



Block 4

Social Identities and Change

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BLOCK 4 INTRODUCTION

The fourth block, **Social Identities and Change** has three units. Each unit explains the major social identities on the basis of which society gets stratified and hierarchically arranged. Many of the social stigmas and exploitations occur due to low social status associated with some of these identities giving rise to social movements. So we have described the dalit social movements, tribal and ethnic movements, and gender based movements in India.



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UNIT 8 DALIT MOVEMENTS*

Structure

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- explain what is the meaning of “Dalit” and the Dalit movement;
- describe different stages and forms of Dalit movements in India;
- Identify the Dalit leaders and their contribution; and
- explain the structural and cultural reasons for Dalit uprising.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Block 4: **Social Identities and Change**, Dalit Movements is the first unit. In the previous section you had learnt about the social institutions like Family, Marriage and Kinship and Religion.

This unit informs you about Dalit movements in India. Do you know that Dalit movements, like any other movement are consciously organised and are a result of sustained collective efforts by ordinary citizens?

This unit attempts to introduce you to the meaning of Dalit movements by tracing its historical origins, its development from pre-independence period to post independence and its outcomes. It explains how Dalits and their struggles

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regarding social justice demand radical transformation and structural changes in our society. For this purpose the unit is divided into three segments.

The first takes you on a historical journey to make you understand the issues and causes of the Dalit uprising. It highlights the meaning of the term Dalit and the relevance of its usages when compared to other terms like ‘harijan’.

The second segment is about the leaders who took up the causes and provided direction to the movement. The movements entered different phases under the leadership of these leaders.

Lastly, the segment will focus on the different aspects of the movements, its intellectual growth and changes in the foundation.

8.2 DALIT MOVEMENTS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

In contemporary India, Dalits still bear the stigma of untouchability and continue to face dreadful socio-economic and cultural inequalities (Shah; 2004). Dalits are deprived of wealth, power and social acceptability or social status for generations. Do you know that the atrocities on Dalits involve more violent forms that are no less in intensity than those in the past despite the abolition of untouchability in free India? Dalit movements are strong resistances by both Dalits and non-Dalits to such atrocities. To begin with, Dalit movements are organised struggles against untouchability and social discrimination based on the practice of untouchability. The Dalit movements therefore challenged brahman hegemony and brahmanic traditions. To understand the Dalit uprising it is imperative to understand the term “Dalit”.

8.2.1 The Term “Dalit”

In common parlance these days, Dalit is mostly confined to administratively coined term “Scheduled Castes” (SC), however; officially it includes scheduled tribes and other backward castes too. Britishers used SC for untouchables in 1935 and earlier Depressed Castes in 1919. Commonly Dalit is also used for all the marginalised sections of the society – poor landless peasants, women, tribals, workers and those exploited in the name of religion, politically, culturally and economically. Dalit means member of the lowest caste, the downtrodden and an erstwhile untouchable caste. Most importantly the term explains the process through which Dalits themselves recognised that they are discriminated and demanded separate identity of their own.

You will be surprised to know that Marathi writers proposed the term “Dalit” in 1960s in place of “Achhuta” or “Harijan” as it means broken/scattered in Marathi. Harijan term was coined by Mahatama Gandhi, which means ‘children of God’ as he appealed caste Hindus to change their attitude towards untouchables and use “Harijan” in place of ‘antayaja’. Ambedkar used ‘Pad Dalit’, Bahishkrit, excluded caste and even depressed caste in place of untouchables but gradually moved to use the term Dalit. Harijan grew unpopular as it could not administer the change in attitude of the upper castes. Dalit word emerged as a marker of political identity and assertion when Dalit term got popularised and more used frequently.

Now it ‘emphasizes the congruence between the backward castes and untouchables and focuses on the affinity in the experiences of these groups’ (Bhattacharya, 1995). The term Dalit in past few decades have emerged as a powerful symbol of exploited masses who stood against the oppressive structures of upper caste hegemony and social discrimination. It signifies all those who were denied of any basic right of existence since time immemorial and those who fought to change the oppressive pasts and present. Looking at the trajectories of Dalit struggles for emancipation Anupama Rao (2009:23) rightly understands Dalit as ‘political minority, negatively defined as non-Hindus in antagonistic relation to Hindu order’ in our democratic nation.

Box 8.0: Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India has played important role in the overall upliftment of the Scheduled Castes. In Part IV of the Constitution, certain fundamental rights are guaranteed to the citizens. Article 15 (2) states that no citizens shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth be discriminated with regard to (a) access to shop, public restaurants, hotel and public entertainment; or (b) the use of wells, tank, bathing ghats, roads, and places of public resorts. Under Article 15 (4), the State is permitted to make any special provisions for advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. (Ref: IGNOU 2010, ESO-14, Society and Stratification, Block 6, pp. 8)

The terminology dalit characterises the essential argument of the Dalit movements in India, which is change and revolution. Section 8.4 will elaborate on various Dalit movements. Meanwhile we discuss the issues and causes below.

Check Your Progress I

- i) When was the term ‘dalit’ come in usage and for whom?

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8.2.2 Socio-Historical Background

Varna and Caste

Indian judiciary identified “caste atrocity” as crime to curb violence faced by Dalits in society and therefore clearly acknowledge that caste is central to Dalit’s servitude and oppression. You know that our society is a stratified society based on hierarchy and difference (Gupta, 1991). The stratification on the basis of caste remains specific to Indian context giving rise to exploitation of the lower

castes. The relation between varna and caste according to Srinivas (1998:63) is 'that caste is subsumed under this traditional concept of varna'. Varna scheme has given distorted image of caste system where Brahmins are at the top and untouchables at the lowest. According to him such hierarchy has not been the only reality but later versions of varna scheme has established the supremacy of Brahmins.

Varna system is the hierarchical segmentation of society in four orders, Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas and the rest were called Shudras and untouchables as 'Atishudra' who were outside the varna scheme. The segmental society is based on the myth established in the society that Brahmins emerged from the mouth, the Kshatriya from the arms, Vaishyas from the thighs and Shudra from the feet of the Creator. Srinivas writes that groups such as Ayogaya, Chandala, Nishada and Paulkasa also were outside the Varna scheme. In this four-fold system first three are 'twice-born' that is men pass through Upanayana ceremony where sacred thread is donned to them. Whereas, Shudras and untouchables had no right to adorn the sacred thread. This distinction brings ritual superiority of other three varnas over Shudras and Ati-shudras. This ritual superiority is based on principles of Brahmanic Hindu religion (discussed below). Varna in Rig-Veda means colour and initially varna described just Aryas and Dasa that later became distinction between Aryas and Shudras.

Each varna subsumes large number of castes. Shudra category includes the largest number of non-brahmanical casts. Since the ritual considerations create these four orders, caste is seen as hierarchical system. Caste as an endogamous group based on the notion of purity and pollution that provides lowest status to shudra and atishudra and recognizes untouchability as a social practice. The caste atrocities are result of this order of hierarchy that has to be followed through differences in practices and religious rituals. Caste acquired political functions after constitutional provisions but the ritual aspect still remains the fundamental source of caste differentiation and hierarchy. It obtained new meaning in British India and with the rise of western liberalism and grew stronger as an institution defining identity and community in independent India too. Dalits were seen to escape caste atrocities through conversions and Sanskritisation. However Srinivas (1998;59) argues that the problem of untouchables remained different from the other lower castes as they could not take any advantage of westernisation or move up the ladder through Sanskritisation. The constitutional provisions brought changes in the status of untouchables in Independent India but caste atrocities continue giving rise to newer Dalit mobilisations.

8.2.3 The Social Practice of Untouchability

'Untouchability', is one of the aspects of Indian society that has obstructed the growth and development of our country. Most importantly it compromises the dignity of human beings and deny them of their basic rights. It is a practice that has its roots in the social values of a Hindu society based on varna and jati. Untouchability, in India has resulted in poverty, illiteracy, servitude and serious contempt and exploitation within the society. Based on birth, it is a practice that has oppressed many by keeping them outside the realm of caste hierarchy or at the lowest, confining them to restricted occupation and considering them impure. The impure occupations like, leather work, cleaning toilets and sewage tanks,

drains, disposing dead bodies, etc. are polluting in nature and those involved in such occupations are only certain sections of the population, known as untouchables.

The practice of untouchability therefore restricts the social mingling with other members of the society and the impurity is socially expressed through the touch that acts as a pollutant that defiles the members of higher caste group. The 'touch', the 'shadow', the 'skin' and even the 'voice' of the lower casts all constitute the sources of pollution and have the potential to pollute the upper castes. The punishment to defile the upper castes is severe and costs the lives on most occasions. Therefore they cannot move around freely, participate in social life, access places of worship, participate in festivals, fairs, community spaces, etc. You can very well guess then, that the practice exists since the system of 'chaturvarna' (four-fold system of varna) prevailed and persists due to existence of discriminatory caste system inherent in Hinduism. B.R. Ambedkar in 1948 defined it; "Untouchability is the notion of defilement, pollution, contamination and the ways and means of getting rid of that defilement. It is a case of permanent hereditary stain which nothing can cleanse."

8.2.4 Brahmanic Hinduism

The above two factors has its roots in Brahmanic traditions which acquired the form of hegemonic Hinduism since colonialism. The orthodoxy of brahmins and their domination grew as it drew their legitimacy from the constructed argument that Hinduism is the ancient religion of Hindus. Do you know that Brahmanic Hinduism rests on the authority of vedas and brahmins and consolidation of social order based on Manusmriti. The Bhagavadgita expounds that every system has to fulfill their duties as prescribed in the religious scriptures and only then salvation can be attained after death. This Karma theory flourished and Manusmriti, the law book of Hindus prescribed strict regulations regarding castes. It endorsed untouchability and the system was rigorously followed by the priestly castes. Such system designates highest rank to priestly caste as you have read above and strictly operates on the institution of caste and untouchability. The idea of 'pollution' attached to the caste provides the cultural identity to the higher castes in the order to differentiate them from the lower ones in the hierarchy. The ritual of purity emerges from the Brahmanic principle in which shudra, women and untouchables are all impure elements within the society and for purity of castes they have to be at the periphery of the social order and cannot share equality with other members of the society. The principle of ritual purity embedded in brahmanic practices led to the hegemony of the upper castes and the lower castes were denied of all the social rights. The temple entry was banned for the untouchables. The complete disempowerment of the lower castes and their servitude enhanced the dominant position of upper castes ritually in every respect. The higher positions in the caste ladder gave them religious legitimacy to exploit them in the name of ritual. Dalit movements therefore stood to reject the traditional Hindu social order based on untouchability promoting socio-economic inequality, cultural supremacy of brahmanic castes and discriminating religious beliefs.

8.2.5 Alternate Religious Movements

It is crucial to point out to you that throughout the Indian history as Srinivas (1998;64) writes, “attempts have been made to reject brahmanical supremacy”. The bhakti and devotional cults between 10th and 13th centuries rebelled against caste hierarchy and brahman domination, claiming devotion as the only way to salvation in place of caste. The bhakti cult saints rose against vedantic philosophy. The prominent saints were Meerabai, Chaitanya, Kabir, Tukaram, Vallabhacharya and others. There were untouchable saints like Ravidas, Chokhamela, Kanaka, Nandanara and others who were also part of Bhakti traditions. Temple entry to these untouchable saints was denied and therefore they continued their spiritual journey questioning brahmanic rituals. Bhakti Religious traditions like Sikhism, Buddhism Veerasaivism also struggled against hierarchically stratified Hindu society where brahman or twice borns enjoyed the highest power. These movements provided philosophical basis and ways to fight dominant Hinduism for new generations. They laid the foundation for political aspirations, rights and complete abandoning of Hinduism.

