops and the rebellion was brutally suppressed by the beginning of 1856 (Ibid 2017, 2015).

8.4.2 The Maratha Uprising of 1875

The typical conditions in the Ryotwari area caused an the agrarian uprising in the Poona and Ahmednagar districts in 1875. Wanting to have a steady flow of large revenue the East India Company imposed excessive taxes on ryots for land which was to be paid in cash and without any regard to fluctuations in crop production due to famines or any other reason. The farmers turned to moneylenders who were mostly outsiders, in order to pay revenue and to save their land from forfeiture by the government. The famers offered land as security and government favoring giving land to moneylenders in case the farmers fail to repay the loans. Thus peasants found themselves trapped in a vicious network with the moneylender as the exploiter and main beneficiary.

In 1874, the growing tension between the moneylenders and the peasants resulted in a social boycott by the ryots against the moneylenders. The ryots refused to

buy from their shops. No peasant would cultivate their fields. The barbers, washer men, and shoemakers would not serve them. This social boycott spread rapidly to the villages of Poona, Ahmednagar, Sholapur and Satara. Soon the social boycott was transformed into agrarian riots with systematic attacks on the moneylenders' houses and shops. The debt bonds and deeds were seized and publicly burnt (Venkateshwarlu 2015).

The government, justifying the activities of moneylenders, quickly moved against the agitating peasants and resorted to repressive activity. The peasants could not withstand for long against the terrible repression by the government and had to abandon these active struggles. The active phase of the uprising in Poona and Ahmadnagar lasted only three weeks. As a conciliatory measure, the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act was passed in 1879 (Desai 1979: 165).

8.4.3 Champaran Satyagraha (1917-18)

Even before the production of artificial blueing dyes by the chemical industry, Indian cultivators had been growing a plant called indigo (Neel) that yields dye for bluing cotton cloths. Demand for the dye indigo was quite high in the textile industry in Great Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This made indigo trade a highly profitable business. Many retired officers of the East India Company and young upstarts, acquired lands from native Zamindars in Bihar and Bengal and extended the cultivation of this crop on a large scale. Tenant farmers were forced to grow indigo crop under a system of oppression (Pradhan 1988).

The tenant farmers were forced by the British planters to cultivate indigo in three twentieth part of a bigha of their holding, this was known as 'Teen Kathia' system. The planters forced indigo cultivation at the best portions of land and offered very low prices for the indigo output. The British administration was indifferent to the indignity, physical abuse and exploitation of farmers. When the indigo market was adversely hit by the introduction of synthetic indigo in the world market in 1897 the planters started a new type of exploitation. Either the losses were transferred to poor peasants or they could give up indigo cultivation by paying higher rents for the land. This miserable scenario of indigo exploitation forced the ryots to resist, violently or otherwise, from time to time, against their oppressors but were cruelly crushed. The British administration instituted inquiries but most of it was eyewash in Bihar (Iyenger 2017).

Gandhiji came to know about this issue in early 1917. He was joined and assisted in his protest against such exploitation by prominent personalities like J.B. Kripalani, Babu Brajkishore Prasad and Babu Rajendra Prasad. Gandhiji's method of peaceful satyagraha and civil disobedience were unique but effective and had a positive impact on the minds the of downtrodden and poor peasantry. The government had to relent and called Gandhiji for talks and also made him a member in the committee to enquire into the plight of the indigo peasants. Based on the committee's report the Teen Kathia system was abolished (Ibid 2017).

However, the recommendation did not resolve the problem of excessive rent and issue of low wages to the agricultural labours. It also remained silent on the exploitation of peasants by Indian Zamindars.

8.4.4 Moplah Rebellion in Malabar (1921)

The Moplah peasant movement was engineered in August 1921 among the peasants of Malabar district in Kerala. The Moplah tenants were Muslims and they agitated against the Hindu landlords and the British government. While the elite among the Moplahs were traders and merchants, the Moplah masses of the Moplah worked as agriculturists who were tenants of Hindu landlords called Jenmis.

The major grievances of the Moplah tenants were (i) Insecurity due to unfavourable land tenure system due to which Moplahs could be ejected from their land without any appropriate notice (ii) High renewal of fees fixed by the Jenmis (iii) High rent fixed for Moplah and discriminating them against Hindu Tenants.

The impetus for the 1921 movement started with meeting of Malabar District Congress Committee at Manjeri in 1920 that supported the tenants' cause and demanded legislation to regulate landlord-tenant relations. Following this the Moplah tenants formed an association with branches in the whole of Kerala and thus brought the Moplah tenants under one organization. During the same time there was the Khilafat movement, in which Moplahs actively took part but finally ended up with an agitation against the landlords.

The British government issued prohibitory orders against the Khilafat meetings in the beginning of 1921. In August 1921, police raided the mosque at Tirurangadi to arrest a Khilafat leader and a highly respected priest. The police opened fire on the unarmed crowd killing many persons. Due to this, clashes ensued and government offices were destroyed, records burnt and the treasury looted. The rebellion soon spread into all Moplah strongholds. In the agitation the targets of Moplah attack were the unpopular Jenmis, police stations, treasuries and offices, and British planters. However, the Moplahs lost the sympathy of general the Malabar population because of the communal flavor and Moplah rebels were isolated. British repression did the rest and by December 1921 all resistance had come to a stop. The Moplah toll was quite heavy and about 2400 persons lost their lives (Mandal 1981).

8.4.5 Tebhaga Movement in Bengal (1946-47)

The word *Tebhaga* literally means three shares of harvests. The movement was started for the reduction in the share of the produce from one-half to one-third, which they traditionally used to pay to the *jotedars*, the intermediary landowners. The movement arose in North Bengal and included the districts of Dinaipur and Rangpur in East Bengal and Jalpaiguri and Malda in West Bengal. This was organised by the Kisan Sabha and marked a departure from the pattern of movements by Indian National Congress (SinghaRoy 1992).

This movement grew against the backdrop of the deteriorating economic conditions of the sharecroppers (known locally as *bargardars*); while the intermediary landowners (known as *jotedars*) flourished. The Permanent settlement 1793 introduced in Bengal, brought in a number of intermediaries between the Zamindars and the peasants. These *jotedars* used to sublet their land to the sharecroppers, known as *bargardars*, who cultivated the land and used to pay a half of the produce to the *jotedars*. The *bargardars* had only temporary rights in the piece of land for a fixed period usually five years. In addition there

was exploitation of the rural economy by moneylenders who were giving credit to the *jotedars* and peasant owners (middle peasants) at high rates. The peasant owners often lost their land and became *bargardars* on their own pieces of land or agricultural labourers when they failed to pay back their debts (SinghaRoy 2005).

The Krishak Praja Party formed the first popular Ministry in Bengal in 1937. The Land Revenue Commission appointed by it recommended in 1940 that “All bargadars should be treated as tenants, that the share of the crops legally recoverable from them should be one-third, instead of half” (Vol. I, 1940: 69). The government did not show urgency to implement these recommendations. This prompted the All India Kisan Sabha to radicalize its agrarian programme and in November 1946 the Bengal Kisan Sabha, its provincial branch, passed a resolution in Calcutta for ‘Tebhaga’ (two thirds share of the produced crops) for the sharecroppers and land to the tiller (Ibid 1992).

North Bengal, especially the Dinajpur district became centre of the Bengal Kisan Sabha activity because of the high concentration of the sharecropping system of land. The poor peasantry of Khanpur village, who were mostly from the scheduled castes (Rajbansi, Polia, and Mali), the scheduled tribes (the Oraon, Colkamar Santal) and ex-tribes (Mahato) responded spontaneously to the movement. The main struggles were during the harvest season when the bargardars refused to provide the half share of paddy to the jotedars and took away the paddy to their houses or kholan (courtyard). A local jotedar filed FIR against the bargardars. Police entered the village on the morning of 20 February 1947 and arrested a few bargardars. The news spread like wildfire all over the village, and an alarm was raised by the beating of drums, blowing conch shells and beating of gongs and utensils by the peasant women. Soon a huge mass of sharecroppers and poor peasants, with conventional weapons, from Khanpur and its neighboring villages assembled and demanded release of the arrested sharecroppers. But the police was adamant and fired 119 rounds, killing 22 protesters, including two women, and injuring hundreds (SinghaRoy 2005).

This episode of Khanpur triggered off the Tebhaga movement very quickly in most parts of Bengal. Poor peasants ignoring their conventional ties with the landowners declined to share half of their produce with the landowners. Protest, firing and killing became part of this movement. The colonial rulers used all possible repressive measures to crash this movement by introducing a reign of terror in the rural areas and the movement eventually collapsed in mid-1947. However, the movement was successful to an extent as an estimated 40 percent of the sharecroppers were granted Tebhaga rights by the landowners themselves (SinghaRoy 2005).

8.4.6 Telangana Movement (1946-52)

The Telangana Movement was a fight against the feudal oppression of the rulers and local landowners of Andhra Pradesh. It was launched by CPI through its peasant wing, the Kisan Sabha. The agrarian social structure of Hyderabad state under Nizams was very oppressive in the 1920s and thereafter. Two types of land tenure systems were prevalent, namely, Khalsa or Diwani and Jagirdari. The former was similar to Ryotwari system where the peasants owned *patta* in their names that were registered and the actual owners were *shikmidars*. In the jagirdari system crown lands were granted to the Nizam’s noblemen in return for

their services. The peasants were most oppressed under the *jagirdari* system (SinghaRoy 2005).

In rural the economy, the *jagirdar* and *deshmukh*, locally known as *dora*, had immense power at the local level. They were the intermediary landowners (with higher titles) cum money lenders cum-village officials and were mostly from the upper caste or influential Muslim community backgrounds. Because of their privileged economic and political status they could easily subject the poor peasantry to extra-economic coercion known as *vetti* (force labour). Under this system the *jagirdars* and *deshmukhs* could force a family to cultivate his land and other works that would continue from generation to generation. A system known as *Bhagela* was also prevalent under which the tenants who had taken loans from the landlords had to serve the landlords until the debt was repaid. They served for generations as the records which were maintained by landlords were manipulated to keep them indebted. (SinghaRoy 2005)

The movement led by the Communists began in Nalgonda district in 1946 which spread to the neighboring Warangal and Bidar districts and finally engulfed the whole of the Telengana region. The movement was against the illegal and excessive extraction by the rural feudal aristocracy and thus concerned with the whole of the peasantry. The demands included writing off of peasants' debt. The movement took a revolutionary turn in 1948 when the peasants formed an army and started fighting guerilla wars. Over 2,000 villages set up their own 'People's Committees'. These 'Committees' took over land, maintained their own army and own administration (Mehta, 1979). *Razakars*, a private militia, organised by Qasim Razvi to support the Nizam, brutally started crushing the armed revolts by the peasants. The armed resistance continued until 1950 and was finally crushed by the Indian army. The movement was ultimately called off in 1951.

The cost of the movement was quite heavy. As many as 4000 communists and peasant militants were killed; more than 10,000 communist cadres and people's fighters were thrown into detention camps and jails for a period of 3-4 years (Sundarayya, 1985:4).

8.4.7 Naxalite Movement in West Bengal (1967-71)

The peasant uprising that occurred in the Naxalbari thana in the Darjeeling district of northern part of West Bengal in May 1967 is one of the major uprisings post-colonial India that has witnessed. It was organised against large scale eviction of sharecroppers by *jotedars* resulting in the deteriorating condition of poor peasants and the government's failure to enact Land Reform Laws effectively.