8.3 SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS

You must be aware that social reform movements during the colonial period were an awakening and struggle against the orthodox traditional socio-religious practices to reform the society. Educated men and women worked for women’s education, widow remarriage, abolition of child marriage and practice of Sati, women’s rights and freedom. Pandita Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde, Ram Mohan Roy and many others made contributions in reforming the society. These also led to the reform of the religious traditions and modern thinkers challenged dogmatism of Hindu religion. Modern Indian social thinkers, like Mahatama Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekanand, Sri Aurobindo, Dayananda Saraswati, rejected orthodox practices of Hindu religion and gave rise to new religious discourses. They believed caste and untouchability is not core to Hinduism.

8.3.1 Rise of Print and Public Spheres

The coming of the printing technology fostered a tool in the hands of Dalit leaders and activists. Education became the central concern of the activists and there was rise of Marathi Dalit public sphere in colonial India and later after independence. Pamphlets, books and other material were produced for mobilizations. Leaders like Jyotiba Phule, B.R Ambedkar wrote extensively. Gulamgiri, written in 1885 by Phule is one of his fundamental writings explaining his position on Aryans, Caste and Hinduism. Who were the Shudras? and The Untouchables were written by Ambedkar in his lifetime and later Revolution and Counter Revolution in Ancient India and other texts were published. Before Ambedkar G.B. Walangkar mobilized Dalits for human rights through news papers Dinbandhu and Sudharak. Tarabai Shinde in Satyashodhak Samaj wrote Stri-Purush Tulna (comparison of men and women), one of the foremost feminist documents in Marathi. Pandita Ramabai wrote in English on high caste women. On the other hand Bansode was an educator and journalist who was associated with non-Brahman movement. The rise of Marathi Dalit literature with writers like Om Prakash Valmiki and others gave rise to strong Cultural and literary traditions that shaped the movements in multiple ways.

i) Explain in one line the following:

a) Caste

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b) Untouchability

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c) Social reform movement

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8.4 THE DALIT LEADERS AND THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF DALIT MOVEMENTS

Dalit movements in India saw different phases under the leadership of different leaders and different groups. Omvedt (1996:6) explains that beginning from Jyotiba Phule, the movement experienced consolidated struggle under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar and then the radical turn in the nature of movements took place with organisations such as Dalit Panthers, factionalised Republican party, Bahujan Samaj Party and some Naxilite groups of low castes. A brief sketch of the leaders, their period and associated groups will provide you an overview of the development of Dalit movements in India.

8.4.1 Jyotiba Phule and Dalit Reform Movement

Mahatama Jyotirao Phule (1827-1890) belonged to OBC caste Mali. Influenced by the wave of reform movements, he developed a strong resistance to upper caste oppression and worked amongst the poor, uneducated untouchables and women. He founded the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1875. He started by establishing schools for untouchable boys and girls in Pune where he belonged. As a social reformer he had a vision that if education is imparted to poor untouchables it

will propound rationality to fight the priestly caste. He saw education as a major source of social change and argued that knowledge, education and science are weapons of advancement in the hands of poor. He recognized that untouchables are more oppressed than lower castes but called for their unity as for him they together constituted the exploited masses of India. He felt it a necessity that shudras and Ati-shudra need to think on their own and to recognize caste as source of slavery.

Phule wrote about Aryans Conquest (Omvedt: 1996). He writes about Aryans as cruel and violent invaders who upturned the egalitarian and prosperous society by deceit and violence and forged a mythology for a segmental and unequal society, not allowing access to its text. By bringing this critique he opposed brahmanical orthodoxy and upper caste dominance and led a strong anti-caste movements of non-brahman castes. Along with Savitribai, his wife he stood against brahmanic patriarchy by raising voices against brutal brahmanic practices meant for widows. The plight of widows was pitiable amongst the Brahmins and opening a house for widows and children, they attempted to humanize the society by struggling to challenge the tyranny of the Brahmins.

By 1920s and 1930s several mobilisations of peasants, dalits and women started to grow under varying leadership and ideologies. On Phule's formulation of Shudra and Ati-shudra, anti-caste, anti-brahman and anti-Hindu ideology struggles started to grow by lower sections of the society. The non-brahman movement in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu as Omvedt (1996:35) explains, as well as the dalit movements in other states such as Punjab, Karnataka and UP, all highlighted Phule's ideology about Aryan conquest and brahman exploitation on the basis of religion. The Adi traditions, claiming lineage to non-Aryans began to take place at several places. Kisan Faguji Bansode (1870-1946) was one of the prominent leader of Adi-movement in Maharashtra. Therefore by 1920s the new dalit movement emerged out of non-brahman struggles that claimed non-Aryans as original inhabitants and refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Brahmanic traditions. These Dalit movements were Ad-dharm in Punjab, Adi Hindu in U.P. and Hyderabad, Adi Dravida, Adi Andhra, Adi Karnataka. Therefore Phule developed a universalistic ideology to counter the wave of Hinduism that was also at its peak in the given period.

Box 8.1: Jyotiba Phule

The non-Brahmanical movement was accorded institutionalisation in the programmes of the Satya Shodhak Samaj founded by Phule. He considered Brahminism as cunning and self-seeking and condemned it as intolerable imposition to ensure the perpetuation of the high in the caste hierarchy. The "dominant agricultural castes" that formed the core and support of this movement subsequently ushered were very pro Congress. Phule's interpretation of lower caste exploitation ignored the economic and political contexts. Exploitation was interpreted in terms of culture and ethnicity. Phule however stressed the need for return to pre-Brahmin religious tradition. Organisation and education were considered essential for attainment of such goals. He opposed the exploitation of Indian peasants and wage earners. (Ref: IGNOU 2010; ESO-14 Society and Stratification, Block 6, pp.14)

8.4.2 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Movement

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956) arose as a Dalit leader on the foundations of non-Brahman movement. Dalit movements saw second phase under him since Ambedkar insisted on safeguarding the political rights of Dalits. He demanded separate electorate for the untouchables and not just the place in the Hindu social order (Singh;1995:115). In 1932, in Poona pact he demanded reserved constituencies for Dalits. Singh points towards two shifts in Dalit politics under Ambedkar in the period 1930-56. It was inclined towards equal political rights and complete abolition of caste system. Beginning of the independent Dalit movement can be traced when Ambedkar formed Indian Labour Part in 1936.

Ambedkar received a US degree in law and returned to India. He resigned from his state service in Baroda and began as a professor at Sydenham College in Bombay. It is here that he associated with Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur and began his journey to fight for the complete autonomy of Dalits. Ambedkar entered into politics with Mahars, forming Bahiskrut Hitkarni Sabha that soon started to hold conferences in and around the province. The first Dalit liberation movement, Mahad Satyagrah was an outcome of one of the conferences. The decision to drink water from the town tank resulted in the failed attempt but the message against Brahmanic suppression was loud and clear as they burnt the copies of Manusmriti. Ambedkar emerged as the most powerful leader with the growing atmosphere of radical opposition to congress bourgeois and resentment of peasants, workers and other marginalized sections. Ambedkar sharpened his struggles against upper castes by strongly proposing the unity of workers, peasants, dalits, non-brahmans and political alliance with non-congress parties. For Ambedkar, not only Brahmanism but capitalism and landlordism were also enemies of people and he believed that not just the social but economic liberation of Dalits is also mandatory for their improved social status in society.

Ambedkar wrote extensively and adopted socialist framework and believed in state guided industrial development. He was against the non-Aryan identity claims and believed caste system came much later. Ambedkar called for mass conversion to Buddhism because Hinduism is based on caste ideology and therefore represents inequality and inegalitarianism. Nearly a million people converted to Buddhism in Nagpur. He rejected Manusmriti and embraced Buddhism as a religion of equality and rationality devoid of any oppression towards poor and women. Renunciation of Hindu religion was the only source of Dalit identity and liberation. He made a united front called Republican party that worked along Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti. He called for ideological, cultural and political struggle for transformation in social order.

8.4.3 Periyar and Mass Movement

The non-brahman movement in Tamil Nadu led to the rise of E.V. Ramaswamy, Periyar (1879-1973), who belonged to merchant family in Erode. Like Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule there were others such as Ramasamy Naicker in Tamil Nadu and in Kerala there was Dalit movement known as Shri Narayana Dharam Paripalana Movement or SNDP Movement. He left Congress by 1925. When Mahatama Gandhi defended Varnashram dharma he contested it strongly and declared that if India has to gain freedom, it has to dissolve Congress, Hindu religion and Brahman domination (omvedt:55). Similar to Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj, Periyar formed the Self Respect League in 1926, that professed radical

nationalism and stood fiercely against caste and religion. Periyar’s radicalism, anti-caste and anti-religion views were expressed in his radical speeches giving new orientation to the non-brahman-movement.

8.4.4 Other Movements

After Ambedkar several movements arose under the banner of different parties. A radical turn was experienced by coming of the Dalit Panthers who fought in collaboration with all parties that were committed to decimate caste and class politics in the country. It was a militant organisation of Dalit Youths that was born in Bombay in 1972. They claimed that the entire state machinery in post independent India was dominated by feudal ideology and interests and such ideologies based on religion have deprived Dalits of their rights as individuals and power, wealth and status within the society. Aligned with several voices across the country that arose against corruption, poverty, state domination, marginalisation of weaker sections, Dalit Panthers gave new direction to Dalit movements by widening its horizon. It sparked the wave of protest and organised efforts against Brahmans that resulted into formation of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, with its branches all across the country. Gradually Ambedkarite organisations started to spring up in Tamil Nadu and by 1984 Dalit Mahasabha was formed. In the same year Kanshi Ram formed his party on Ambedkar’s birthday, known as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) that aimed to work amongst Dalits, adivasis and OBCs and minorities. Bhartiya Republic Party remained committed to Mahars and Dalits at large.

Check Your Progress III

i) Which leader started Satyashodhak Samaj?

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ii) Who were Dalit Panthers?

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iii) Who was Jyotiba Phule?

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8.5 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF DALIT MOVEMENTS

Dalit movements are markers of Dalit consciousness about the realisation of them as any other human beings with definite needs and mental and physical capabilities like others. It made them assert their identities, culture and politics without any restrictions and infringement. This shaped the movements against caste based social exclusion of both reformative and transformative character. The case of Dalit movement rests on the dream of a modern caste-free egalitarian Indian society where no discrimination exists on the basis of caste.

Typologies

Dalit movements have seen different phases and encountered challenges both cultural as well as political. It fought for human dignity and recognition of large section of masses that remain invisible in society since ages. Therefore Omvedt argues that it was “redemptive for individuals and revolutionary in terms of society”. The struggle has always been radical in its orientations and demands change in individual psyche as well as the entire society for dalit emancipation and dignity.

Shah (2004) on the other hand argues that these movements were both reformative and alternative in nature since it demanded altered socio-cultural and religious conditions while asking freedom from bondage and servitude. He further indicates that reformative can be classified into Bhakti, neo-vedantik and Sanskritisation movements whereas, the alternative spread in conversions, religious and secular movements.

Beyond Hinduism

The movement operated at two levels: first under Phule it took the path of social reform and demanded social acceptability of shudra and atishudra by the removal of the practice of untouchability and claiming the membership within the society. It aimed to reform the society on the principles of liberty, justice freedom and brotherhood. In the second phase with demand for political as well as social, integration took the centre stage. The movement demanded constitutional guarantee and recognition of a separate identity as Dalits. Dalit Panthers and many others brought Dalit movements into the sphere of larger struggles against poverty, equal rights, employment and sharing of resources with Dalits. The mass conversion indicated for collective emancipation as Shah(2001;34) writes, that ‘throughout 1970s it the protests and struggles on issues of land rights, temple entry, farm wages, common resources for all, against discrimination in public spaces, etc. continued at local levels that reflected in electoral dignity’.

Scholars like Rajni Kothari have argued that Dalit movements were not just anti-untouchability or anti-brahman movements but had vast canvas demanding right to education, employment and political representation. Omvedt (1996;92) highlights that they demanded for democratic socialism based on equality, freedom and justice. Dalit politics moved beyond Hinduism or the cultural rights of Dalits and demanded for broad economic and political integration of the masses.

Mandal Commission brought different dimension to the Dalit Bahujan confederation. Later parties brought Dalits into mainstream politics of parliamentary system. Gopal Guru states, that at present Dalit politics has reduced the movements to pressure groups that is restricted to micro levels. Dalits

achieved national status and have shown profound transformation in literacy reaching to 66.10% in 2011. Government further bans social discrimination in various local bodies. Yet what is challenging is the violence on political mobilisations of Dalits. Una case in Gujrat, 2016 and discrimination at the individual level Rohit Vemulla suicide case, also January 2016 are still throwing up blatant challenges to the struggles of Dalits for cultural and social equality. The hegemonic upper caste Hindu dominated society is still averse to the inclusion of lower castes and untouchables.

8.6 LET US SUM UP

The unit focuses on Dalit movements in India. It presents the meanings of the term Dalit, the causes and issues that shape the movement and most significantly its leaders.

The different phases of Dalit movement can be associated with prominent leaders and the issues they raised for the liberation and emancipation of Dalits. The movements express the struggle against the exploitation and oppression of the lower castes and untouchables in society.

The unfolding of the Dalit movement also explains us that the term Dalit encompasses all poor, marginalised and downtrodden section of the society and the effort was for workers, peasants, landless labourers, women, religious minorities as a whole. The movements had the power to create an alternative India with more egalitarian, just and vibrant society free from regressive values and helps.

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8.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

The term “Dalit” is used administratively for the lowest castes called the scheduled castes or SC’s however, officially it also includes the scheduled tribes i.e. the ST’s and the Other Backward Castes or OBC’s. Britishers used the term Scheduled Castes or SC’s for untouchables in 1935 and earlier Depressed castes in 1919. This term and the term ‘dalit’ continued to be used for all marginalised sections of society, such as the poor peasants, women, workers etc. the Marathi writers first proposed this term in 1960’s in place of the term “Achuta”.

Check Your Progress II

- a) Caste is an endogamous group, dividing the society into different hierarchical groups.
- b) Untouchability which has been abolished by the Constitution of India is a social practice that had ensured discrimination and exploitation towards the lower castes by upper castes.
- c) Reform movements are movements that aim to reform the society from the evil religious practices, beliefs and rituals.

Check Your Progress III

- a) B.R. Ambedkar
- b) The group of young Dalits from Maharashtra
- c) A social reformer and a Dalit leader.



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UNIT 9 GENDER BASED MOVEMENT*

Structure

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 - 9.2.2 Role and Status
 - 9.2.3 Traditional Expectations and Women's Status
- 9.3 Women's Movement in India: The context
 - 9.3.1 Early Feminist Campaigns
 - 9.3.2 Movement Against Dowry
 - 9.3.3 Agitation Against Rape
- 9.4 Growth and Maturing of the Movement
- 9.5 L.G.B.T +Q Movement
- 9.6 Challenges to the Women's Movements
- 9.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.8 References
- 9.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the key sociological concepts of sex and gender;
- discuss how gender roles are socially constructed in society;
- describe how this gender construction gives rise to different roles and status in society; especially women's status;
- outline the women's movement in India;
- discuss the growth and maturing of the movement;
- discuss nature of labour force, and its types;
- describe the LGBT Queer Movement in India; and
- discuss the challenges to the women's movement.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you had learnt about Dalit movements in India. Here the focus of the unit is on the role and status of men and women and the other gender issues which have given rise to gender based movements.

In this unit, we shall look into the issue on Gender based movements in India. We will first explain the key sociological concepts related with the gender issues in brief. We will then highlight the concern raised by various women's organisations that spark off in the form of different social movements. This covers

the period from early feminist campaigns to the maturing of the movement. We have briefly presented the LGBT and Queer movement in this unit to explain gender related movements in India. Finally we discuss the challenges to women's movement in India.

9.2 EXAMINING SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

In this section we shall be examining the concepts of sex and gender, role and status and the traditional view on women's role and status. This is because many of the gender issues are related with the low status of women and other psychological biases in society,

9.2.1 Sex and Gender

The dictionary meaning of gender is “classification of objects roughly corresponding to the two sexes” as well as the properties of these two sexes. While discussing the differences between the sexes we generally focus on biological and reproductive functions, but differences in gender relate to various other attributes, which may be socially and culturally determined. In other words sex is biological whereas gender is sociological, namely, the social meaning we attribute to it. Over here we shall be looking mainly at some of these attributes and how they come into existence. Further, we shall be looking at how the concepts of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ become important not only in terms of the difference between them, but also as concepts which help us to understand society and social relationships.

9.2.2 Role and Status

You are already aware of or will now realise the vital importance of the terms such as role, status and function for an understanding of society. These terms tell us how individuals and groups organise themselves as well as relate to each other. Very simply, role tells us about what is expected from an individual in a particular situation, while status deals with her or his expectations arising out of that situation. To put it another way, a role deals with duties and obligations while status deals with rights (but not necessarily legal rights). You will, of course, realise that these definitions or explanations are very simply put and may in fact overlook many complexities and even conflicts. For instance, it is commonly assumed that a mother is a woman, a wife, a cook, a teacher of her children, a daughter-in-law and so on. What happens when the mother is also the principal of the local village school? Not only does she have to deal with a range of roles and statuses, but also with the tensions that may arise out of her role as mother and her role as an administrator. We shall try and show you how conventional analyses have tended to concentrate on the traditional and accepted roles of women as bearers and rearers of children and not on their other roles. So far, biological differences have been focused on without adequate attention to the implications of these differences.

9.2.3 Traditional Expectations and Women's Role and Status

As a girl or boy living in contemporary India, you would have heard of, or even been witness to, caste and religious conflicts and wondered how these conflicts arise. In many cases they occur because of differences in expectations. You would perhaps also have heard of how a certain caste or community oppresses or ill-

treats members of other castes and communities. Such matters are now routinely discussed in the school, within the home and among the friends. Occasionally there may also be cases of men of one group or caste molesting or raping women of another group or caste. Such matters are also discussed, but perhaps less freely. Caste oppression is a recognised expression of power and control of one group over another. You are probably now quite confused by the manner in which terms, such as ‘keeping people in their place’, ‘honour’, ‘conflict’, ‘power’ and so on have been used. To make it simpler we are now suggesting that it is essential for us to take into consideration how the various roles and expectations of social groups may compete with one another. By giving you above the random examples of the tensions experienced by women from a group caught up in conflict situations we wanted to make you aware of the fact that a study of Indian society needs to take into consideration the role of gender to understand the concepts of role, status, and conflict. You will also be able to understand social movements related with gender issues such as; women’s movements and other kinds of gender based movements in India. (Ref. IGNOU 2001, ESO-12: Society in India, Block 7)

Activity 1

Observe the daily activities of two employed women preferably from different socio-economic backgrounds, continuously for one week. While observing please note the types of work done by them inside the house and, if possible, at the work place. Now, write an essay in about 20 lines on the double burden of work regularly undertaken by them. Exchange your note, if possible, with your co-learners at your Study Centre.

9.3 WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN INDIA: THE CONTEXT

Desai, N. in her work, *From accommodation to articulation: Women’s movement in India* critically examines the disturbing aspect of the social situation in India which is in fact the slow erosion of concern for women’s issues even after Independence. She argues that in the decades preceding the attainment of national independence, prior to 1947, there was an outstanding record of women’s participation in political struggle and through it of articulating their rights. Yet, until the early seventies there has been no concerted action towards achieving the goal of equality.

The **dawn of independence in 1947** generated a great deal of hope and optimism in the people. The early fifties saw the enactment of several legislations which established formal equality, removed social disabilities, setting up various administrative bodies for the creation of opportunities for women, and inducting a number of feminists into the government. Another important factor which affected the contours of women’s movement was the emergence of new welfare society, in **1953 the Government established a Central Social Welfare Board** in which many of the prominent women social workers were associated with it. Several voluntary organisation and women’s association began to rely on the grants received from the board. As a result they lost their spirit and vigour of the pre-independence phase. Thus no effort was made to increase the earning power of women.

Women's development was thought to be confined to education, social welfare, and health by the Planning Commission. Besides in every plan the proportionate allocation for social services was declining which was subjected to heavy cuts in times of crisis. The order of priorities up to the Fourth Plan has been education, then health and social welfare because it was generally assumed that all other programmes will benefit women directly or indirectly.

Kumar, R (1995) argued that the movement that started in the 1970s was different from its predecessors, for it grew out of a number of radical movements of the time. The most interesting movements for feminists were the **Shahada** and **anti-price rise agitations** in **Maharashtra** and the **Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)** and **Nav Nirman in Gujarat**. The **Shahada movement**, in **Dhulia district of Maharashtra**, was started by a Bhil tribal landless landowners. Drought and famine in Maharashtra during this period exacerbated the poverty already created by invidious rates of sharecropping, land alienation, and extortionate money lending charges, and these conditions contributed to rising militancy among the Bhils. The **Shahada movement began as a folk protest** (through radical **devotional song clubs**) in the late 1960s. It took on a more militant campaigning thrust when the New Left joined the movement in the early 1970s and helped the Bhils form an organization, the **Shramik Sangathana, in 1972**. Accounts of the Shahada movement women were more active than men and that as their militancy grew, they began to take direct action on issues specific to them as women, such as the **physical violence associated with alcoholism**. Groups of women began to go from village to village to storm liquor dens and destroy liquor pots. Women would assemble, beat him, and force him to apologize to his wife in public.

Meanwhile in Gujarat, what was probably the first attempt at forming a women's trade union was made in Ahmedabad by Gandhian socialists attached to the **Textile Labour Association (TLA)**. **Formed in 1972** at the initiative of **Ela Bhatt**, who worked in the women's wing of the TLA, the **Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)** was an organization of women who worked in different trades in the informal sector but shared a common experience of extremely low earnings, very poor working conditions (most of them performed piecework in their homes or toiled on the streets as vendors or hawkers), harassment from those in authority (the contractor for home workers and the police for vendors), and lack of recognition of their work as socially useful labour.