After independence, the Govt. of West Bengal enacted the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act (1953) to abolish zamindari and other intermediary systems. The West Bengal Land Reform Act (1955) was enacted to put a ceiling on landholdings, to reserve 60 per cent of the produce for the sharecroppers and to restrict the eviction of share croppers. However, due to ineffective implementation of the provisions, eviction of the tenants and the sharecroppers continued. This resulted in sharp downward mobility of the peasants along with economic insecurity and unemployment. The proportion of sharecroppers decreased from 16 per cent of the rural households in 1952-53 to 2.9 per cent in 1961-62. Though the proportion of the marginal and the small cultivators increased among the rural population due to land transfers, the poor peasantry was in a difficult

condition due to livelihood insecurity. This can be seen from the census data of 1961 and 1971 that showed the phenomenal increase of the agricultural labourers from 15.3% in 1961 to 26.2% in 1971 and the decline of the category of cultivators from 38.5% to 32 % during the same period (Census of India 1961, 1971).

The Left political parties had initiated mobilisation of the peasantry in the Naxalbari areas since the early 1960s when the landowners of the Naxalbari region started large-scale eviction of sharecroppers. The agrarian revolt arose in the month of April 1967 after the formation of the new government in West Bengal in which the CPI (M) was a major partner. The two most prominent leaders of this movement were Kanu Sanyal and Charu Mazumdar who later formed CPI(M-L) after being expelled from CPI(M). The high point of the movement was in May 1967 when forcible occupations, looting of rice and paddy and intimidation and assaults by the peasants took place. The leaders of the movement claimed that around 90 percent of the peasants in the Siliguri subdivision supported the movement. The movement came to a halt, when, under central government pressure, the West Bengal police entered the region and swept the area. Cases of killing of landlords were carried on later as a part of the annihilation strategy (SinghaRoy 2005).

The tasks of the rebellion spelled out by Kanu Sanyal, inter alia included redistribution of land to peasants that were tilled but not owned by them, burning all legal deeds and documents, declaring void all unequal agreements between the moneylenders and the peasants as null and void, confiscating hoarded rice and distributing among the peasants, trying and sentencing to death all Jotedars etc.

The movement spread to other areas of the state and elsewhere in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh later in the form of the Naxalite movement.

8.5 CHANGING PATTERN OF AGRARIAN STRUCTURE AND PEASANT MOVEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

The history of the peasant movements can be traced to the economic policies of the Britishers, which have brought about many changes in the Indian agrarian system. The consequences of the British colonial expansion were felt the most by the Indian peasantry and it rose in revolt from time to time. Under British rule changes in the modes of production in agriculture have disturbed the traditional agrarian relationships which also led to peasant unrest. Land became a marketable commodity and commercialised agriculture developed during the late nineteenth century. This led to erosion of the traditional bonds, thus providing possibilities of rebellion. With commercialisation of agriculture between 1860 and 1920, the landlords who used to collect rent in cash started collecting rent in grain, the price of which was high (Shah 2004)

The peasant movements created an atmosphere for post- independence agrarian reforms, for instance, the abolition of Zamindari system. They eroded the power of the landed class, thus adding to the transformation of the agrarian structure. Since the 1960s, agricultural production has increasingly become market oriented. Non-farm economic activities have expanded in the rural areas. In the process, not only has the rural-urban divide become blurred, but the nature of peasant

society in terms of composition, classes/strata and consciousness has undergone considerable changes. An agricultural labourer in contemporary India, in general, is no longer attached to the same master, as was the case during the colonial and pre-colonial periods in pre-capitalist agriculture. Due to the process of proletarianisation of agricultural labourers, in the last few decades, they are more dependent on wage labour and thus losing the extra-economic relations with their employers which govern the conditions of their work and life (Kannan 1988:12, Shah 2004: 17-18)

Since the green revolution there is penetration of market economy and globalization and the peasant struggles also have undergone changes. New Farmers' organisations such as the Shetkari Sangathana in Maharashtra, Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) in Uttar Pradesh, Khedut Samaj in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Punjab have come into existence that have a lot of political clout and influence. They demand 'remunerative prices' of their produce, concessions and subsidies in the prices for agricultural inputs, electricity charges, irrigation charges and betterment levies, etc. (Omvedt 1993; Brass 1994a; Gupta 1997; Lindberg 1997; Shah 2004). They assert for a change in the development paradigm from industrial development to agricultural development. With the rural urban divide blurring in many places, rich peasants have begun to invest their agricultural surplus in industries and other urban sectors.

The post economic reform period in India saw a number of peasant protests and movements against acquisition of cultivable fertile land for industrial units and developmental projects. A few examples are – movements at Singur and Nandigram in West Bengal in 2006, Mann in Maharashtra in 2005, and Sompeta in Andhra Pradesh in 2010. In these movements support from several NGOs and wide publicity due to advancing IT sector is also seen.

Check Your Progress

- 1) Write short notes describing any two radical peasant movements in India.

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- 2) Elaborate the changing pattern of agrarian structure and peasant movements in contemporary India.

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8.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed some of the crucial features of peasant movements in Indian society. We started with a conceptual discussion on 'peasant' and peasant movement. The role of peasants in revolutionary movements has also been touched upon very briefly. The social background and causes for the emergence and manifestation of radical social movements are also discussed. A few of the prominent radical social movements are also discussed.

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UNIT 9 DALIT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Who is a Dalit ?
- 9.3 Dalit Mobilization/Dalit Consciousness
- 9.4 Dalit Movement in Pre-Independence India
 - 9.4.1 Bhakti Movement
 - 9.4.2 Neo-Vedantik Movements
 - 9.4.3 Sanskritization Movement
 - 9.4.4 Gandhiji's Contribution to Dalit Movement
 - 9.4.5 Ambedkar's Contribution to Dalit Movement
- 9.5 Dalit Literary Movement
- 9.6 Post-Independence Dalit Movements
 - 9.6.1 B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhist Dalit Movement
 - 9.6.2 Dalit Panthers
 - 9.6.3 Contribution of Kanshi Ram
 - 9.6.4 Mayawati's Contribution to Dalit Movement
- 9.7 Dalit Women's Movement
- 9.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.9 References
- 9.10 Specimen Answers To Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of 'dalit' in India;
- To identify the issues/problems involved in the dalit movement;
- To know phases through which the dalit movement has passed; and
- Analyze the role of dalits and their organisations in the electoral politics

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The Dalit movement began as a protest movement to bring socio-political transformation in the status of dalits in India. Dalits have been ruthlessly exploited and inhumanly subjugated by the upper castes for centuries. They have been isolated, fragmented and oppressed by the hegemony of Brahmin culture. The new polity, the post modern administrative framework, the rational judicial system, the current forms of land tenure and taxation, the new patterns of trade, the liberal education system, and the network of communications emphasized the spirit of liberty, equality and social justice for Dalits. The Dalit movement asserts rights and privileges to the Dalits. Ruman Sutradhar (2014) writes that the Dalit

*Contributed by Manas Nanda

Movement is a social revolution aimed for social change, replacing the age old hierarchical Indian society, and is based on the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and social justice. He also explains that the socio-cultural exclusion, economic deprivation and political exploitation of centuries made the Dalits break out of such kinds of age-old prejudices. Hence, they began to protest with the help of literature, or forming organizations like the Dalit Panthers, and this protest movement came to be recognized as the Dalit Movement.

The post modern researchers, social scientists and academia have developed their interest to study the dalit movement as it is one of the important social movements in India. Different dalit leaders through their organization and political parties have mobilized and motivated the dalit mass to achieve the overall objectives of creating an inclusive society. Due to stronger mobilization by the Bahujan Samaj Party, the dalits could participate in the democratic electoral process in the country and create a separate identity for themselves. The dalit leaders unleashed the movement for maintaining or increasing reservations in political offices, government jobs and welfare programmes. It is called the new political movements of dalits. Dalit movement brought a transformation in the caste structure of Indian society and emphasized the fight for self dignity. The present reservation system is the outcome of dalit movement.

9.2 WHO IS A DALIT ?

Dalits have different names in different parts of our country. They are called Holaya, Panchama, Chandala, Samagara, Chammar, Adikarnataka, and Adidravida etc. The word “Dalit” is derived from the Sanskrit word *Dal*, means “ground”, “suppressed”, “crushed”, or “broken to pieces”. It was first used by Jyotiba Phule, the founder of the Satya Shodak Samaj, a non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. He used the term to refer to the outcastes and untouchables as the victims of the caste-based social division of the Indian society in the nineteenth century. Victor Premasagar writes that the term expresses the Dalits’ “weakness, poverty and humiliation at the hands of the upper castes in the Indian society.” The term *Dalit* has become a political identity, similar to the way African Americans in the United States moved away from the use of the term “Negro”, to the use of “Black” or “African-American.” Dalits today use the term “Dalit” as they believe the term is more than being broken and is in fact an identity born of struggle and assertion. The word dalit is a degraded term which was replaced by the British rulers who named it as depressed class in 1919. Gandhij lovingly called them Harijan. The British administration defined them as Scheduled castes in 1935. Again the term Dalit was popularized by the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra in 1970.

In Varna Vyavastha, untouchables are placed as Panchama Varna. They occupy the lowest position in Indian society. They are the members of the menial caste and they are considered as impure and polluted and they have been regularly facing discrimination and violence which prevents them from enjoying the basic human rights and dignity promised to all citizens of India. They were denied access to roads, temples, schools, etc. to avoid “pollution” of other castes. They are forced to accept polluting occupations like disposing dead bodies, working with leather, cleaning toilets and sewage, etc.

The total percentage of Dalits is 16.6 percent in India. They are highly concentrated in states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa and Maharashtra. Dalits are mainly poor peasants, share-croppers and agricultural labourers in the rural economy. In the urban economy they basically form the bulk of the labouring population. Sutrdhar (2014) writes that Dalits began their movement against the exploitation by Brahmins, and that they have not succeeded even now. There are varied reasons why the movement could not be successful and one of the most important is that Brahmanism is deep rooted in the social structure of India. The Arya-Brahmins, the originators of the Vedas have actually institutionalized discrimination through the institution of caste. The majority are accepting caste system because the dominant ideology is inflicted in the people's minds by the process of hegemony. Brahmanism, in order to continue discrimination has made use of Gramscian hegemony through social institutions like schools, and temples, to maintain their hegemonic status.

The Brahmins have very systematically deprived the Dalits of their own land and resources. The dominant Brahmanical ideology of caste is being resisted by a small group that took the shape of the Dalit Movement. A few educated Dalits organized the majority to begin the movement.

As Gail Omvedt (1976) perceptibly observes, the autonomous Dalit movement had to engage with three forces in colonial society:

- 1) It developed in opposition to the socially and culturally pervasive and historically deep-rooted hegemony of Brahminical Hinduism.
- 2) It had to contend with the hegemony of the nationalist movement, which under the leadership of the Congress, strove to take over the agendas of several subaltern movements while restraining their democratic and egalitarian potential.
- 3) It had to face a difficult relationship with the communist movement.

9.3 DALIT MOBILISATION/DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS

Mobilization' means the process of preparing the actors for collective action. Collective action can simply be defined as people acting together in pursuit of interests they share, for example, gathering to demonstrate in support of their cause. Neil Smelser (1962) in his *Theory of Collective Behaviour* and Charles Tilly in his book *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978) included mobilization as one important component of collective action. Collective behaviour begins when mobilization for action takes place.

Ghurye in '*Caste and Race in India*' (1969) has explained the type of discriminations associated with untouchables in traditional Indian society which includes banning of women of untouchable caste from covering the upper part of their body, wearing gold ornaments having sexual proximity beyond the caste and the men from wearing dhoti below their knees, using public facilities and going for occupations beyond their caste, prescriptions. Untouchables at large were supposed to carry a thorny branch of a tree to remove their footsteps from

the road; they were supposed to hang an earthen pot around their neck to spit in, which may otherwise fall on the ground making higher castes impure.

S.C Dube (1958) advocates that for the emergence of class consciousness, ideology of dalit becomes essential. He advocates that Dalit consciousness in contemporary India is the manifestation of Dalit's search for modernization whereas Dalit consciousness in traditional India was a challenge to orthodox Brahmanism and Hindu values. Dalit mobilization in case of India should be studied from time perspective" indicating and explaining how various kinds of ideology have supported Dalit mobilization in India. During 1920s -1950s Dalit mobilization was greatly concerned about forcible entry into Hindu temples, burning copies of the Manusmriti, abandoning the services of indigenous priests governed by brahmanic values, production and the circulation of caste literatures etc, but in contemporary India, Dalit identity is more a matter of search for rights, justice and equality rather than just being concerned with rebellion against Hinduism. Therefore different stages of Dalit consciousness are driven by different ideologies and interests and must be addressed by sociology.

Andre Betielle (1969, 1991) writes that Dalit mobilization in contemporary India is greatly driven by political interest rather than by discriminatory cultural past. The practice of untouchability is losing its ground in contemporary India because of growth of caste free occupations resulting in the mutual co-presence of Brahmins and Dalits in same occupation sphere. The Constitution of India guarantees to protect untouchables from all possible forms of discrimination in schools, colleges, hospitals and other institutions of public importance. Development of transportation and communication have facilitated the inflow and the outflow of ideologies from one part of the society to another which results in least practice of discrimination and exploitation of dalits in contemporary India and credit for that must go to the structured pattern of social change.

Gail Omvedt (1999) emphasised that Dalit mobilization in India should be studied from a multidimensional perspective. She advocates that every movement is having initiation stage, consolidation stage; crystallization stage;-maturity stage and disintegration stage. Multiple factors like economic discrimination, lack of social dignity, cultural isolation and alienation from decision-making process were responsible for initiation of Dalit mobilization prior to India's Independence. She narrates that the emergence of Republican Justice Party and emergence of Dr B R Ambedkar who said that Dalits need an Ambedkar rather than a Gandhi for their liberation gave rise to the consolidation of Dalit movement in India.

M. S. A. Rao in 'Social Movements in India' (1979) equates Dalit movement with the movements of Blacks in America. He concludes by saying that ideology for Dalit movement was imported from the west that bore fruit in Indian social soil.

Yogendra Singh advocates that Dalit mobilization in India sufficiently exemplifies how modernization has broken the backbone of caste and he equates Dalit consciousness with class consciousness to bring forward the view that Dalit mobilization in India is driving Indian society in the direction of modernization giving importance to the principles of equality against the principle of hierarchy. The sociologists have differences in their viewpoints pertaining to Dalit mobilization. Despite variations in their standpoint they all accept that Dalit

mobilization in India is an empirical fact. It has spoken on the one hand about the Dalit’s search for self-identity with dignity, their search for rights and equality, and on the other hand that Dalit mobilization has given way to the glorification of caste or class identity within which caste is hidden. Such consequences of Dalit mobilization have stood against the basic objective of Indian Constitution that pledged to make India a casteless and classless society.

The main thrust of the Dalit movements has been centered in the Pre-Independent and Post Independent periods on the problem of untouchability. Dalits supported the movements for maintaining or increasing reservations in political offices, government jobs and welfare programmes.

Ghanshyam Shah (2004) classifies the Dalit movements into reformative and alternative movements. The former tries to reform the caste system to solve the problem of untouchability. That latter i.e. the alternative movement attempts to create an alternative socio-cultural structure by conversion to some other religion or by acquiring education, economic status and political power. Both types of movements use political means to attain their objectives. The reformative movements are further divided into Bhakti movements, neo-Vedantik movements and Sanskritisation movements.

The alternative movements are divided into the conversion movement and the religious or secular movement. The latter includes the movement related to economic issues. In the context of dalit identity and ideology Shah has classified dalit movements into movements within cultural consensus, competing ideology and non Hindu identity, Buddhist dalits, counter ideology and dalit identity. The first three are based around religious ideologies whereas the last is based on class.

The reformative movements are further divided into (1) Bhakti Movement, (2) Neo-Vedantik Movements and (3) Sanskritization movements. The alternative movements are divided into (1) the conversion movement and (2) the religious or secular movement. The latter includes the movement related to economic issues. In the context of dalit identity and ideology Shah has classified dalit movements into (1) movements within cultural consensus, (2) competing ideology and non-Hindu identity, (3) Buddhists dalits and (4) counter ideology and dalit identity

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the question
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit

1) Explain the concept of 'Dalit'

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2) Write an essay on Dalit Mobilization/ Dalit Consciousness

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9.4 DALIT MOVEMENT IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

9.4.1 Bhakti Movement

This movement in 15th century was a popular movement which treated all sections of society equally and it developed two traditions of Saguna and Nirguna. The first one believed in the form of God Vishnu or Shiv relating to the Vaishnavite or Shaivaite traditions. It advocated equality among all the castes though it subscribed to the Varnashram dharma and the caste social order. The followers of Nirguna believed in formless universal God. Ravidas and Kabir were the major figures of this tradition. It became more popular among the dalits in urban areas in the early 20th century as it provided the possibility of salvation for all. It promised social equality. Through these movements Fuller argues devotionalist ethic came to be widely reinterpreted as a charter of egalitarianism. No doubt the teachings of Bhakti movement inspired and motivated scheduled castes for the beginning of dalit movement. These provided the means to protest against orthodox Hinduism for future generations of Dalits.

9.4.2 Neo-Vedantik Movements

These movements were initiated by Hindu religious and social reformers. These movements attempted to remove untouchability by taking the dalits into the fold of the caste system. According to the pioneers of these movements, untouchability was not an essential part of Hinduism and, for that matter, of the caste system. Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, believed that the caste system was a political institution created by the rulers 'for the common good of society, and not a natural or religious distinction'. He said, 'in fact, any Brahman, who is disqualified for his work, becomes at once a Sudra de jure, and a Sudra, who qualifies for it, becomes at once a Brahmana de jure; though neither can become so de facto also either by his own will or the will of others, as long as the state does not make him so' (Jordens 1978: 62).

The neo-Vedantic movements and non-Brahmin movements played an important catalytic role in developing anti-caste or anti Hinduism dalit movements in some parts of the country. The Satyashodhak Samaj and the self-respect movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the Adhi Dharma and Adi Andhra movement in Bengal and Adi-Hindu movement in Uttar Pradesh are important anti-untouchability movements which were launched in the last quarter of the 19th and the early part of 20th century.

Nandini Gooptu (1993) in her study in Uttar Pradesh in the early twentieth century briefly analyses the emergence of the *Adi-Hindu Movement* in the urban areas of

the region (2001). Like Adi-Dharma, the leaders of the Adi-Hindu movement believed that the present form of Hinduism was imposed on them by the Aryan invaders. The movement did not pose a direct threat to the caste system. It was 'in essence, conceived as and remained a protest against the attribution of "low" roles and functions to the untouchables by means of a claim not to be Aryan Hindus; it was not developed into a full-blown, direct attack on the caste system' (Gooptu 1993: 298). The Dalits began to call themselves Adi-Andhras in Andhra, Adi-Karnatakas in Karnataka, Adi-Dravidas in Tamil Nadu, Adi-Hindus in Uttar Pradesh and Adi-Dharmis in Punjab. Dalits also followed the route of conversion with a purpose of getting rid of untouchability and to develop their social and financial conditions.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule formed the Sayta Shodak Mandal in 1873 with the aim of liberating non-Brahmins from the clutches of Brahminism. Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur started Satya Shodak Mandal in 1912 and carried forward the movement started by Phule. In the pre-independence period, the Dalit movements comprised of a strong non-Brahman movement against Brahmanism in Maharashtra, Adi-Dravidas movement in Tamil Nadu, Shri Narayan Dharma Paripalan movement in Kerala, Adi-Andhras movement in Coastal Andhra and the like. Phule tried to formulate a new theistic religion.

9.4.3 Sanskritisation Movement

M.N. Srinivas (1955) defined Sanskritization as a process by which "a *low* or *middle* Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently *twice-born* caste.

Kumar (1991) writes that Dalit leaders followed the process of 'Sanskritization' to elevate themselves to the higher position in caste hierarchy. They adopted Brahman manners, including vegetarianism, putting sandalwood paste on forehead, wearing sacred thread, etc. Thus Dalit leaders like Swami Thykkad (Kerala), Pandi Sunder Lai Sagar (UP), Muldas Vaishya (Gujarat), Moon Vithoba Raoji Pande (Maharashtra) and others tried to adopt established cultural norms and practices of the higher castes. Imitation of the high caste manners by Dalits was an assertion of their right to equality.

Some of the dalit leaders advocated that by following Brahmanic culture and manners like vegetarianism, putting sandalwood paste on the forehead, using sacred thread around the neck and accepting Brahmanic dialects, dress, manners, ceremonies and rituals will enable them to elevate their position in the society. Some of the dalits were attracted towards Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and Mahanubhav Sect.

It was in the 1920s, however, that Dalits began to organize strongly and independently throughout many regions of India. The most important of the early Dalit movements were the Adi-Dharm movement in the Punjab (organized 1926); the movement under Ambedkar in Maharashtra, mainly based among Mahars which had its organizational beginnings in 1924; the Namashudra movement in Bengal; the Adi-Dravida movement in Tamilnadu; the Adi-Karnataka movement; the Adi-Hindu movement mainly centered around Kanpur in U.P; and the organizing of the Pulayas and Cherumans in Kerala.

Kshîrasâgara (1994) writes that the phenomenon of Sanskritization had been apparently explained long ago by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in his *Castes in India* (1916) by the term imitation in the context of formation of castes. He had categorically stated that almost all the castes in pre-caste society followed the priestly Brahmin class in their attempt to upgrade their social status by way of imitation of certain Brahmanic manners and customs and by differentiation from other groups. This process led to the formation of the castes. He says the laws of imitation flows from the higher to the lower. The extent of intensity of imitation varies inversely in proportion to social distance from the superior castes and source of imitation must enjoy prestige in the group.

9.4.4 Gandhi's Contribution to Dalit Movement

When Mahatma Gandhi was in South Africa, he realized the problem of social discrimination. Gandhiji advocated that the construction of the life of the Nation was of utmost importance. This could be achieved by alleviating the social status of the untouchables. He always thought of untouchability as a cruel and inhuman institution. During his course of interaction with Harijan's at Ahmedabad, he examined, "this is a movement for the purification of Hinduism". According to Gandhiji, "If we are the children of the same God how can there be any rank among us"? He stressed the problem of untouchability and its removal from its roots. To boost up the work for the upliftment of Harijans, Gandhiji laid the foundation of the *Harijan Sevak Sang* in 1932 when he was in jail. This organisation was not a part of the Congress. It was the outcome of the fast Gandhiji undertook in 1932 in jail.