Conditions of **drought and famine** in the rural areas of **Maharashtra in the early 1970s** led to a **sharp rise in prices** in the urban areas. **In 1973, Mrinal Gore of the Socialist Party and Ahilya Ranganekar of the Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPI –M)**, together with many others, formed the united **Women's Anti Price Rise Front**, to mobilize women of the city against inflation. The campaign rapidly became a mass women's movement for consumer protection and its members demanded that the government fix prices and distribute essential commodities.

Soon after, the movement spread to Gujarat, where it was known as the **Nav Nirman Movement of 1974**. **Nav Nirman**, originally a students' movement against soaring prices, corruption, and black marketeering, became a massive middle-class movement joined by thousands of women. It took the police some

three months to subdue the *Nav Nirman* movement, and between ninety and one hundred people were killed.

In the same year as the *Nav Nirman* movement developed and was subdued, the **first women's group** associated with the contemporary feminist movement was **formed in Hyderabad**. Comprising women from the Maoist movement, the **Progressive Organization of Women (POW)** exemplified rethinking within the Left. As in the *Shahada* movement, Maoist women stressed the existence of gender oppression and to organize women against it.

The year 1975 saw the sudden development of a whole spate of feminist activities in **Maharashtra**. Influenced by POW, **Maoist women in Pune** formed the **Purogami Stree Sangathana** (Progressive Women's Organization), and Maoist women in Bombay formed the **Stree Mukti Sangathana (Womens' Liberation Organization)**. **March 8, International Women's Day**, was celebrated for the first time in India by both party-based and autonomous organizations in Maharashtra: the **Lal Nishan (Red Flag) Party** commemorated it with a special issue of the party paper. In August, the **Marathi socialist magazine Sadhana** brought out a special women's issue; in September **dalits** and socialists organized a conference of *devadasis* (literally, servants of the gods; or temple prostitutes); and in October a number of organizations that had developed out of the Maoist movement, such as the **Lal Nishan Party** and the **Shramik Sangathana**, organized a '**United Women's Liberation Struggle**' conference in Pune.

In the late nineteenth century, under the leadership of **Jyotiba Phule** dalits had also espoused **women's rights to education**, against *pardah*, and for widow remarriage, *Janwedana* a dalit Marathi newspaper, brought out a special women's issue entitled 'In the Third World Women Hold Up Half the Sky,' a slogan borrowed from the Chinese Revolution to make clear its departure from First World Feminism; some months later women from the dalits movement formed an intriguing new group called the **Mahila Samta Sainik Dal** (League of Women Soldiers for Equality).

Activity 2

Interview five women, preferably from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Inquire from them about the form and extent of the ownership they have on land, household assets and other productive resources. Now based on your data write a note on women's access to property in about 20 lines. Exchange your note, if possible, with your co-learners at the Study Centre.

The declaration of a **state of emergency in 1975 by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi** interrupted the development of the fledgling women's movement. Many political organisations were driven underground, thousands of activists were arrested, and most who remained at liberty focused on civil rights, such as freedom of speech and association, the right to protest, and the rights of political prisoners. The Lifting of the emergency in 1977 and the formation of the **Janata government in 1978** led to a renewal of some of the earlier movements. Women's groups were formed all over the country but mainly in the major cities.

9.3.1 Early Feminist Campaigns

The distinguishing features of the new women's groups were that they declared themselves to be 'feminist' despite the fact that most of their members were

drawn from the Left, which saw feminism as bourgeois i.e. belonging to middle and upper middle classes and divisive: that they insisted on being autonomous even though most of their members were affiliated to other political groups, generally of the far Left; and that they rapidly built networks among, one another, ideological differences notwithstanding. All three features were, however, defined and in certain ways limited by the history of these groups, whose first years were spent mainly in attempts at self-definition. The fact that most of their members were drawn from the far Left and belonged to the urban educated middle class influenced the feminist movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s in complex and varied ways.

The only party-based women's organisation to be formed in the late **1970s** was the ***Mahila Dakshata Samiti*** (Women's Self- Development Organization), which was founded in 1977 by socialist women in the coalition Janata Party. Some feminists were critical of party practices but believed that parties could enact valuable reform and fulfill feminist aims, others were critical of entrenched political parties, and yet others argued that political parties, even of the Left, were so centralised that they would never fulfill the feminist. Though the feminist campaigns in the late 1970s and early 1980s were dominated by the new city-based groups, a similar growth of feminist consciousness had taken place in certain rural movements. The 1950s sharecroppers' movement in the Telengana area of Andhra Pradesh was again renewed in the late 1970s, and the area was declared a 'disturbed zone' by the government. In **Telengana's Karimnagar district**, where women had been especially active in the **landless labourers' movement** from the 1960s on, the new wave of agitation began with a campaign against the **kidnapping of a woman called Devamma**, and the **murder of her husband, by a local landlord**. According to the *Stree Shakti Sanghatana* formed in the late **1970s** in Hyderabad, the demand for **independent women's organizations** came from the women themselves, who **raised the issues of wife beating and landlord rape** through the *mahila sanghams* (women's committees).

At around the same time, in the **Bodhgaya district of Bihar** feminist issues were raised by women in the socialist students' organisation, the ***Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini*** (Young Students' Struggle Organisation), which was involved in an **agricultural laborers' movement** for land reclamation from the temple priest who owned most of the land in the area. As in the Shahada and Telengana Movement, women were active in the struggle, and in 1979 a women's camp in Bodhgaya decided that Vahini campaigns to reclaim plots of land would demand that plots be registered in the names of men and women.

9.3.2 The Movement Against Dowry

The **first campaigns** of the contemporary Indian feminist movement were **against dowry and rape**. Protests against dowry were first organized by the **Progressive Organization of Women (POW)** in **Hyderabad in 1975**. Although some of the demonstrations numbered as many as two thousand people, the protests did not grow into a full-fledged campaign because of the imposition of the emergency, which drove most activists underground. After the lifting of the emergency, a **new movement against dowry started in Delhi**. This time it was against **violence inflicted upon women for dowries**, especially against murder and abetment to suicide.

Although the *Mahila Dakshata Samiti* was the **first women's organization in Delhi's** contemporary feminist movement to take up the issue of **dowry and dowry harassment**, it was *Stri Sangharsh*, a fledgling feminist group founded in 1979, that drew public attention to dowry-related crimes. On 1st June 1979, that drew public organized a demonstration against the death of Tarvinder Kaur, a young woman from Delhi who had left a deathbed statement saying the in-laws had killed her because her parents could not fulfill the in-laws' ever-increasing demands. The demonstration was widely reported by the national press, and in the next few weeks there was a spate of **demonstrations against dowry deaths**, one of the biggest ones **led by the Nari Raksha Samiti** (Women's Rescue Committee) on 12th June through the alleys of old Delhi.

Within weeks, feminists reversed the indifference of decades' issue of linking women's death by fire (women doused with kerosene and set on fire, often by the in-laws and husband) with **dowry harassment** and showing that many official suicides were in fact murders. Feminists recorded the last words of the dying woman, took family testimony, and encouraged friends and neighbors to come forward with their evidence. As a result, many families began to lodge complaints with the police against the harassment of their daughters by the in-laws for more dowry. Campaigns against dowry deaths gradually began to be taken up by neighborhood groups, teachers' associations, and trade unions.

In 1980, a year after the anti-dowry agitation began; the **government passed a law against dowry-related crimes** that recognized abetment to suicide because of dowry demands as a special crime and made mandatory a police investigation into the death, of any woman within five years of marriage. And though the law was passed in 1980, the first positive judgment under it did not occur until **1982**, when a **Delhi Sessions Court magistrate found two people guilty of dowry murder and sentenced them to death**. The judgment was **reversed by the Delhi High Court in early 1983**. Women's groups from the party-affiliated Left and autonomous groups protested and were held for contempt of court. In 1985, the Supreme Court upheld the verdict but converted the sentences to life imprisonment. Moreover, the storm that women's groups raised in 1983 had some indirect effect. In **December 1983 the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act was passed**, which made cruelty to a wife a cognizable, non-bailable offence punishable by up to three years' imprisonment and fine; the act also redefined cruelty to include mental as well as physical harassment. In addition, **Section 113-A of the Evidence Act** was amended so that the court could draw an inference of abetment to suicide. Finally, the act amended **Section 174 of the Criminal Procedure Code**, requiring a postmortem examination of the body of a woman who died within seven years of marriage.

9.3.3 The Agitation Against Rape

Few months after the campaign against dowry-related crimes began, the agitation against rape started with **campaigns against police rape**.

When the **new feminist groups were formed in the late 1970s** they were already familiar with the categories of police and landlord rape, for both, especially the former, had been addressed by the Maoist movement. Moreover, the **issue of police rape achieved new significance in 1978**, just as feminist groups were in the process of formation, through an **incident in Hyderabad** where a woman called **Rameeza Bee was raped by several policemen, and her husband, a**

rickshaw puller, was murdered when he protested his wife's rape. A popular uprising ensued: Twenty-two thousand people went to set up roadblocks, cut the telephone wires, stoned the building, and set fire to some bicycles in the compound. The army had to be called in, and the uprising was quieted only after the state government had been dismissed and a commission of inquiry into the rape and the murder had been appointed.

In 1979, there were women's demonstrations against incidents of police and landlord employer rape in many parts of the country. Campaigns against these incidents, however remained isolated from each other until **1980**, when an open letter by four senior lawyers against a judgment in a case of **police rape in Maharashtra sparked off a campaign by feminist groups.** Known as the **Mathura rape case**, the incident had occurred several years earlier, when a **seventeen year old girl, Mathura, was raped by local policemen.** A case was registered against the policemen, who were acquitted at the Sessions Court, convicted on appeal at the High Court, convicted on appeal at the High Court, and later acquitted by the Supreme Court. The defense argument for the policemen was that Mathura had a boyfriend and was thus a loose woman who could not by definition be raped. The open letter was in protest at the Supreme Court's acceptance of this argument.

The **campaign against rape (begun in 1978-79) marked a new stage in the development of feminism in India.** The Bombay feminist group **Forum Against Rape (FAR)**, which is now called the **Forum Against Oppression of Women** decided in February 1980 to campaign for the reopening of the case and wrote to feminist groups across the country to propose that demonstrations be held on **International Women's Day (8th March)** to demand a retrial. In effect, this was the **first time that feminist groups coordinated a national campaign.** Groups in seven cities responded to the **FAR letter and organized demonstrations on 8th March demanding a retrial of the Mathura case,** the implementation of relevant sections of the **Indian Penal Code, and changes in the rape law.** In both Bombay and Delhi, joint action committees were formed of feminist groups and Socialist and Communist Party affiliates to coordinate the campaign.

Meanwhile, protests against police rape were reported from all over the country, only some of which were organised by feminists. As in the agitation against dowry, the first protests against police rape sparked off a series of protests by neighbourhood and trade union-based groups in different parts of the country.

Within months of the agitation, the government introduced a bill defining the categories of custodial rape and specifying a mandatory punishment of ten years' imprisonment, in camera trials, and shift of the onus of proof onto the accused. The clause over which controversy raged was the burden of proof clause, which said that if the women could prove intercourse with the accused at the time and place she alleged, and if it had been forced upon her, then the accused would be presumed guilty until he could prove otherwise. Immediately there arose the cry that this violated the legal principle that a man was innocent until proved guilty, and the papers were full of articles vehemently protesting the clause, some of which exclaimed that this paved the way for every revengeful woman to frame innocent men. Indeed, a **1988** Supreme Court judgment in another case of custodial rape, the **Suman Rani case**, showed how clauses in the law that were intended to ensure fairness allowed scope for interpretations that ran contrary to

the purpose of the law. The sentence against Suman Rani’s rapists was reduced because of the supposed conduct of the victim – in this case the fact that she had a lover was held to militate against the crime of the rapist. This issue of conduct was especially important given the circumstances under which much urban custodial rape take place. In Delhi, for example, the **People’s Union of Democratic Rights**, discovered that in several cases the victims had run away from home with the men they loved against their families’ wishes; then the police had tracked them down in cities to which they had fled and used their ‘runaway’ status as a reason to separate them from their partners and rape them.