9.4.5 Ambedkar's Contribution to Dalit Movement

Ambedkar started a Marathi fortnightly, the "*Bahiskrit Bharat*", in April 1927 and a weekly, the "*Janta*" in November 1930. In September 1927 he started the "*Samaj Samta Sang*" for advocating social equality among the untouchables and the caste Hindus. He supported inter-caste dinner and inter-caste marriage. He also published another paper, the "Samata" in March 1929. In December 1927 he led a Satyagrah to establish the civic rights of the untouchables to draw water from a public tank, 'Chavadar Talen', at Mahad district Kolaba. Hindus claimed the tank as a private property and a prolonged litigation followed. Ambedkar won the case in the Bombay High Court in March 1937.

Ambedkar conducted another Satyagrah in March 1930 to establish the rights of the untouchables to enter the famous temple of Kalaram at Nasik. The Satyagrah was withdrawn in 1934. From April 1942 to 1946, he spread his activities and formed the *Scheduled Castes Federation* as an all India political party. From 1942 to 1946 he was a member of the Governor General's Executive Council and took advantage of this opportunity to promote the interest of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. He secured funds from the central Government for their education and reservation in posts in the central and provincial services for them.

9.5 DALIT LITERARY MOVEMENT

Dalit writings became an all India phenomenon. Dadawala (2016) writes that even prior to the 1960s, writers like Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, Shankarao Kharat, Narayan Surve, Anna Bhau Sathe were expressing Dalit concerns and issues in their literature. Baburao Bagul (1930–2008) is considered as a pioneer

of Marathi Dalit writings in Marathi. His collection of short stories titled *Jevha Mijat Choral* (When I Concealed My Caste) published in 1963 shook the traditional foundations of Marathi literature with its radical depiction of social exploitation. Subsequently, Namdeo Dhasal (who founded an organization called Dalit Panthers) further consolidated and expanded the Dalit literature movement in India.

Literateurs like Laxman Gaekwad, Laxman Pawar, Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Tryambak Sapkale, Arun Dangle, Umakant Randhir, J. V. Pawar, Tarachandra Khandekar, Yogi Raj Waghmare, Avinash Dolas, Kishore Shantabai Kale, Narendra Jadhav, Yogendra Meshram, Bhimrao Shirvale etc. became prominent voices of Dalit writing in Marathi. Many of the Dalit writings have also been translated into English and published as part of the anthologies of Dalit writings.

9.6 POST-INDEPENDENCE DALIT MOVEMENTS

9.6.1 B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhist Dalit Movement

Babasaheb Ambedkar has been the pioneering figure in the dalit movement. Ambedkar devoted and sacrificed every moment of his life thinking about and struggling for the emancipation of Dalits. Ambedkar became the nation's first Law Minister on 15 August 1947. On 29 August 1947, he was appointed as Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, charged by the Assembly to write India's new Constitution. Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination. Ambedkar fought for extensive economic and social rights for women, and also won the Assembly's support for introducing a system of reservations of jobs in the civil services, schools and colleges for members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, a system akin to affirmative action. India's lawmakers hoped to eradicate the socio-economic inequalities and lack of opportunities for India's depressed classes through these measures.

Conversion to Buddhism

Ambedkar favoured Buddhist religion. He studied Buddhism all his life. In 1950, he turned his attention fully to Buddhism and travelled to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to attend a meeting of the *World Fellowship of Buddhists*. He advocated for conversion to Buddhism. Ambedkar twice visited Burma in 1954; the second time in order to attend the third conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon. In 1955, he formed the *Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha*. Ambedkar organised a formal public ceremony for himself and his supporters in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. Ambedkar completed his own conversion to Buddhism along with his wife. He then proceeded to convert some 500,000 of his supporters who were gathered around him. He then travelled to Kathmandu in Nepal to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Conference. Ambedkar was convinced that Buddhism possessed a moral doctrine with two major objectives to perform. Firstly, in the political domain, it would be helpful for the dalits in creating a non-communal political ideology and identity against other existing perspectives of violent politics. During the Mahar Conference at Bombay Presidency in 1936, Ambedkar was convinced that conversion is the powerful weapon for Dalits to emancipate themselves. He realised that the "caste system among the Hindus has the

foundation of religion”. And so long as the Dalits “remain Hindus, Dalits will have to struggle hard for social intercourse for food and water, and for inter-caste marriages if they continue as Hindus. Ambedkar converted himself to Buddhism in 1956 in Nagpur. His able leadership could mobilize four lakh Dalits to convert themselves to Buddhism. In 1981, for example, responding to caste atrocities, more than 1,000 Dalits in Tamil Nadu converted to Islam. In 2002, in Jhajjar, Haryana, after five Dalits were lynched by a mob on the suspicion that they had killed a cow, the area saw mass conversions. In 2014, in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh, four Dalits angered by caste discrimination converted to Islam. Earlier this year, 180 Dalits converted to Buddhism in Uttar Pradesh to protest against the arrest of activists from the Bhim Army, a Dalit rights organisation.

Ambedkar was the chief architect for the foundation of the movement. He left the movement with a mission to fulfill its goal, even though leadership changes over time. Ambedkar chalked out a consolidated economic development plan without being influenced by the socialist approach of the radical Marxist thinking that he once found suitable to describe the depressed classes in India. Ambedkar was very concerned about the economics of the deprivation of oppressed classes in India. In *State and Minorities* Ambedkar laid down the strategy of India's economic development without closing every avenue of private enterprise and also providing for the equal distribution of wealth. He advocated an economic framework aimed at providing protection to the vulnerable sections of society against economic exploitation (Jadhav, 1993).

According to the 2001 census, there are currently 7.95 million Buddhists in India, at least 5.83 million of whom are Buddhists in Maharashtra. This makes Buddhism the fifth-largest religion in India and 6% of the population of Maharashtra, but less than 1% of the overall population of India. The Buddhist revival remains concentrated in two states: Ambedkar's native Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh — the land of Acharya Medharthi and their associates. Bhoj Dev Mudit, converted to Buddhism in 1968 and set up a school of his own. Rajendranath Aherwar appeared as an important Dalit leader in Kanpur. He joined the Republican Party of India and converted to Buddhism along with his whole family in 1961. In 1967, he founded the Kanpur branch of “Bharatiya Buddh Mahasabha”.

The Dalit Buddhist movement in Kanpur gained its momentum with the arrival of Dipankar, a Chamar bhikkhu, in 1980. Dipankar had come to Kanpur on a Buddhist mission and his first public appearance was scheduled at a mass conversion drive in 1981. The event was organised by Rahulan Ambawadekar, an RPI Dalit leader. In April 1981, Ambawadekar founded the Dalit Panthers (U.P. Branch) inspired by the Maharashtrian Dalit Panthers.

9.6.2 Dalit Panthers

The Dalit Panthers movement was a neo-social movement which accepted Ambedkar's philosophy to find a theoretical framework for the movement. Dalit Panthers was a social organisation that sought to fight caste discrimination. It was founded by Namdeo Dhasal and J. V. Pawar on 29 May 1972 in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

The Dalit Panthers were inspired by the Black Panther Party, a socialist movement that sought to fight racial discrimination against African-Americans, during

the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, which occurred in the mid-20th century. The initiative to form the Dalit Panther Movement was taken up by Namdeo Dhasal, J. V. Pawar, and Arun Kamble in Bombay. The Dalit Panther movement was a radical departure from earlier Dalit movements owing to its initial emphasis on militancy and revolutionary attitudes,

Most members were young men, some of whom were Neo-Buddhists. They advocated for and practised radical politics, fusing the ideologies of Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule and Karl Marx. Crucially, the Dalit Panthers helped invigorate the use of the term *Dalit* to refer to lower-caste communities.

Kumar (2016) narrates that the Dalit Panther movement was a radical departure from earlier Dalit movements. Its initial thrust on militancy through the use of rustic arms and threats, gave the movement a revolutionary colour. Going by their manifesto, dalit panthers had broken new ground in terms of radicalising the political space for the dalit movement. They imparted the proletarian – radical class identity to dalits and linked their struggles to the struggles of all oppressed people over the globe. Marxism provided a scientific framework to bring about a revolutionary change. Although have-nots from both dalits and non-dalits craved for a fundamental change, the former adhered to what appeared to be Ambedkarian methods of socio-political change and the latter to what came to be the Marxian method which tended to see every social process as the reflection of the material reality.

Unfortunately, quite like the BPP, they lacked the suitable ideology to channel this anger for achieving their goal. Interestingly, as they reflected the positive aspects of the BPP's contributions in terms of self-defence, mass organising techniques, propaganda techniques and radical orientation, they did so – in the case of BPP's negative aspects too. Like Black Panthers they also reflected 'TV mentality' (to think of a revolutionary struggle like a quick-paced TV programme), dogmatism, neglect of economic foundation needed for the organisation, lumpen tendencies, rhetoric outstripping capabilities, lack of clarity about the form of struggle and eventually, corruptibility of the leadership.

9.6.3 Contribution of Kanshi Ram

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is a popular national political party in the Indian state formed by Kanshi Ram in 1984 on the birth anniversary of Dr B.R Ambedkar to represent Bahujans (literally meaning "People in minority"). It refers to people from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes (OBC), as well as religious minorities. The cadres are inspired by the philosophy of Gautam Buddha, B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Narayana Guru, Periyar E. V. Ramasamy and Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj. The primary focus of BSP is for the upliftment of downtrodden people, with the principal goal of "Social Transformation and Economic Emancipation" of the "Bahujan Samaj". B.R Ambedkar, who was the champion of lower caste rights became the icon and ideological guru of BSP cadres. The political strategy of the party is to narrate the stories of Dalit heroes, build memorials and organize celebrations around their stories repeatedly to build a collective memory in the psyche of the people.

In 1973, Kanshi Ram established the *Backward and Minority Communities Employee Federation (BAMCEF)*. The motto of the association is to "Educate-

Organize and Agitate”.. Kanshi Ram continued building his network and making people aware of the realities of the caste system, how it functioned in India and the teachings of Ambedkar. In 1980 he organised a road show as “Ambedkar Mela” which reflected the life of Ambedkar and his views through pictures and narrations. In 1981 he founded the *Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti*.

9.6.4 Mayawati’s Contribution to Dalit Movement

Mayawati Prabhu Das became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for four separated terms. She is the national president of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). She emphasized on a platform of social change to improve the lives of the weakest strata of Indian society — the *Bahujans* or Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and religious minorities. Mayawati’s government was branded as a “miracle of democracy” by P. V. Narasimha Rao, former Prime Minister of India. Mayawati during her tenure directed all the Commissioners and the District Magistrates to distribute 3 acre land pieces or pattas to weaker sections of society by launching a special drive for illegal possession of pattas be dispossessed of them and the eligible poor be identified by regular monitoring of pattas and strict action against the mafias and musclemen through spot verification of different development and public welfare programmes. In 2010, 5596 people belonging to the SC and ST communities were allotted 1054.879 hectares of agricultural land. In a special drive 74 FIRs were filed and 88 people were arrested for illegal occupation of agricultural land.

Under the leadership of Mayawati, the government has taken the following decisions (from March 2007 to May 2008) in the interest of weaker sections:- (1) Special drive for filling backlog of reservations (2) Provision of reservation to SC/ST in private sector (3). Computerisation for transparency in the distribution of SC/ST scholarships (4) Mahamaya housing scheme (5) Shri Kanshi Ram Shahri Gharib Awas Yojna for providing housing facility to urban poor (6) Construction of community halls for Dalits (7). Janani Suraksha Yojna under which the eligible pregnant women are provided a sum of Rs.1400/-. Dalit empowerment is Mayawati’s lasting contribution to the Indian polity. She has “given a sense of self-confidence to the community that even Ambedkar or Kanshi Ram could never give.”

9.7 DALIT WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

In January 1928, a women’s association was founded in Bombay with Ramabai Ambedkar, Dr. Ambedkar’s wife, as its president. On 20th July 1942, The All India Depressed Classes Women Conference was organized and 25,000 women attended that conference. The Dalit movement thus considered women of even the highest castes as Dalits, because of their oppression. The National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW), was formed by Ruth Manorama in 1993, which has forced women’s movements in India to address the caste question seriously and raised its voice against violence on Dalit women. Dalit Mahila Sanghatana was formed by dalit women in Maharashtra in 1995. It focused on representing the dalit women’s question at the International Women Conference held in Beijing. The self representation of dalit women in Durban Conference on Racism in 1993 and International Women’s Conference in Beijing 1995 are path breaking events in the history of dalit women’s politics. Ramabai Ambedkar, Mrs. Anjinibai Deshbhratar, Mrs. Gitabai Gaikwad, Mrs. Kirtibai Patil, and Sulochanabai Dongre were the chief supporters of Dalit women’s movement.

Dalit feminists have articulated the three-fold oppression of Dalit women as

- 1) Dalits are oppressed by upper castes;
- 2) Agricultural workers are subject to class oppression, mainly at the hands of upper caste land owners; and
- 3) Women are facing patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men, including men of their own castes

The current goals of Dalit Women’s Movement are as follows:

- 1) To change caste equations in the area/region where they work
- 2) To promote the leadership of local women
- 3) To protest against all forms of violence against women and men
- 4) To negotiate their terms with members of the upper castes during elections
- 5) To ensure that the benefits of government schemes announced under the new Dalit-run regime, flows to all eligible Dalits.

A dalit woman has to face gender discrimination being a woman. and economic and caste exploitation being a dalit and at the same time she is oppressed by the patriarchy from which the dalit communities are not free. She equally suffers due to the lack of cultural capital which dalits on the whole suffer from. Ambedkar has not only spoken for and agitated for the rights of Dalits but also Dalit women. He argued that “practices of sati, enforced widowhood and child marriage come to be prescribed by Brahmanism in order to regulate and control any transgression of boundaries, i.e., to say he underlines the fact that the caste system can be maintained only through the controls on women’s sexuality and in this sense women are the gateways to the caste system (Rege: 1998).

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the question
 ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit

1) Describe Dalit Movement in Pre-Independence India

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2) Explain Dalit Movement in Post Independence India

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9.8 LET US SUM UP

Dalit Movement has no doubt brought a major social change in the traditional hierarchy of Indian society. It has encouraged the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and social justice among the different castes and classes of people. The Dalit movements raised the issues related to identity and reservations of government jobs and political positions. There was a strong opposition to the practice of untouchability and discrimination. The movements have brought the dalits to the mainstream politics and allowed them to hold important and administrative posts in different parts of the country. The dalit literature mobilized the dalit intellectuals to assert their rights and maintain their dignity in the hierarchical society. The Dalit movement was a direct challenge to the upper caste and class and they have been acting as a strong pressure group to the government in the mainstream politics. Thus the dalit movement has become a powerful social movement to bring a major socio-economic and political transformation in the conditions of dalits.

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9.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Dalits were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth varna, also known by the name of Panchama. Dalits now profess various religious beliefs, including Buddhism, Christianity and Sikhism.
- 2) Dalit mobilization in India sufficiently implies how modernization has broken the backbone of caste and equates Dalit consciousness with class consciousness to bring forward the view that Dalit mobilization in India is driving Indian society in the direction of modernization giving importance to the principles of equality against the principle of hierarchy

- 3) Dalit Movement in Pre-independent India starts with the Bhakti movement. This movement led the foundation of Dalit movement by propagating equality and liberty to all sections of people. Neo-Vedantic movement attempted to remove untouchability by taking them into the fold of the caste system. Through the process of sanskritisation Dalits emulated their status in the hierarchy structure. Mahatma Gandhi also discards the practice of untouchability. Dr B R Ambedkar fought for the emancipation of dalits in India
- 4) Dalit movement began with the Buddhist Dalit Movement. Ambedkar mobilized the dalits to convert them to Buddhism for enjoying equality and protecting them from caste atrocities. Ambedkar provided constitutional guarantees and protections for a wide range of civil liberties for individual citizens, including freedom of religion, the abolition of untouchability and the outlawing of all forms of discrimination. Dalit Panther movement, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati's effort to ameliorate the condition of Dalits is highly praise worthy.

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GLOSSARY

Dalits: The social groups which have faced discrimination including untouchability are called dalits.

Dalit Movement: It means the protest of dalits against their discrimination of all kinds and for protection of their rights.

Social Justice: It means an absence of social and economic discrimination; conditions which are for the protection and preservation of equality, self-respect and other rights.

UNIT 10 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Women's Movement : A Variant of Social Movement
- 10.3 Reform Movements and Women's Issues in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries
 - 10.3.1 The Brahmo Samaj
 - 10.3.2 The Prarthana Samaj
 - 10.3.3 The Arya Samaj
 - 10.3.4 Muslim Women and Social Reform
- 10.4 Women's Participation in the Freedom Movement
 - 10.4.1 Role of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru
 - 10.4.2 Women's Organisations and Issues
 - 10.4.3 Forms of Women's Participation in the Freedom Movement
- 10.5 Institutional Initiatives and Women's Movement in the Post-Independence Period
 - 10.5.1 Constitutional Provisions and Social Legislations
 - 10.5.2 Planned Development and Women's Issues
 - 10.5.3 Women's Political Representation
- 10.6 Resurgence of Women's Movement in the 70s: Issues and Actions
 - 10.6.1 Emergence of New Organisations and Approaches
 - 10.6.2 Deforestation and Ecological Movement
 - 10.6.3 Issue-based Movements in the 70s and 80s
 - 10.6.4 The Emerging Trends and Government's Response
- 10.7 Women's Movement in the Contemporary Period
- 10.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.9 References
- 10.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have discussed the historical and contemporary dimensions of the women's movement in India. After going through this unit you should be able to:

- describe women's movement as an important variant of the 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 organisations, 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.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

A 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 10.2 of this unit we discuss the 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 roles in projecting women's issues in a wider context. You will find these aspects in section 10.3. Social reforms among the Muslim women have also been discussed in this section. In section 10.4 you will read about women's organisation and participation in the independence 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 the women's movement significantly. We discuss the changing facets of the women's movement in the post-Independence period in section 10.5. During the 1970s and 1980s there was a resurgence of the women's movement in India. Section 10.6 of this unit deals with this aspect. Here we discuss the attempts of women to organise themselves 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.

10.2 WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: A VARIANT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The study of social movements is not an area of study 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.

10.3 REFORM MOVEMENTS AND WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The position of women in India has varied in different periods and in different classes, religions and ethnic groups. By the nineteenth century there were several evil social practices like Sati (burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband), child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, polygamy etc. which were a matter of debate.

During 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 the 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 could not 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 witnessed the proliferation of various organisations. These organisations took 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 and Arya Samaj. In the following section, we shall be discussing these organisations briefly.

10.3.1 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.

10.3.2 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 the 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.

10.3.3 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, and remarriage of child widows. It was opposed to divorce and widow remarriage in general, and emphasised separate schools 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.

10.3.4 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 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 the 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 the women’s question as a social problem.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below to answer the question

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit

i) What were the major objectives of the social and religious movements of the nineteenth century? Answer in about four sentences.

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- ii) What were the major women issues raised by the Brahma Samaj? Answer in about four sentences.

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10.4 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

During the freedom movement, the struggle for Women's rights 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.

10.4.1 Role of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru

Mahatma Gandhi played the most significant role in involving a large number of women in the nationalist movement. Hence it is important to understand the impact of Gandhian ideology on the 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 and 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 the 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 that of men.

Jawaharlal Nehru was influenced by the Western suffragettes and was exposed to liberal views on the 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.

10.4.2 Women's Organisations and Issues

The emergence of women's organisations was closely linked with both social reform movements 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 lady 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 perspectives on 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.

10.4.3 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 numbers participated in the Salt March (when 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 organisations also 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

Note: i) Use the space given below to answer the question

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit

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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10.5 INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

In the post Independence period a series of institutional initiatives have been introduced for the emancipation of women in 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.

10.5.1 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 the freedom movement it was felt that with the nation's Independence, many of the disabilities, and problems of women attributed to colonial rule would disappear. 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 Principles of State Policy clearly stating the need for uniform laws for all the communities.

With these legislative measures in the fifties women's organisations 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.

10.5.2 Planned Development and Women's Issues

In the post-Independence period it was assumed that economic development policies i.e., agricultural development and modernisation, industrialisation, technological development etc., would bring about a 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 greater detail.

i) Thrust of Development Policies

The main thrust of development policies for women was on 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 a 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 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 rate was 39.29 and 54.16 respectively. In the rural areas the female literacy rate 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 work 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 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.

10.5.3 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), and state legislatures. They became governors, chief ministers, cabinet ministers and held other positions 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 the 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 73rd and 74th amendments of 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.

Check Your Progress

Note: i) Use the space given below to answer the question

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of 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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10.6 RESURGENCE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE 70s: ISSUES AND ACTIONS

The late 1970s and 1980s was marked by a resurgence of the women's struggle and the emergence of new women's groups and organisations. After their participation in the 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 period 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 the women's movement in India. Figure 10.1 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 for 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 10.1 Women's Movement

10.6.1 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 line 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. 36

10.6.2 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.

10.6.3 Issue Based Movements in the 1970s and 1980s

The ineffectiveness of social legislation in 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 a few of these movements.

i) Anti-dowry Movements

A sustained campaign has been conducted by several women's organisations and civil rights group against dowry murders. 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 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 pro-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. The anti-rape movement got a new momentum with the horrible episode of Nirbhaya gang rape in Delhi that shook the public conscience in India.

10.6.4 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 grassroots 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 setup women's wings.

As a response to the 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 the government 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 conditions.

The 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution prepared in the late 1980s were passed in 1993 and it ensured 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 advise the government on women's issues and be a powerful advocate of their rights and hence as 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 Samridhhi 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.

10.7 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

Contemporary women's movements have been organised with the target to end the gender discrimination, inequality and violence against women through adopting subsequent mechanism of legal institutions and political and social changes.

A large number women's organizations born in the last few decades that have raised their voice against social inequality and gender discrimination. NGOs and civil society organizations played a very significant role in transforming the society. Contemporary movements demonstrated their issues in the post-modernist perspective which questions the larger issue of women's subjectivity and subordination under male domination.

From the 1960s onwards, US feminists adopted a popular slogan 'The Personal is Political' and started their activism against personal relations between man and woman. Both liberal and radical feminism took shape as an activism platform to challenge the patriarchy. Later on this activism spread in many developing countries. In India, such movement took place in a broader way which addressed the broader question of caste, class, gender, ethnicity and religious issues. The Dalit women's movement addresses the caste questions, whereas peasant movements address the peasant question. Ethnic tribal movements address the ethnic identities whereas middle class women questions the religious atrocities. For instance, the Temple entry movement by the Hindu women's and the Muslim women's movement against triple talaq are the important women's movement against the caste and religious atrocities.

Among other developing countries India has a unique challenge of patriarchy where different social groups have different problems. Inequality exists at the group level and then each social group practise its own way of patriarchy where the poor marginalized sections face the double burden of social oppression. The traditional social order in Hindu society does not allow education to women and property rights. Rural society still faces this problem which reinvents inequality and gender discrimination.

Activity 1

Read section 10.6 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

10.8 LET US SUM UP

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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10.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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.