The **Supreme Court Judgment** was a **staggering setback** for the **feminist movement**, which **in 1980** had appeared to have at least partially gained its point that character and conduct should be deemed irrelevant. Feminists reacted with a storm of protest. The National Front government responded promptly with the promise of yet another amendment of the rape law, this time concerning the rules of evidence. But the key question, of implementation and interpretation of the law, remained open.

Check Your Progress I

- i) Distinguish between gender and sex.
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- ii) Tick the true answer (T) and (F) for false
 - a) In pre-Independent India there was no attempt to attain gender equality in India.
 - b) The Shahada Movement in India, district of Maharashtra was started by Bhil tribal landless landowners.
 - c) The year 1975 saw a development of a number of feminist activities in Maharashtra.
 - d) In 1988 Supreme Court judgement on custodial rape, the Suman Rani case, the custodial laws showed fairness to the victim.
- iii) What are the major reasons for the protest and uprising of women in India?
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9.4 GROWTH AND MATURING OF THE MOVEMENT

The mixed experiences of the campaigns against rape and dowry led many feminists to question their methods and tactics. The discovery that there was little and faulty connection between the enactment and the implementation of laws left many feeling rather bitter that the government had easily side tracked their demands by enacting legislation. This gave rise to further questions about the efficacy of basing campaigns around demands for changes in the law and, by extension, around demands for action from the state. In the early 1980s, women's centers were formed in several cities to provide women with legal aid, counseling, health care and employment. Attempts to appropriate symbols of women's power grew in the 1980s through reinterpreting myths, epics, and folktales and unearthing historical forms of women's resistance in India. The emphasis gradually changed to looking for traditional sources of women's strength rather than simply suffering.

The search for historical examples of women's resistance led feminists to scrutinize the distant and immediate past, to look at the role women played in broader movements for social transformation, and to reclaim some of the movement's predating contemporary feminism. One example was the **Chipko movement** against **deforestation** in the northern Indian mountain tracts, beginning in the mid-1970s, *Chipko* (literally, 'cling to') was a **movement to prevent forest destruction** by timber contractors and was carried forward largely by women, who were traditionally responsible for fuel, food and water in the family.

By the early 1980s, **feminism had branched into a series of activities** ranging from the **production of literature and audiovisual material to slum-improvement work, employment-generating schemes, health education, and trade unions**. The **first professions** to feel the influence of feminism were **journalism, academia, and medicine**. Soon after the feminist movement began, most of the major **English-language dailies** had deputed one or more women journalists to write **exclusively on feminist issues**, and a network of women journalists evolved.

Women's studies took off in the 1980s, initially under the aegis of independent research institutes such as the **Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) in Delhi**, though an attempt to fund research at the university level was made by the S.N Damodar Thackeray (SNDT) Women's University in Bombay, which set up a women's research unit. The SNDT and CWDS began to jointly host annual national women's studies conferences, and interest in women's studies grew so rapidly that today the University Grants Commission, a central government body plans to set up Women's studies courses at the college level.

During the same period, the Maharashtra-based Shiv Sena (Shiva's Army) activated its women's wing to engage in anti-Muslim propaganda. Interestingly, its main argument was one advanced in the nineteenth century that had enduring success in India; that the Muslim rate of reproduction is so prolific that it will outstrip that of Hindus.

An even more worrying development took place between 1982 and 1983 in Delhi; Rajasthan and parts of Bengal, where attempts were made to revive *sati*,

the practice of immolating widows on their husbands' funeral pyres. Under the aegis of the *Rani Sati Sarva Sangh* (an organization to promote sati) feminist discourse was used to propagate a cult of widow immolation.

Women's demonstrations were organized in various parts of the country to **demand women's 'right' to commit sati**. In Delhi, feminists decided to hold a counter demonstration along the route of a pro-sati procession. This was the first time that feminists were forced to confront a group of hostile women, which was in itself so shocking that it took the heart out of the counter demonstration. Most distressing of all, however, was the way in which the processionists appropriated the language of rights, stating that they should have the right, as Hindus and as women, to commit, worship and propagate sati. At the same time, they also appropriated feminist slogans on women's militancy, for example, '*Hum Bharat ki nari hain, phool nahin, chingari hain* (We, the women of India, are not flowers but fiery sparks).

The early 1980s witnesses a series of **counter movements against feminist ideas** by sections of **traditionalist society**. The rise of these counter movements was partly related to the spread of feminism and the influence it was beginning to have on women's attitudes, especially within the family. The kind of support that women's centres gave women who were being harassed for dowry or forced into arranged marriages, for example, provoked a considerable degree of public and private hostility, and feminists began to face attacks from irate families in person and through the police and the courts. However, where earlier such attacks would have led to a wave of sympathy for the feminists, from the mid-1980s on they were accompanied by a public and increasingly sophisticated, critique of feminism. Much of this criticism took place in a context of growing communalism.

9.5 L.G.B.T+Q MOVEMENT

When we talk about gender based movements, we must also add other gender related developments in society especially in India. There has been different sexualities besides male and female and traditional ambiguity and vagueness about them. L.G.B.T is the code word which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. This community has originally been known as Gay community. But it was not enough to use this term since it referred only to men. Hence, the term L.G.B.T was introduced in the mid-1980s. These people have a different sexual orientation than a normal person. Their orientations regarding sexual life, self-identification, sexual behavior is different.

Gay people were traditionally understood to be attracted to the people of same gender and were in relationship with the same gender. But the lesbians, biosexuals and transgender were not included in this.

A lesbian generally refers to women who are sexually attracted to women only. They are like gay people but only men are included in gay whereas women are called lesbians. They are not at all attracted to opposite genders.

A bisexual person is one who is sexual, romantically and emotionally attracted to both the sexes. They are not only attracted to one but finds a connection in both the genders.

The LGBT and Queer face innumerable difficulties in the society where the only accepted orientation is heterosexuality. Homosexuality is regarded as abnormal. Abuse is their daily routine and they faced it almost every day. They are more likely to experience intolerance, discrimination, harassment, and threat of violence due to their sexual orientation than those that identify themselves as heterosexual. It is mainly due to homophobia. They face inequality and violence at every place around the world. They face torture from people who mock at them and make them realize that they are different from others. In many countries, the rights enjoyed by opposite-sex couples are not enjoyed by the same-sex couples. They are prohibited from those rights. As a result, they face discrimination and cannot enjoy social protection schemes such as, health care .(Das Ananya International Journal for Emerging Research & Development © 2018, www.IJERND.com All Rights Reserved Page |11 pensions). The LGBT people even hide their gender and do not disclose it due to fear of losing their job. The young LGBT people face ragging and harassment in schools, colleges, and university which in many cases leads to depression, school drop-out and homelessness. They gradually develop low self-esteem and low self-confidence and become isolated from friends and family. The parents of normal children don't allow them to mix with the LGBT children acting completely out of care and concern without realizing that this leads to isolation for the other one. Lack of communication between LGBT child and the parents often leads to conflict in the family. Many LGBT youths are placed in foster care or end up in juvenile detention or on the streets, because of family conflict related to their LGBT identity. LGBT teens have to face a very high risk of health and mental problems when they become adults because they are rejected by their parents and society at large.

According to a study, around 30 per cent of LGBT in the U.S have been abused by the members of their family for their different sexual orientation. Also, a survey revealed that about 40 percent of the homeless people constituted of LGBT. 'Studies done by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network [GLSEN] report that nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students face harassment. The 2007 National School Climate Survey found not only that LGBT students were harassed but 31.7% of LGBT students missed a class and 32.7% missed a day of school because of feeling unsafe.'

Additionally, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face poverty and social stigma. They experience racism daily. They suffer from social and economic inequalities due to continuous discrimination in the workplace. These people mostly get addicted to drugs, alcohol, and tobacco to get themselves relieved of stress and rejection and discrimination. LGBT elders also face several problems. They cannot avail of the opportunities which are received by other senior citizens. Most of them feel isolated and they distance themselves from everyone. Very little is known about them because of widespread failure of governmental and academic researchers to include questions about sexual orientation and gender identity in their studies of the aged. They also become victims of hate crimes. In some countries, homosexuality is regarded as a crime. It is illegal and is often met by imprisonment and fines. For example, in Muslim law, homosexuality is regarded as a sin and is unlawful. (Das, A.2018)

The first bold step was taken by USSR when it decriminalized homosexuality in around 1920s. It was at that time when society was conservative and was also

socially backward regarding the matters of sexuality. But this victory was short lived as during the rule of Stalin, homosexuality was re-criminalized again. Immediately after World War II, a lot of homosexual groups came to the forefront and emphasized love over sex. A movement called Homophile movement was started in some European countries in 1945 and continued up to around 1970. A new movement called Gay Liberation Movement started in 1970 and continued for four years. Homosexual groups like Gay Liberation Front [GLF] and Gay Activists' Alliance [GAA] were formed.

Till then, only gays and lesbians were in the limelight. Bisexuals started gaining prominence in LGBT movements in the 1970s. National Bisexual Liberation Group was formed in New York representing the bisexuals. The advocates of the Gay and Lesbian Rights argued that one's sexual orientation has nothing to do with gender identity. Homosexuality was considered as an illness across the world. But in 1979, Sweden became the first country in the world to remove homosexuality as an illness.

In modern India, Shakuntala Devi was the first to publish a study on homosexuality in 1977. Section 377 of Indian Penal Code talks about unnatural offenses stating homosexuality is illegal in India. The movement to repeal Section 377 was initiated by AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan in 1991. They published an article regarding Section 377 and wanted its annulment. In 2001, it again gained a momentum when a Public Interest Litigation was filed by Naz Foundation in Delhi High Court.

For the first time in the history of India, 'Third Genders' was given recognition and was officially recognized as another gender just as male and female. The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in the case of National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India in its landmark judgment in 2013 created the 'third gender' status for hijras or transgenders. Earlier, while writing their gender, they were forced to write male and female, but now after this judgment, they can proudly describe themselves as 'third gender'.

The Government of India has been directed by the Supreme Court for treating the members of 'Third Gender' as socially and economically backward. The Supreme Court further opined that absence of law recognizing hijras as the third gender could not be continued as a ground to discriminate them in availing equal opportunities in education and employment. The third gender would be categorized as Other Backward Classes [OBC] which will help them to avail the opportunities of reservations in educational institutions and government jobs. The ideals enshrined in the Constitution of India by our founding fathers are defended by the Supreme Court's judgment. The verdict though pertains to only eunuchs or transgender people; it is indeed a ray of wisdom.