Check Your Progress 2

- 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

GLOSSORY

Evolutionary Process: A process of gradual change in a society from one stage to the other

Franchise: Right to cast vote

Metropolitan city: Urban places with more than one million population

Polygyny: A form of marriage in which a husband has more than one wife at the same time

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UNIT 11 WORKING CLASS MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Emergence of Working Class in India
 - 11.2.1 The Political Economy of Colonial Administration
 - 11.2.2 Industrialisation
 - 11.2.3 Urbanisation
- 11.3 Urban Occupational Structure
 - 11.3.1 Change in the Occupational Structure
 - 11.3.2 Emergence of Urban Unorganised Sector
 - 11.3.3 Features of Urban Working Class
- 11.4 Working Class Movements in India: Concept, Growth and Characteristics
 - 11.4.1 Concept
 - 11.4.2 Growth of Workers Movements
 - 11.4.3 Characteristics of Workers Movements
 - 11.4.4 Weaknesses of the Workers Organisation
- 11.5 Issues Before the Working Class Movement
- 11.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.7 References
- 11.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the process of emergence of the urban working class in India
- Describe the urban occupational structure
- Analyse the features of urban working class, and
- Discuss the concept, growth and characteristics of urban labour movement.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

We begin with a discussion on the emergence of urban working class in India. The urban working class, in its modern sense, emerged in India as a consequence of colonial rule. The British colonial policy destroyed the self-sufficient village community system of production. It destroyed the traditional village and cottage industries. These altogether led to the displacement of an important section of rural craftspeople and artisans from their traditional avenues of employment and pushed them to seek alternative employment in the urban areas. We discuss all these aspects in this unit. This unit also discusses the emergence of urban working class in terms of industrialisation and urbanization in the colonial and post-independence period. We also present an overview of urban occupational structure

and the major features of the contemporary urban working class. Labour movement has been an inseparable part of the socio-political lives of urban working class. In this unit, we also discuss the concept, growth and characteristics of labour movement in India.

11.2 EMERGENCE OF WORKING CLASS IN INDIA

In another unit we defined urbanization as the movement of people from village to town/city where economic activities are centred on non-agricultural occupations, such as trade, manufacturing, industry and management. In the process of urbanisation, in India, cities have been the centres of diverse economic activities. They attract people from the rural areas. This attraction which pulls a significant section of the rural population to the urban areas is called the pull factor. However, rural poverty, backwardness of agricultural economy and the destruction of cottage industries also push villagers to the urban areas - this is known as the push factor.

Thus, the push and pull factors of migration which play an important role in the process of urbanization also play a significant role in the emergence of the urban working class in India. However, in our country the push and pull factors do not operate in isolation. Rather these have been affected tremendously by the political economy of the state since the colonial period.

11.2.1 The Political Economy of Colonial Administration

The urban working class is a product of the eighteenth century Industrial Revolution in Europe. India was one of the colonies of England at that time suffering a forced disintegration of traditional economic income. The Industrial Revolution of Europe was characterized by a phenomenal development of capitalist, transition from man made products in craftspersonship to the use of machinery in large scale industry, invention and use of modern machinery and emergence of the modern working class. In this context, it is essential to examine the impact of colonial rule in India.

The imperialist rulers, to maximize their industrial production plundered the natural resources of India. Their prolonged colonial administration and intensified exploitation reduced a large section of Indian people to a miserable, impoverished mass. Their rule amounted to :

(i) Destruction of the Self-sufficient Village Community : In the earlier unit (Unit 24) we have discussed how the British administration brought complete destruction to self-sufficient village community system of production. It gave, through its new land systems, unabated scope to the new strata of landlords originating from the money-lenders, traders etc., to exploit the rural poor, (especially the poor peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers).

Destruction of Traditional Village and Cottage Industries:

Their policy also paved the way for the destruction of traditional village and cottage industries in India. In 1813, the Britishers introduced free trade policy in India. Indian market was made open to the British capitalists resulting in a rapid increase of British exports to India. However, they imposed heavy import duty varying between 70% to 80% on the cost of imported Indian textile and silk products in England. This discrimination in the colonial trading policy particularly

ruined the textile industry in India and adversely affected her economy. The Britishers introduced modern road and railway transport to suit their import and export operations. It helped the Britishers to smoothen the process of export of raw material from India to England and to flood Indian markets with their industrial products. This unscrupulous trading policy designed by the imperialists converted India into an agrarian raw material adjunct of capitalist Britain.

Displacement and Migration of Rural Artisans and Craftsmen: Since traditional cottage and village industries in India were destroyed in this period an important section of the displaced artisans and craftsmen joined the army of agricultural labourers while a small section of these impoverished workers migrated to the urban areas for employment. In the process of extreme economic insecurity and pauperization of the lower strata of the society, India emerged to be a reservoir of cheap labour. The Britishers took the full opportunity of this situation.

They arranged large-scale immigration of Indian labourers to the plantation industries in different British colonies. The Indian labourers were sought to be introduced in the plantations of the colonies like British Guiana, West Indies, Mauritius etc. There is no need to mention that immigrant Indian labourers were subjected to unscrupulous exploitation.

There was also interregional migration of the working class people. Impoverished people also migrated to distant places in search of jobs where some industries were set up or mining or plantations had developed. Since, these workers were settled in the areas which were far away from their home places they were also exploited by their employers. The workers were never recruited directly by the employer, rather there was always a middleman between the worker and the employer. These middlemen were largely responsible in employing workers under exploitative terms and conditions of work.

11.2.2 Industrialization

In India, industrialization has undergone various stages. Work participation in the industries has also changed accordingly. Let us examine the various stages of industrialization in India.

i) The Early Industrialisation

Factory production started in Calcutta and Bombay (now known as Mumbai) for jute and textile products respectively in the early part of the 1850s to export manufactured goods to markets in Britain. Later, factories were established in Madras (now known as Chennai), another port town. One of the reasons for setting up industries was that costs of production were much lower in India as labour was available at very cheap rates. A couple of decades earlier, in 1839, tea plantations came up in the north-eastern province of Assam. The tea produced was again for consumption in Britain (Bhowmik, 2010).

In India modern industries were introduced initially in the period between 1850-1870 which also coincided with the emergence of the industrial working class by 1890 when certain large factories were established in India. There were around 3,00,000 people employed in factories and mines, while around 2,00,000 people were in cotton and jute mills and coal mines. In the early twentieth century jute factories flourished in Bengal. During 1913-14, these

factories alone employed 2,16,000 workers. Textile industries also flourished in Bombay. In 1905, these factories employed altogether 1,95,000 workers. Similarly, housing and communication industries also developed in this period.

The industrial base in India remained narrow during the initial years. The census of 1911 showed that there were around 800,000 workers engaged in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Of these 524,000 were employed in factories and plantations. In fact the jute industry and tea plantations employed 400,000 workers, namely, half the total labour force. The situation improved with the onset of the First World War in 1914. The war created a need for industrial goods and the colonial government sought to meet this by expanding the engineering goods sector in India. During this period the first steel mill was set up in Bihar in northern India. This region has an abundance of mineral wealth. The railways, introduced in 1860s primarily to carry raw materials to the cotton textile mills in Mumbai and the jute mills in Calcutta, increased its network. (Gadgil 1982. Bhowmik, 2010)

However, the working conditions of the workers in these industries were terrifying. They were made to work at a stretch for more than sixteen hours, irrespective of age and sex. There was no precautionary measure against any accident. Usually, wages were below the subsistence level. Many a time workers had to work for weeks without any break. When the workers physically broke down under the strain of this labour which was unbearable for any human being, one set was replaced by another set of new recruits just like replacing a broken cog of a wheel by a fresh one.

The workers were unorganised and the industrialists were able to make them work for long hours at low wages. Women and children were the most affected in this system, as their wages were even lower.

The lack of any regulations on the textile mills in Bombay had helped the mill owners to sell their goods at cheap rates. Workers in Bombay, males, females and children, worked in the factories for 16 hours a day or more. The miserable plight of the textile workers, especially the children, caused concern among social workers. One of them, Shapoorjee S. Bengalee, a Parsee philanthropist and social reformer, tried to convince the government to enforce some legislation to protect children working in factories. He even drafted a bill on this subject and he sought the help of his friends in England to help in convincing the British government to pass regulations (Bhowmik 2010).

Pressures from both sides led the government to pass the First Factories Act in 1881. This was the first legislation that regulated working conditions in the factories. However it had hardly any effect on the working conditions. Ten years later, in 1891, the Second Factories Act was passed that reduced the working time of children to seven hours and of women to eleven hours a day. A half hour recess was allowed for workers to take their meals. At the same time there was no move to regulate the working hours of males and there was also no regulation of wages. Working hours of male workers were regulated only after passing of the Third Factories Act in 1911 which laid down that males could not work for more than 12 hours in a day. (Bhowmik 2010)

ii) Industrialization between the two World Wars

It is necessary to mention here that in the period between two World Wars there was a phenomenal increase in the demand of the factory products in India because of the decrease in imports from England. Indian mills and factories increased their production to meet the growing demands of iron and steel, jute, textiles, leather and other products. However, because of the absence of heavy industries their production was not fast enough. Indeed the British administration had made no serious effort to foster the development of capital goods industries, rather it hampered its growth in the Indian soil.

iii) Industrialisation in the post-Independence period

It was only after Independence that the Government of India, made a conscious and deliberate effort for industrialisation. Since the Second Five Year Plan the process of industrialization has got a boost in India. However, the process of industrialisation has not been able to solve the problem of unemployment in India. Between 1960 and 1965 the rate of growth of employment in the factory was 6.6%, but during 1965-70, it declined to 1.3% only. Even in 1970 factory employment absorbed only 2% of the labour force.

11.2.3 Urbanisation

Emergence of urban working class is closely related to the process of urbanization. Though traditional urbanization was continuing since long, (with the coming of the European colonial traders) the process of urbanization entered into a new phase in India. Gradually cities grew up in the coastal areas and with the spread of the British power, urban centres emerged in various parts of the country. In this period, there emerged new social and political institutions, new modes of transport and communications. All these widened the scope of economic opportunity and mobility of people. Since the rural areas were witnessing the process of destruction of village and cottage industries, the new economic avenues pulled a significant section of the rural people towards the urban areas. In this period, India witnessed a large-scale migration of rural labour force towards the newly established industrial areas (we have already discussed these in the earlier section). The British colonization led to the emergence of new urban centres and the expansion of the traditional ones as well. It also made the urban centres an integral part of their economic system. In these urban centres various social groups emerged viz., the administrative and business elites, professional groups, the educated white collar workers and the working classes. The working classes consisted mainly of factory workers and unskilled manual labourers engaged in various service occupations. The majority of the working class belonged to the low strata of the caste hierarchy.

The process of urbanization has achieved a new dimension since Independence. In the process of planned economic development and technological modernization the degree of urban industrialization has increased in India since the early fifties. This has brought about a phenomenal change in the urban occupational structure. We shall be discussing this aspect in the next section.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below to answer the question
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit
- i) Explain the impact of British trade policy on Indian traditional textile industry.

Answer in about six lines.

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- ii) Explain how the process of destruction of cottage and handicraft industries contributed to the growth of industrial working class in colonial India. Answer in about seven lines.

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11.3 URBAN OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE

In this section, we shall be discussing the urban occupational structure. Initially, we shall introduce you to changes in the occupational structure and the emergence of unorganized sectors in the urban areas which have affected urban occupational structure. Lastly, we shall examine the feature of urban working class.

11.3.1 Change in the Occupational Structure

Inspite of rapid rate of industrialization and urbanization, there has not been much change in the occupational structure in India. In the period between 1901 to 1971, the work force in agriculture (primary sector) was around 72%.

Employment in the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sectors 1901-2011

Year	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1901	71.8	12.6	15.6
1951	72.2	10.6	17.3
1961	72.3	11.7	16.0
1971	72.1	11.2	16.7
1981	70.59	12.92	16.49
1993-94	64	16	20
1999-2000	60.4	15.8	23.8
2011-2012	49.9	24.3	26.8

Since 1951 there has been marginal shift of workers in favour of secondary sector from 10.6% in 1951 to 11.2% in 1971 and there has been decline in work participation in the tertiary sector from 17.3% in 1951 to 16.7% in 1971. Large investment in industries has contributed towards this shift. Since 1981 census shows a significant shift of workers from agriculture to other sectors. It shows that the secondary sector has increased (to around 24% in 2011) from around 11% in 1971.

Distribution of workforce by industrial sectors shows substantial shift from farm work to non-farm work. In 1972-73, about 74 per cent of workforce was engaged in primary sector and in 2011-12, this proportion has declined to about 50 per cent. Secondary and service sectors are showing promising future for the Indian workforce. You may notice that the shares of these sectors have increased from 11 to 24 per cent and 15 to 27 per cent, respectively.

The distribution of workforce in different status indicates that over the Growth of Employment and Gross Domestic Product, 1951–2012 (%) last four decades (1972-2012), people have moved from self employment and regular salaried employment to casual wage work. Yet self-employment continues to be the major employment provider. Scholars call the process of moving from self-employment and regular salaried employment to casual wage work as casualisation of workforce.

In recent years, there has been a gradual shift of workers towards the urban sector. In 1951, of the total workers only 14% were urban. However, in 1981, the urban workers constituted around 20% of the Indian work force. In the same period the workers employed in mining and quarrying increased from 13.5% to 16.5%, in the manufacturing sector it increased from 44.2% to 52.2%, in the construction it increased from 48% to 50.5% and in the service sector from 55.2% to 58.2%. It is important to note that the maximum increase of the urban work force has been in the manufacturing sector. This is a reflection of growth in industry in our country since the induction of the Second Five Year Plan. Data is available about the employment in the organized sector. Till March 1988, altogether 440.29 lakhs of workers were employed in the urban organized sector of which 183.19 lakhs and 257.10 lakhs were employed in the public and private sectors respectively.

11.3.2 Emergence of Urban Unorganised Sector

In recent years, there has been a sharp emergence of the urban unorganized sector in various parts of the country.

The unorganized sector of India's urban economy absorbs a significant part of the total urban working force in India. It has been estimated that about 45% of the industrial workforce is in the unorganized sector. Besides unorganized industrial workers, there are also workers like construction workers, small vendors, hawkers selling vegetables, food items, newspapers, washermen, scavengers, domestic servants etc. who belong to the unorganized sector.

11.3.3 Features of Urban Working Class

The urban working class in India possesses some distinctive features:

- 1) One of the important features is that most of them have migrated to the cities from rural areas. These migrant labourers still maintain a relationship with their relatives residing in the villages. They also pay regular visits to their native villages.
- 2) Though most of the migrant labourers have left their traditional occupation there is still an important segment of migrant workers who have retained their traditional occupations. This segment of urban workers belong to the lower sections
- 3) A significant section of urban working class is illiterate. Many of them are unaware of legal protection.
- 4) They are diversified on the basis of caste, religion, region, language etc. It is found that the extent of diversity is higher in the big cities in comparison to that of the small urban centres.
- 5) A significant section of the urban working class work in the unorganized sector. The economic problems faced by them are not always identical to those of the workers in the organized sector. Payment of wage to workers in the organised sector is governed by Payment of Wage Act, 1936 and the Minimum Wage Act, 1948. Legal provisions are also made for the equal remuneration to men and women workers doing similar kind of work. Workers in the organized sector are also paid bonus on the basis of profit or productivity. These provisions are generally ignored by the employers in the unorganized sectors while giving remunerations to their workers.
- 6) Urban working class is more exposed to modern means of communication than their rural counterparts. Thus, they are aware of the alternative avenues of employment and have relatively more bargaining capacity. This exposure also helps them to form organizations to fight for their common causes.

In recent years there have been enormous proliferation of workers associations in the urban areas. It is not only that the urban industrial class has been united, but the workers of the organised sector are also found to be united in many parts of the country.

- 7) Many of the urban workers work under unsafe work conditions. Again they have no adequate housing facilities. Many of them live in the slum areas.

Regular problems of the slum areas are usually faced by them. These problems include unhealthy living conditions, poor housing, lack of drainage and electricity, prevalence of delinquency, crime and gambling etc.

- 8) Though there are diversities among the urban working class in terms of sectors of employment, language, region, caste and ethnicity, there are also common elements of unity among them. One of the significant common elements of their unity is their lower economic status. Many of them suffer from regular economic insecurity and uncertainty. They are also exploited by their employers in many ways. These common elements have brought them together against their employers. They have also been united to get adequate legal protection.

A significant section of the urban working class is the industrial working class. There have been conflicts between the industrial workers and their employers. There have been industrial conflicts on the issues of higher remuneration, good working conditions, bonus etc. These conflicts have taken the form of organized protest. From the side of the workers the format of their protest have been strikes, gheraos, demonstrations etc. These organized protests have been inseparable part of trade unionism and labour movement of the urban working class. In the following sections of this unit, we shall be discussing these aspects in detail.

Check Your Progress 2

Tick mark the correct answers.

- i) According to a recent estimate around
- a) 45% of the urban workers belong to organized sector
 - b) 45% of the urban workers belong to unorganized sector
 - c) 95% of the urban workers belong to organized sector
 - d) 95% of the urban workers belong to unorganized sector
- ii) Most of the urban workers in India
- a) have migrated from rural areas
 - b) original inhabitants of urban areas
 - c) migrants from other countries
 - d) belong to the upper strata of the caste hierarchy
- iii) Most of the urban workers in India
- a) work under daily wage work condition
 - b) have adequate housing for cities
 - c) live in the healthy environment
 - d) None of the above

11.4 WORKING CLASS MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: CONCEPT, GROWTH AND CHARACTERISTICS

In this section, we shall concentrate only on industrial labour movement in India. Industrial workers form a large chunk of the urban work force. In a modern industrial society there is a strong tendency towards creating an inequality of bargaining power between two major social groups, workers and capitalists. The labour movements seek to augment workers' strength to match the heightened power of capitalists. Let us know what we mean by labour movement.

11.4.1 Concept

By labour movement we mean the organized efforts of wage-earners directed towards the advancement of their economic interests. An allied long-term objective of the movement is to secure social and political leverage for the working class people. The urban labour movement is closely related to the trade union movement. Let us study the major characteristic features of a trade union.

A major question relates to the exact characterization of the trade union. There is a controversy among specialists in this regard. An influential opinion characterizes union as an economic agent "seeking to maximize one or many variables on the sole labour market." J. Dunlop provides a model based on wage bill maximization through union activities. He argues that political factors may have short-term relevance, but long-term union activities are influenced by economic forces that determine wages and employment. But this point of view is contested by some specialists, notably A.M. Ross. His main argument is that among all the participants in the economic process, "the trade union is probably least suited to purely economic analysis." The union leaders are obliged to mediate and compromise between divergent interests of the members for their maintenance in power. This internal political process plus the need for the unions to forge strong links with mainstream political parties to achieve their objectives, show that the union is essentially a political body. A recently formulated view, especially by Reder and Levinson is that the union has a distinctive political personality which, however, can work within the constraints of the economic environment.

A major segment of India's urban class structure comprises the industrial work force. Their organized efforts have taken the shape of a movement, called Indian labour movement. According to the figures available for 1986 the registered union workers in India numbered 45,095. There are also many unions which are unregistered. At the apex of the union organizational structure there are fourteen federations at the national level, but these are actually the officiating bodies without substantial power at the plant level. However, notwithstanding its long ancestry, the labour movement in India has failed to evolve a conspicuous working class ideology. The lack of ideological articulation in India's labour movement reflects a set of historical circumstances under which the movement has developed.

11.4.2 Growth of Workers' Movements

Let us examine the growth of labour movements in India:

- 1) **Colonial Period:** Although the labour movement in India had its beginning in the colonial period, its overall character was and continues to be different

from that of the British labour movement. The pattern of growth, unlike in the West, did not accommodate into its process the old-style artisans or craftsmen. As such, the skilled workers did not constitute the backbone of the early labour movement. This had the effect of restricting the working class consciousness and of bringing in outside leadership. At the same time, since the labour movement in its early stage grew under the domination and influence of India's struggle for freedom and since, moreover, no clear socialist ideology permeated the struggle, the labour movement in India, unlike that in the continent, did not envision a new social order.

A significant section of the early industrial working force comprised the poorest of the rural poor who were forced out of their homes by the severity of famines. These workers returned to their village homes as soon as they could get rural jobs. Thus in the early years the workers did not grow into an industrial proletariat; they were essentially the migrant, casual labourers who continued to be culturally related to the countryside. This was further reinforced by slow industrial growth in India.

However, in the present century, the pace of industrialization and urbanization quickened, and hence, the overall situation started changing. The dependence of factory workers upon land came to be reduced. In particular the workers employed in big cities like Calcutta and Bombay came to be almost completely dissociated from agriculture and rural industries as a means of continued livelihood. This actually marked the beginning of the rise of an industrial proletariat.

Post-World War II Period: By the time World War II ended, India emerged as a major industrial power in the world. This had the effect of creating a sizeable industrial proletariat in the major cities of the country. The enormous pace of industrialization specially in the core sectors of India's economy and a significant increase in the ranks of the landless labourers plus caste and communal violence in the countryside, brought in an extensive migration from country to city and a huge industrial labour force.

The growth of the labour movement in India reflects the country's industrial as well as political process. In the beginning the movement was confined mostly to textile industry, as this was the first major industry set-up in the organized sector. The importance of this industry in the labour activity and unrest, but also at the level of leadership, was and has remained prominent.

Now, of course, the labour movement has spread to several industries. This reflects the industrial growth process with all its diversities. Organized labour movements have moved to plantations, mines, transport as well as to service sector.

11.4.3 Characteristics of Workers Movements

There are some distinguishing characteristics of India's labour movement. Let us examine some of these:

- I) Indian trade union has a narrow operational base; there are two reasons for this. One is that it is confined to the organized sector of the economy, and the second is that labour unions are generally plant-based and hence, are

commonly of small size.