On 2 February 2016, criminalization of homosexual activity was reviewed by the Supreme Court. In August 2017, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the Right to Privacy is an inherent and fundamental right under Article 21 in the Indian Constitution, providing hopes to LGBT activists that the Court would soon strike down Section 377. The Court also ruled that a person's sexual orientation is a matter of privacy issue. In January 2018, the Supreme Court agreed to refer the question of the validity of Section 377 to a large bench for

examination before October 2018. The Supreme Court is going to hear petitions on Sec 377 on May 1, 2018. (Das, Aananya, International Journal for Emerging, Research & Development, Vol. I. Issue, 2) On 6th Sep. 2018 the Supreme Court of India decriminalized homosexuality by declaring section 377 of the Indian Penal code non constitutional.

9.6 CHALLENGES TO THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

The issue of personal or religion-based and differentiated family law became controversial for feminists in **1985** in what is now referred to as the **Shah Bano case**. In India, personal law falls under the purview of religion, though individuals can choose secular alternatives. This choice is, however, circumscribed; a woman married under Muslim or Hindu law, for example, cannot seek divorce or alimony under secular law, she has to abide by what is offered by the religious laws by which she is/was married. Neither Muslim nor Hindu personal law entitles a woman to alimony. Under Muslim law she is entitled to the return of her engagement gift (*mher*): under Hindu law she is theoretically entitled to the gifts that went with her at marriage (*stridhan*). Finding an abnormal number of destitute divorced women in India, the British colonial government passed a law under the **Criminal Procedure Code (Section 125)**, which remains in Indian criminal law that was at issue in the Shah Bano Case.

Shah Bano was a seventy-five year old woman who had been abandoned by her husband and had filed for maintenance under Section 125. While her claim was being considered, her husband divorced her using the *triple talaq*. The Supreme Court, in its judgment, upheld Shah Bano's right to maintenance from her husband under both Section 125 and Muslim personal law. It asserted that Section 125 transcended personal law. The court was critical of the way women had traditionally been subjected to unjust treatment, citing statements by both Manu, the Hindi law maker, and the Prophet as examples of traditional injustice. And the court urged the government to frame a common civil code because the constitutional promise of a common or uniform civil code would be realized only at the government's initiative.

The judgment was widely criticized by feminists, liberals and secularists as well as by Muslim religious leaders for what was held to be unduly weighted critical comments on Muslim personal law. The **Ulema** (Scholar-priests) issued a **fatwa** (proclamation) that the judgment violated the teachings of Islam. Wide publicity was given to the *fatwa* and within a few months the whole issue took the form of a communal agitation claiming that Islam was in danger. One hundred thousand people demonstrated against the judgment in Bombay and at least as many in Bhopal, both cities with large Muslim populations. Supporters of the judgment were threatened, stoned and beaten up.

In **September 1987**, an incident of **Sati** in the village of **Deorala in Rajasthan** sparked off a campaign that gave rise to a furious debate that spanned not only the rights and wrongs of Hindu women but also questions of religious identity, communal autonomy, and the role of the law and the state in a society as complex and as diverse as India. Within a couple of weeks of the incident of *sati* several articles appeared that engaged in a polemic against Indian feminists accusing

them of being agents of modernity who were attempting to impose crass, selfish, market dominated views on a society that had once given the world ideas of spirituality. So Indian feminist stood accused of being westernists, colonialists, cultural imperialists, and, indirectly, supporters of capitalist ideology.

Given that there has been, on average, only one reported sati a year in post-independence India, the extraordinary debate that the 1987 sati incident aroused was puzzling. In a way it can be understood only as part of a process of politics reorganization in which the **death of Roop Kanwar, the girl who was immolated**, became the **symbol of Rajput identity politics**. In contrast to some of the other areas in which sati had been attempted; Deorala was a relatively highly developed village. The family was well off and the Kanwars had links with influential Rajputs and mainstream state-level politicians.

The tradition versus modernity argument further isolated feminists. The bogey of modernism was so successful that it masked the fact that sati was being used to create a tradition, despite feminist efforts to emphasize this. Tradition was defined so a historically and so self-righteously that it obscured the fact that the pro-sati campaign was run on modern lines, with modern arguments, and for modern purposes, such as the reformation of electoral blocs and identity-based community representation with the state.

However a closer look at the nature of women’s support for the *pro sati agitation* revealed that this was ambiguous and at many points consisted of firmly differentiating between the worship and the actual practice of sati. An examination of the women who were mobilized for the pro-sati demonstration made clear that they were not in fact the women, who were most directly affected by the issue. Widows were conspicuously absent.

For most feminists, the campaign around sati revealed the growing opposition to feminism and spelled a considerable setback for the movement. Yet the challenges it posed to feminist self definitions yielded some valuable insights.

Check Your Progress II

- i) Fill in the blanks-
 - a) The search for historical examples of women’s resistance led the feminists to scrutinize the and past to look at the role women played in broader movements for social transformation.
 - b) One example of women’s movement in the past was..... movement against deforestation.
 - c) The early 1980’s witnessed a series of movements against feminists ideas by sections of traditionalist society.
 - d) In 1987, an incident of *Sati* took place in a Rajasthan village of where a young widow was made to commit Sati by her family. It gave rise to a furious debate in adverse multi-religious, multi-cultural society like India.

ii) Why was the feminist movement in India challenged?

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9.7 LET US SUM UP

The contemporary Indian women's movement as well as the L.G.B.T+Q movement is a complex and perhaps the only movement today that encompasses and links such issues as work, wages, environment, ecology, civil right, sex, violence, representation, caste, class, allocation of basic resource, consumer right, health, religion, community and individual and social relationships. In this unit we have explained the sociological aspect of sex and gender. We have clarified role and status and the traditional status of women in India. An index of the movements influence is the extraordinarily large participation of women in most radical campaigns, particularly in urban areas. The emergence of a Women's liberation movement in the west has encouraged some sections of woman in India to fight for equality and justice. Myths with regard to the high status of Indian women are being exploded and protests are being raised against the use of woman as a sex symbol. We briefly explained the L.G.B.T+Q movement generally, as well as, especially in India. All these issues related to gender based movements have been discussed in this unit.

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9.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- i) Sex refers to the biological attributes of men and women, while gender is understood to be a social construct which includes the full range of personality traits, attitudes, feelings, values, behavior that society differentially ascribes to men and women
- ii) a) F, (b) T, (c) T, (d) F
- iii) The major reasons for the feminist movements in different regions of India ranges from low social status; exploitations and crimes like dowry murder's and rape.

Check Your Progress II

- i)
 - a) distant; immediate
 - b) Chipko
 - c) counter
 - d) Deorala; Roop Kanwar
- ii) The feminist movement in India was challenged because people belonging to different religions, such as, Hindus, Muslims, etc. were traditionally covered by their religious laws. Different legislations were passed to protect the interests of different categories of women. However, the religious bodies did not agree with these developments. Feminists agitated against traditional customs such as, triple talaq or Sati; and so on. This led to the opposition of the feminist movement during the 1980s.

UNIT 10 TRIBAL AND ETHNIC MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Tribal Movements
- 10.3 Nature of Tribal Movements
- 10.4 Causes of Tribal Movements
- 10.5 Different Phases of Tribal Movements
 - 10.5.1 Tamar Revolt (1789-1832)
 - 10.5.2 The Kherwar Movement (1833)
 - 10.5.3 Santhal Revolt (1855)
 - 10.5.4 Bokta Movement (1858)
 - 10.5.5 Birsa Revolt (1895-1901)
 - 10.5.6 Midnapur Movement (1918-1924)
- 10.6 Salient Features of Tribal Movements
- 10.7 Ethnic Movements
- 10.8 The Emergence of Ethnic Movements
- 10.9 Major Factors Responsible for Ethnic Movements
- 10.10 Typology of Ethnic Movements
 - 10.10.1 Ethnic Majority Movement
 - 10.10.2 Ethnic Minority Movement
 - 10.10.3 Mixed Majority-Minority Movement
- 10.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.12 References
- 10.13 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- define the two main forms of social movements – tribal and ethnic movements in India;
- explain the nature and causes of tribal and ethnic movements;
- discuss the emergence of tribal and ethnic movements;
- describe the phases and salient features of tribal movements; and
- discuss the typology of ethnic movements.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will discuss two forms of social movements, that is, tribal and ethnic movements. The unit is composed of two sections. The first section informs

about the tribal movements in India. This section offers an insight into the nature of tribal movements and what lead to the tribal uprising through tracing the causal factors. This section also deals with various phases of tribal movements and derives salient features of tribal movements. The second section deals with ethnic movements in India. This section of the unit enlightens about the issues that lead to the emergence of ethnic movements in India. It also identifies the factors responsible for ethnic movements. Three major forms of ethnic movements based on social structure of ethnic groups are elucidated in the second section. This unit will enable the students to clearly make a distinction between these two forms of social movements.

10.2 TRIBAL MOVEMENTS

For the last two or three decades, human rights violations of the tribal communities (commonly called adivasis) has been on the rise. Article 342 of the Constitution of India has termed tribes as scheduled tribes and article 366(25) has defined scheduled tribes as: '*such tribes or tribal communities or parts or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of this constitution*'. Two categories of scheduled tribes can be pointed out here. These are frontier tribes and non-frontier tribes. Frontier tribes dwell in the northeast frontier states of India such as Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Nagaland. Tribes inhabiting these states constitute 11 per cent of the country's total tribal population. At the same time, there are non-frontier tribes who are geographically spread across the country however their concentration is high in states such as Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Orissa, Bihar, Lakshadweep Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli constituting 89 per cent of the total population of tribes in India.

Both these categories of tribes are ecologically cut-off from the mainstream society to a certain extent and demographically inhabited at proximate environs, relying more on land and forest resources (Paul, 1985). Inhabiting the borders of the larger society, tribal communities represent the lower sections of population. Despite their acquaintance with non-tribals, they retain their own identity through distinct patterns of living such as dialects, cultural heritage, life-styles, forms of religion, rituals, self-identity, values and so on (See: Paul, 1985).

Prior to the arrival of British, tribal communities dwelled in and around forest because of their traditional rights over the forest produce comprising essential commodities based on daily needs such as food, cattle rearing and grazing, construction of houses from timber wood, cultivation and so on. However, the policies of the British perturbed the long established traditional patterns of land ownership systems of tribals through creating a class of zamindars i.e., landlords, which though were regarded by tribals as outsiders. The newly created British landlord system reduced tribals to mere tenants thus transforming the traditional land ownership system into tenancy. This further created trader's class and marked the evolution of market economy. High rentals were extracted from tribals; they were stabbed physically for any defiance in the trade and even forced into selling out not only their property but their spouses and children as well against the debt.

In addition to these disturbances, the price on basic commodities left them in agonising conditions. There was no listening to the plight of tribal communities.

Subsequently, in response to exploitation caused by the British policies, tribal communities started revolts and this marked the beginning of tribal movements in India, which were guided by respective chiefs of tribal communities. These movements can be categorised into different phases which will be discussed in the following sections.

Activity 1

What is the word for 'tribe' in your language? Do you know of any tribal leader who gained political fame in India. Read about him/her and write an essay of about one page on her or him.

10.3 NATURE OF TRIBAL MOVEMENTS

Tribal movements be it peasant, forest and land, identity or any other socially or political oriented, can be comprehended through two paths – violent movement and non-violent movement. Non-violent movements are a kind of resistance movements involving strategic bargain and negotiation with the oppressors without resorting to any form of violence. On the other hand, violent movement is a form of resistance wherein the suppressed erupt through revolts and other forms of violent resistance practices. Examples of non-violent and violent tribal movements include Tana Bhagat Movement and Mauriya Movement respectively. Tana Bhagat movement, which is a non-violent movement, points toward the struggle towards structural transformation of the communities. A common example of this structural transformation can be what M.N. Srinivas calls 'Sanakritization'. On the other hand, Mauriya Movement, a form of violent resistance, was directed towards reshaping and reforming the tribal patterns of livelihood involving forest and land.