- II) The second distinguishing mark is that the movement is confined to only big cities of the country such as Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, Bangalore and Kanpur. This is because industrial development in India has a marked regional bias.
- III) The third characteristic of India's labour movement is the absence in it of a conspicuous class orientation, notwithstanding a clear anti-imperialist posture. This is partly because of the influence of the national movement under which India's labour movement grew. This movement emphasized accommodative politics in order to set up a united front against the powerful colonial regime. Later when the radical left came and assumed leadership of a segment of the movement, it had to work within the parameters set up by the national movement. Moreover, workers in India do not constitute a distinctive wage earning class corresponding to the factory workers of Western countries. Again, workers do not constitute a socially homogeneous category. Caste, community and regional differences among them have obstructed the process of class formations. In addition, there is an important element of rural values in the personality mould of India's working class. The tension between new urban values and old rural values persists even to this day. Naturally, therefore, a distinctive class character and a psychology of class conflict are inconspicuous in the case of India's labour movement.
- IV) The fourth feature of India's labour movement is its close connection with political parties. At the apex of the union structure there are several national federations, most of which are formally affiliated to one party or the other. In 1947, there was only one such federation, that is, the All India Trade Union Congress dominated by the Communist Party of India. Since then all the major parties have set up their own national wings. Among the prominent all-India bodies are, The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), The Hindu Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), The United Trade Union Congress (UTUC), The Center of India's Trade Unions (CITU) and The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS). These are linked to the Congress-I, the CPI, the Janata Dal, the non-communist Leftist, the CPI-M and the BJP respectively. The result is plant-level multi-unionism and an enormous fragmentation process in India's labour movement.
- V) The fifth characteristic of India's labour movement is the absence of autonomous growth. The movement is significantly dependent upon outside forces. The leadership is provided generally by the middle class professional politicians who are members of the mainstream political parties. Leadership does not generally emanate from the internal political dynamics of the union. Because of this there is virtually no accountability of leadership to the general mass of workers and there is no creative internalized political process. Moreover, a certain dependence of the unions upon the state has also had the affect of inhibiting both unity and autonomy of India's labour movement

The union-party connections, however inimical to the growth of grassroots leadership, are not wholly discarded, as unions linked to a party which rules the centre and/or the states, can expect to get some benefits. So long the Congress-I was in power at the centre, the INTUC because of its links with the ruling party had, reaped some advantages. Similarly, the unions affiliated

to the CITU seem to enjoy some benefits in West Bengal because of their close links to the them ruling Left front.

11.4.4 Weakness of the Workers' Organisation

However, there are some significant constraints which erode the strength of the organized labour. Beside fragmentation engineered by peculiar legal and political factors, there is the problem of easily available substitute labour, because of unemployment. This along with the presence of unorganized labour, seem to be inhibiting the rise of a strong labour movement. In this situation the management has formulated certain strategies to reduce their dependence on unionized labour. One is hiring contract workers and the second is to close down the production of certain items and get these products by subcontracting their manufacture to the unorganized small sector. The third strategy is to increase substitute union management cadre for the permanent blue collar force. Moreover, since the service sector has increased enormously, there has occurred a significant increase in the white collar force. This has brought in a sharp differentiation of their role perceptions and separate white collar unionism.

The labour movement in India is in the process of formulating an adequate response to the management's manipulation of the unionized labour problem. No response seems to have emanated from the outside professional leadership as its concern does not go beyond monetary benefits for workers. A grassroots awareness of the workplace predicament has, however, arisen to breed a new trade union orientation and leadership.

Thus, it appears that though the Indian labour movement has a long history, in the absence of a neat working class ideology and class solidarity the movement lacks sufficient strength to match the power of management. The movement suffers from enormous fragmentation both on cultural and party lines. Besides, the virtual absence of concern on the part of the outside professional leadership for the critical workplace problems and their failure to mobilize the workers along required paths, have the effect of weakening the movement. Also, the Indian state has played no positive role. There is no strong statutory support, nor is there any effective state intervention oriented towards mediating between business interests and union demands.

Check Your Progress 3

Define labour movement in about four lines.

Mention four important features of Indian labour movement.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

Mention four important weaknesses of the labour organizations in India.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)

11.5 ISSUES BEFORE THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

The discussion has so far focused mainly on labour in the organized sector. However, a large section of the working population in India is employed in the unorganized sector. This sector has heterogeneous composition of workers and it has been expanding. The problems of workers in this sector are manifold and are further compounded due to the near absence of trade unions. This has reduced the 'visibility' of workers in this sector as they are unable to articulate their problems as a collective.

Most of the larger trade unions do not appear to be interested in unionizing workers in the unorganized sector. Davala's study (1995: 7-8) showed that workers in the unorganized sector constituted less than one per cent of the total membership of most of the national trade union centres. As a result, representatives of labour in the unorganized sector are rarely called to the national policy making bodies such as the Planning Commission, ILC and so on and their interests are not taken into account. In order to overcome this problem, some of the larger unions in the unorganized sector such as SEWA, Indian Federation of Construction Labour, National Forum of Fishworkers, Sarva Shramik Sangha and some of the unions of forest and agricultural workers got together to form another national centre. Thus the National Centre for Labour was formed on May 1, 1995. However though the centre's collective membership is higher than some of the recognized national federations, it is yet to be invited to participate in the ILC.

At the same time employment in the unorganized sector has been growing while that in the organized sector has been on the decline as a result of some of the strategies adopted by the large firms. First, labour is being replaced by new technology. Second, most of these firms use the 'putting out' system to save costs. Perhaps the most important reason for the growth of this system is that it gives the large-scale sector greater control over the labour process. Instead of manufacturing the entire product in their own factories, these firms prefer to farm out the manufacture of their products to smaller production units in the unorganized sector. Heather and Joshi (1976) had dealt with this aspect in their earlier study on migrant labour in Mumbai. Holmstrom (1985) later did a more detailed analysis of the link between the two sectors. He saw this as a complimentary division of labour between the large-scale and small-scale sector can find its market in the organized sector (Holmstrom, 1985: 13-25). Since costs of production are lower in the small-scale sector, the larger firms are able to procure the products cheaply. Labour productivity in the small enterprises is low, but costs are reduced due to the low level of wages.

The main attraction of the larger manufacturers towards the unorganized sector, besides low costs, is the flexibility of labour in this sector. There are hardly any regulations in this sector relating to working time, security of employment and social security. Hence workers work for long hours at unstructured timings and at very low wages. Besides they can be removed from employment at the will of the employer and the production unit too can close down at will. In the organized sector this is not possible because

legal restraints and trade unions prevent the employers from acting arbitrarily. Hence by putting out to the unorganized sector the employers do not have to face these constraints. In other words, they face fewer controls from the government, the workers and their trade unions. In this way they, in fact, exert greater control over the labour process as they can get their products manufactured on their own terms and conditions through the unorganized sector.

The flexibility involved in home-based work, which is another major activity in the unorganized sector, is even greater. This sector comprises workers working at piece rates through labour contractors. A large section of this workforce comprises women. The remuneration is usually very low and often children are included in the workforce in order to increase the remuneration. There are practically no laws regulating work or wages and, in fact, the actual number of people working in this sector is not known as, in most cases, they are not even recognized as workers.

Liberalization in the economy due to globalisation has boosted the putting out system because the emphasis is now on producing cheaply for the world market. The common refrain of the larger industries and the business press in the country is that over protection of the organized sector workers is the biggest hurdle to increase in productivity. Soon after the new industrial policy was announced in July 1991, all the associations of employers started pressing for an exit policy through which it would be easier to shut down industries. The government has so far not introduced this policy due to opposition from trade unions, but it has made conditions for laying off workers much easier. At the same time it should be noted that the liberalization policy introduced in 1991 did not create a flexible and unprotected labour force. It was already in existence and liberalization has boosted the process.

Though these changes are taking place at a fairly rapid pace, the trade unions in the organized sector have so far not been able to respond to these effectively. The response to the government's Industrial Policy Statement of 1991 of the trade unions has been very traditional. They have reacted through their conventional means by organizing a national strike, holding a few demonstrations and meetings where the leaders gave fiery speeches full of rhetoric. These have hardly had any effect on changing the policies. In fact, the pace of liberalization has accelerated despite these protests.

One of the major problems of the trade unions is that they are unable or unwilling to expand their membership to sectors outside the organized sector. For example, within the organized sector there is an unorganized sector comprising casual and contract labour which is not protected by the legal framework. Davala's (1992) study of casualisation of labour in eight industries showed that, in many large industrial units, the casual and contract labour outnumber the permanent workers. Yet, in most cases, these workers were not unionized. In fact, in some of the units, the unions viewed these workers with suspicion and as potential threats, as the management could manipulate them easily and counteract work stoppages through them. Had these workers been brought into the trade union fold the managements would not have been able to manipulate them in their favour. Their wages and working conditions would have improved and the unions would have

emerged stronger in counteracting managements' strategies for reducing the labour force.

The situation in the small-scale industries is similar. Had these workers been unionized by the unions in the industry, the bargaining power of both sections of workers would have improved. There would have been a common cause among all workers and workers in the small-scale sector could have improved their working conditions.

Unfortunately, instead of unionizing workers outside the organized sector, trade unions have become more inward looking. Their main concern lies in getting as much possible for their own members without any concern for other sections of workers. One can argue that trade unions are primarily responsible to their own members and it would be wrong to expect them to take up issues which do not affect their members. However, under the present circumstances, ignoring workers in the unorganized sector can further erode the gains of workers in the organized sector. The two sectors, as explained earlier, are linked with each other and the employers manipulate these sectors to their own benefit, thus increasing their control over the labour process. Hence, protecting the rights of workers in the unorganized sector through unionization will benefit both sectors.

The central trade unions do not seem to see things this way. They have rarely focused on issues of labour in the unorganized sector. For example, in the ILC held on October 24-25, 1996, the main issue which was raised by the national centres was that of raising the ceiling on bonus. This issue was discussed for a full day in the two-day conference. Though the issue was valid it concerned less than five per cent of the total workers. An issue which could have been discussed in the conference was the ILO convention on home-based workers. After a great deal of lobbying among the governments and the trade unions, ILO's General Body ratified a convention on home-based workers in August 1996 in which there are provisions for maintaining registers of home-based workers, granting them the right to unionise, provision of social security, minimum wages and so on. These provisions of the convention need to be incorporated in the legal systems of different countries and the trade unions could have raised this in the ILC. The present attitudes of the trade unions are, in fact, aiding the process of liberalization as they result in dividing the working class.

11.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we began with a discussion on the emergence of urban working class in India. Here, we discussed the impact of British colonial policy in India, which led to the destruction of traditional village crafts and cottage industries and migration of a section of unemployed rural people to urban areas. We also discussed the role of industrialization and urbanization in the emergence of the urban working class in India. The change in the urban occupational structure and the major features of the urban working class are also discussed in this unit. Labour movement is an important aspect of the urban working class. We also discussed the growth and characteristics of industrial labour movement to give you a broad view on the urban labour movement in India.

11.7 REFERENCES

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11.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The Britishers introduced a free trade policy in India. Indian market was made open to the British capitalists resulting in a rapid increase of British export to India. However, they imposed heavy import duty on imported Indian textile industry in India.
- ii) The traditional industries of rural India were destroyed in the colonial period. As a result the rural artisans and craftsmen were displaced from their traditional avenues of employment. A section of these displaced labourers migrated to the urban areas and joined the urban work force.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) A
- ii) A
- iii) D

Check Your Progress 3

- i) A labour movement is an organized effort of the wage earners directed towards the advancement of their economic interest. It aims to protect the social and economic interest of the working class people.
- ii)
 - a) Indian labour movement has its narrow operational base,
 - b) It is confined to the big cities of the country.
 - c) There is lack of conscious class orientation in it.
 - d) The labour movement has close linkage with the political factors.
- iii)
 - a) Fragmentation engineered by political factors
 - b) Substitute labour force greater by growing unemployment.
 - c) Presence of unorganized section
 - d) Presence of outside professional leaders

FURTHER READINGS

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GLOSSARY

Primary Sector: The primary sector of economy includes agriculture, livestock, forestry, fishing, hunting and plantations.

Secondary Sector: The secondary sector of economy includes mining and quarrying, household industry, other than household industry and construction.

Tertiary Sector: This sector of economy includes trade and commerce, transport, storage and communications and other services.

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