10.4 CAUSES OF TRIBAL MOVEMENTS

Tribal movements involve different issues that affected their livelihood and structure. These movements erupted because of the denial of their rights by the British. This suggests that tribal movements started against the tyrannies brought about by the British through their policies which denied the tribals of their rights on various fronts such as damaged their status, enhanced rent, evicted tribals from their own land, customary rights on forests, harassment, physical sufferings and enactment and imposition of new legal system which gave access to outsiders to enter into the tribal regions. Alongside, economy holds significance in the eruption of various tribal movements. Among all these causes, few are of much importance. For example forests, which was the major source of tribal livelihood, was cut down following the enactment of certain laws which legalized the cutting down of forest wood by timber merchants and contractors (Shah, 1990). This type of regulation not only deprived tribals of their rights over the produce but also lead to their harassment at the hands of officials. In this backdrop, following causes of tribal movements can be derived:

- a) In an attempt to increase agricultural produce by non-tribals, they discarded the traditional multiparty land-ownership among tribals which further resulted in their socio-economic differentiation.
- b) The tendency of missionaries to refuse to revolt against the government gives an impression that they were an extension of colonialism.

- c) Enacting new forest regulations which shifted the control of tribals over forest land to the government. This also debarred tribals of their erstwhile rights of using forest for timber and grazing purposes. ((You may recall the unit 3 Tribe in Block 2 of this course)
- d) The emergence of Zamindari system reduced the tribals to tenants and allowed the non-tribals to take over the settled agriculture and the tribals lost their agricultural land in this course of action.
- e) Taxes imposed on timber usage, constraints on shifting cultivation due to land grab policy of the government, exploitation of tribals by money-lenders.
- f) Considering tribal land as private estate as a result of which tribals lost their land.

10.5 DIFFERENT PHASES OF TRIBAL MOVEMENTS

Tribal movements can be categorised into three phases, the first phase (1789-1860), the second phase (1860-1920) and the third phase (1920-1947). Under these three phases, there are various tribal revolts/movements in India as follows:

10.5.1 Tamar Revolts (1789-1832)

Led by Bhola Nath Sahay, tribal communities from Tamar revolted from 1789 to 1832 against the British oppression. Not only Tamar tribals, but they were joined by other tribes from Midnapur, Koelpur, Dhadha, Chatshila, Jalda and Silli who jointly revolted against the blemished align system of the British government. The blemished align system indicates the failure of the British government to secure the land rights of the tenants (cultivators) as a result of which they were evicted from their land. This apparently caused unrest among Tamar tribes and others in 1789. During the period from 1789 to 1832, Tamar revolt repeated seven times. The main cause of the revolt was the illegal withdrawal of land rights from the tribal communities. Various tribal communities such as Oraons, Mundas, Hos and Kols also joined the uprising following directions from their leader Ganga Singh. During the revolt, the tribals killed the 'dikus' in each village, torched houses and robbed their belongings. However the Tamar revolt was repressed by British in 1832-1833. The Ho-territory was occupied by the British as their estate and Ho-tribal leader was appointed to administer Ho-territory through rules enacted by the British.

10.5.2 The Kherwar Movement (1833)

Kherwar is a name which was attached to Santhals in ancient times. What triggered Kherwar movement was the tribals' desire to retain their independent territory which they enjoyed in the past. Bhagirath Majhi who initiated this movement announced to reinstate the lost independence of tribals provided however that they refrain from committing sins. Assuming the title of Babaji, Bhagirath Majhi promised the tribals of setting them free from the tyranny of oppressors if they worship Ram – the Hindu God.

10.5.3 Santhal Revolt (1855)

Santhal revolt started against the forced and unjust land ownership of Santhals by landlords. Not only against the landlords, Santhal movement of 1855 also erupted against money-lenders. This movement started under the leadership of two brothers – Sidho and Kanhu, who announced that the revolt can be called off after they take their land back. The two brothers took a pledge to bring an end to the oppression. The zamindars gathered in the Santhal's land and grabbed their crops. Santhals, armed with traditional weapons, submitted their petition to the Governor in Calcutta but were stopped which ignited violence. In this violence, thousands of Santhals were killed. The revolt lasted for around 60 days. However the movement compelled the government for a change in the existing policy. A huge volume of land was extracted from the possession of British and this land was renamed as 'Santhal Parganas'. Government also appointed chief for recovering the alienated land.

10.5.4 Bokta Movement (1858)

Bokta movement, which can be understood through its three phases, erupted in various parts of Chotanagpur. Singh (1983) has pointed out its three phases as the agrarian, revivalist and political phases. The agrarian phase and the revivalist phase saw protests against the landlords. Tribal tenants rebelled against the hike in land rent as well as their harassment by the landlords and the clashes took place relentlessly. On the political front, the tribals desired to form a separate territory having political autonomy.

10.5.5 Birsa Revolt (1895-1901)

Birsa revolt was headed by Birsa Munda, cherished as one of the great freedom fighters and saviour of Munda tribes, who revolted against the transformation of Munda agrarian system into a feudal state in Chotanagpur area. This revolt, like the earlier ones, was against the zamindars, traders and the government officers under the British regime. Munda tribe had a traditional system of land called as Khuntkari system according to which tribes enjoyed long established claim over the land. However in 1874, British changed land policies and thus implemented the zamindari system thereby forming two classes of landlords and tenants. The tenants comprising tribals were made to pay rent for their own land and their right over the land was sealed if they failed to pay the rent. In addition, the tenants were exploited in a number of ways such as eviction from land, harassment, land encroachment, increased rent, and so on. This pushed tribals to depend on money-lenders who would add high interest on the loans. As a result of this oppression, the tribals started rejecting the operation of outsiders to establish their own independent territory.

10.5.6 Midnapur Movement (1918-1924)

Though it started way back in 1760 against the British, however, the Midnapur peasant movement gained momentum during late 19th century following the encroachment of tribal land. Midnapur movement can best be understood through its two phases: one which overlapped with the non-cooperation movement of 1921-22; and two a phase which started following the arrest of Gandhi. Tribals were excluded from the non-cooperation movement up till 1920. During the beginning of 1921, efforts were made to include tribals also in this movement. However the Midnapur Zamindari Company created by Congress started its

oppression against the tribals who were paid low wages. This triggered agitation against the British. However Gandhi terminated the non-cooperation movement for the belief that tribal struggle was not acknowledged by the stakeholders under British (Dasgupta, 1985). Santhals gradually extended their movement against all oppressive operations. In 1922, tribals asserted their right over forest and the movement broke the barriers of Midnapur Zamindari Company and included Indian landlords also.

There were other movements also that can be counted under the three periods mentioned earlier. These are Jitu Santhal Movement in Malda, tribal movement in Orissa and tribal movement in Assam which were against the British introduced Zamindari system; the promulgation of section 144 and the arrest of tribals; and the encroachment of tribal land respectively.

10.6 SALIENT FEATURES OF TRIBAL MOVEMENTS

The exploitation and oppression against the tribals lead to a series of uprisings and movements. Among the oppressors include various stakeholders of the British Government, which they considered as ‘outsiders’ such as zamindars, thekedars, money-lenders, and other officials. There were regional movements against these stakeholders. Many of these movements were more so the social and religious movements in nature during their initial stages. However almost all the movements later fused with national uprisings. The anti-colonial agitations were ignited by land encroachment, eviction from land ownership, less wage, huge rent, putting an end to the feudal system of land ownership, and so on. All these movements erupted to safeguard the existential right of tribals. There was a chief from each tribal community to guide their respective movements. Tribal movements would often steer towards violence in which tribals were massacred, their houses torched and movements brutally cancelled. As a result of this, the tribals submitted themselves to the policies of British, which though deprived them of their rights and other interests. The normal laws in place at that time were deemed inapplicable to the tribal areas and therefore a new law called as Scheduled District Act (1874) was enacted and passed. The tribal areas thereafter were excluded from the Government of Indian Act (1935). However despite being excluded from the mainstream, the government continued to creep into tribal territories, which concealed all the exploitations against the tribals (Sonowal, 2008).

Activity 2

Visit a construction site in your neighbourhood and inquire about the origin of the labourers working on the site. Ask them if they are from a tribal community you may find out about who they are and about their socio-cultural background. Write a note of one page and discuss it with that of other students at your center.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) What do you understand by tribal movement?

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ii) Tribal communities dwell around lakes and rivers. True (✓) False (×)

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iii) Name the two paths of tribal movements.

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iv) Santhal Revolt took place in which year.

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10.7 ETHNIC MOVEMENTS

The word ‘ethnic’ has a wider usage among scholars across disciplines. Derived from “ethnos”, scholars understand ethnicity in terms of its definition “groups in an exotic primitive culture” (Urmila, 1989: 13). In order for a community to be termed as an ethnic community, it must meet six standard principles. They are community name, common ancestry, shared historical memories, shared culture, definite territory and group cohesiveness (Smith, 1993). Ethnic communities are most often termed as minorities and categorized into three forms. The first is national minorities which include the traditional occupants of the nation. However, they are also believed to have come into existence as a result of the arrival of a new religion or converting to an alien religion to form their unique identity. The second is immigrant ethnicities who left their nation-state in search of livelihood and settled down at a different territory where they established immigrant connections with the inhabitants of same ethnic groups. The third is the refugee groups which though are analogous to the immigrant groups however the difference between the two lies in the former’s occupation of a different territory due to the conditional settlements in their primary inhabiting territory.

Paul Brass (1991) discusses three ways of defining ethnic groups: a) in terms of objective attributes, b) by reference to subjective feelings and c) in relation to behaviour. The first definition implies that there are some distinguishing *objective cultural features* that separate one group from the other—language, territory, religion, dress etc. All these are called *ethnic markers* through which distinctions between one ethnic group and another are emphasized and these are maintained. So, while the ethnic groups may interact with one another for the purpose of, say, economic activity, the objective ethnic markers ensure the continuity of separate group identity. The second aspect, i.e. presence of subjective feelings implies the existence of an *ethnic self-consciousness*. As mentioned earlier, at the base of ethnic affinity lies real or assumed common identity. The important thing to keep in mind is that the fact of common descent is not as important as the belief in it. It is not what is that is critical but *what people perceive*. In other words, ethnicity is a subjective construct, it is how we see ourselves. The third dimension, namely, the behavioural one, points to the existence of concrete, specific ways in which ethnic groups do or do not behave in relation to, or in interaction with other groups. In this sense, the normative behaviour of an ethnic group may include practices related to kinship, marriage, friendship, rituals etc. Thus, an ethnic group is a collectivity which is perceived by others in society as being different in terms of language, religion, race, ancestral home, culture etc., whose members perceive themselves as different from others and who participate in shared activities built around their actual or mythical common origin and culture. On the basis of these variables a group can be ranged from being barely ethnic to fully ethnic. It is a collectivity within a larger society characterised by elements like real or imaginary common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements such as kinship patterns, religious affiliations, language or dialect forms, etc. Also imperative is some consciousness of kind among the group members. Consequently, most definitions of ethnicity and ethnic groups focus on objective and involuntary external markers, as well as, subjective and voluntary internal consciousness as its major elements.

The concept of ethnicity suggests that it is a process through which members of a certain group or community identify themselves and there are no ascribed territorial boundaries of ethnic groups. This may mean that ethnic movements erupt only because of the threat to shared attributes such as language, culture or identity. This sense of ‘oneness’ defines the ethnicity of a group based on collective identity; they have the potential to collectively strive for shared interests.

10.8 THE EMERGENCE OF ETHNIC MOVEMENTS

Inequality encountered by any individual, group or community which is endorsed by the government may incite them to erupt collectively against it and this marks the beginning of an ethnic movement. Ethnic movements do not just arise due to the failure to meet their economic or political demands, but what also sparked them is the threat to their distinct social identity (Hechter & Okamoto 2001). Policies during the colonial times as well as the modern policies implemented by the government used ethnic elements such as race, language, culture, etc. to

classify ethnic groups for the differential treatment. However this idea of unequal treatment intensified and convinced these groups to establish even broader identities.

Evidently, disparities among various ethnic groups tempted them for a joint action, and political break-ups were the causal factor for their movements. Disruption in the conventional functioning of society due to the shifting of power produces political opportunities. Any crisis in the country produces an environment for the ethnic elites to persuade ethnic groups to take part in uprisings. Except the transitions in power, there are other aspects of political interventions responsible for the rising of ethnic movements in the country. However, the state-politics is not the only cause factor of ethnic movements. There are other causal factors also that contribute equally to this kind of uprising. For example, constructing a hierarchy among various ethnic communities, which is a social construction, may result in the suppression of one by the other. Also there is a competition among various ethnic groups in economic markets as well as other institutions, which amplifies ethnic boundaries and consequently gives rise to a movement (Olzak 1992).

From the above discussions, we can derive several causal factors which led to the emergence of ethnic movements in India such as modernisation, political economy, inter community conflict, competition for resources, relative deprivation, social hierarchy, cultural gap, and so on.

10.9 MAJOR FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ETHNIC MOVEMENTS

The rising ethnic tension in India has grabbed the attention of Indian sociologists to highlight the factors responsible for such tensions. Scholars have highlighted diverse factors responsible for ethnic movements in India. For example Rajni Kothari (1988) emphasizes that ethnic tension is the consequence of modernisation. Like him, Gyanendra Pandey (1990) and Harjot Oberoi (1994) consider ethnic conflict as an outcome of modernity and claimed that India in the past was free from the nuances of identity. However Omveldt (1990) opposed the romanticizing aspect of traditional India for the reason that hierarchy has always been a dominating feature of Indian society and the claim that multiculturalism is a feature of Indian society is a myth. The crucial causal factors of ethnic movements in India are:

- 1) The extreme competition for economy, the passion to safeguard age-old culture and the diverse cultural and linguistic groups.
- 2) Unequal economic development which lead to the underdevelopment of certain groups and their marginalisation.
- 3) Politicizing caste and religion, the chief components of identity formation, by political leaders for their political interests.
- 4) There was growing concern among both linguistic and religious ethnic groups about their assimilation into the mainstream, which was seen as a threat to their ethnic identity.

- 5) The defective developmental policies created a feeling of alienation among the ethnic communities which further forced them to dislocate from their traditionally occupied territory thus bringing miseries in their lives.

Box 10.1

The origin and resurgence of ethnicity lie in intergroup contact, that is, when different groups come into one another's sphere of influence. Of course, the shape it takes depends on the conditions in that society. The second point is that ethnicity is used to meet the present demands of survival for the oppressed groups. When subjugated groups find it difficult to tolerate the dominance of others and make efforts to improve their position, ethnicity is generated.

10.10 TYPOLOGY OF ETHNIC MOVEMENTS

As mentioned previously, ethnicity is an ongoing social construction process through which ethnic groups keep sprouting from time to time. This creates a kind of majority-minority duality depending upon the structure of ethnic groups. Such a typology of ethnic groups is a two-dimensional process: one where a distinction is made between majority and minority movements or a distinction among various groups based on class; the second dimension pertains to the ethnocentric movements wherein ethnic minorities with a common identity strive to raise their position through transcending the boundaries. To elucidate further, we will now turn to the types of ethnic movements, which is two-fold.

10.10.1 Ethnic Majority Movements

Dominated by ethnic majorities, this form of movement can be classified into four types. The first group-focussed movement, which is an ethnocentric group movement, intends to promote the interests of their group. The second type of this movement involves those majority groups who occupy a lower place within the hierarchical order of the majority groups. The third type of movement, an issue-focussed movement, considers factors which bring in change in the society through promoting certain issues such as peace, social cohesion, etc. The fourth type of movement is a group-focussed collaborative movement intended to uplift the ethnic minorities.

Ethnic majorities, unlike minorities, do not follow a conscious process of developing collective identities. They instead have a national identity or sometimes identified through their religion. The majority movements are blatantly hostile towards others especially the minorities. This hostility in the majority movement considers ethnic minorities as a threat to their socio-political and socio-cultural status. This diminishes the network ties between the majority and minority groups which further creates 'Us-Them' duality within the ethnic structure. As a result, majority groups perceive minorities as their opposites rather than potential collaborators. A common example of this type of movement is the Naga Movement of Manipur led by one of the major ethnic communities.

The Naga revolt started in 1950 and this is one of the oldest ethnic majority movements in India. The revolt has its origin in Manipur which comprises diverse ethnic groups such as Nagas, Meteis, Kukis, and so on. The existence of these various ethnic groups are the main cause of ethnic insurgency however primarily the main cause has been the demand for autonomy and thus Naga movement is

also referred to as secessionist movement. The demand for the formation of a separate state arose due to the internal territorial dispute between Nagas and Kukis after the formation of 7 North-Eastern States. At the same time and following the formation of 7 states, Meitei tribes opposed the formation of separate states. They instead demanded a common territory for all. The dispute among all these tribes has led to communal conflict among them and thus, Nagas and Kukis changed their faith by turning to Christianity while Meiteis followed Hinduism. The protests usually take the form of strike calls and other forms of non-violent agitations. After 1997, both Nagas and Kukis demanded a separate statehood and this has resulted in confusion among various ethnic groups in the Manipur. There is a continuity of this conflict over the formation of separate state even in the present times also.

Bodo movement is yet another example of this type of ethnic movement. Initiated in Assam during the colonial times, Bodo movement strengthened into an extremist assertion during 1980s. The main causes that lead to the rise of Bodo movement include discrimination and biasness faced by the Bodo community from the dominant community. Leaders of this movement demanded a separate statehood because they considered Bodos as ethnically distinct from other inhabitants of Assam. In 1960, the coming of Assam Official Language Bill was seen as a threat to the linguistic identity of Bodos. This led to violent mass movements and it is for this reason also that Bodo Community demanded an autonomous territory. The intention was to divide Assam into two equal halves. In 1993, the failure to fulfil the demands of Bodo community resulted in mass agitation. The situation further worsened due to the atrocities of Bodoland Security Forces. Ethnic cleansing by the armed forces gave the movement a communal turn which resulted in the death of many and many left homeless. Conflict continued until an accord was signed in 2003 between the armed rebels and the state which weakened the intensity of conflict. However, no such progress was witnessed in terms of safeguarding the identity and language of the Bodo community.

10.10.2 Ethnic Minority Movements

Dominated by ethnic minorities, this type of movement entails both 'issue' and 'group' oriented movements. The group-oriented movement is channelized toward the developmental aspects of ethnic minorities. Examples of this type of movement include civil rights movement, separatist movement, inter-sectional movement, and so on. Ethnic minorities are a secluded group in terms of economic advantages however there are exceptions to it. Despite some being economically well-off, they are discriminated due to their status.

In addition, their identity is determined on the basis of their class and the place where movement takes place. Such movements comprise people from ethnic minority community and therefore intended for the interests of oppressed groups of people. They have weaker or no network ties within the society as a result of which they are always under the threat of being dominated by the majority. However, primarily the issues which are causal factors for minority movements include social hierarchy, sub-ordination, social exclusion, fewer resources, and so on. Though in India, there have been no such movements on the part of the ethnic minorities such as Muslims except the Muslims in the State of Jammu and Kashmir who demand for an autonomous and liberal state.

10.10.3 Mixed Majority-Minority Movements

This kind of ethnic movement involves both ethnic majorities and minorities. In these movements, the minorities participate in large number in the movements of majorities and vice-versa. This kind of movement is also called as solidarity movement since the groups in the binaries organise movements for the interests of other group. To elaborate, the ethnic majorities organise movements in support of minorities while as minorities support and organise movements for majorities. However, there is always a tension in terms of majority-minority divide when both the groups merge to support a movement. The causal factors for such tension include the factors such as hierarchy, culture, power, motives behind organising movements, and so on. However people participating in such movements will have different aims as a result of which such movements are prone to internal clashes the basis of which can primarily be resource allocation and leadership. This type of movement entails struggle for representation and/or leadership of a particular territory inhabited by both ethnic majority and minority.

Other than the three forms of ethnic movements discussed above, there can also be mixed minority and mixed majority movements. Mixed minority movement comprises participants from various minority groups based on the internal hierarchical order. Such mixed minority movement is jointly organised by various minorities over issues where the participating members are similar to each other in terms of being underprivileged and ignored by the ethnic majorities. On the other hand, mixed majority movements involve participants from various ethnic majority groups within the hierarchical structure in the majority group.

Check Your Progress 2

i) What are the six standard principles for a group to be called as an ethnic group?

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ii) The causal factor for ethnic movements primarily is

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iii) According to Rajni Kothari, ethnic tension is the consequence of hierarchy.
True () False ()

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iv) Mention two major types of ethnic movements.

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10.11 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have dealt with two major movements in India, that is, tribal and ethnic movements. The tribal movements were more oriented towards the protection of their land and forest area as well as culture from the clutches of British. The contemporary status of tribals is the outcome of the rebellious movements that took place since late 18th century. Tribal people resisted all forms of suppression and exploitation by zamindari system, politicians, British officers or other representatives of the suppressors. The failure of the government to protect the resources of tribal communities forced them to organise movements against them. This unit offers different phases of tribal movements in India, the nature of these movements and their importance. It also traces the causal factors for the uprising of tribals. At the same time, the unit also presents a clear picture of ethnic conflicts in India. It elucidates how ethnic movements started in India. Ethnicity is considered as a social construct; therefore, identities based on ethnicity cannot be construed as natural. And for this reason, the unit offers the causal factors of ethnic movements in India which includes factors such as economic, political and cultural factors which determine the identity of a particular ethnic group. Ethnic movements were mostly against the hierarchical system existent within the ethnic structure comprising the ethnic majorities and minorities. They were organised to safeguard the cultural and political identities of ethnic groups and do not pose any threat to the nation.

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10.13 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Tribal movements are social movements organized against the government practices that affect the livelihood and overall structure of the tribal communities.
- ii) False
- iii) Violent movements and non-violent movements
- iv) 1855

Check Your Progress 2

- i) 1) Community name,

- 2) Common ancestry,
 - 3) Shared historical memories,
 - 4) Shared culture,
 - 5) Definite territory
 - 6) Group cohesiveness
- ii) Political Break-ups
- iii) False
- iv) 1) Ethnic majority movements
2) Ethnic minority movements

Further Readings

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