



Block 2

Institutions and Processes

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UNIT 4 VILLAGE INDIA*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Indian Village: Myth and Reality
- 4.3 Village as a Social Unit
 - 4.3.1 Caste System and Kinship Networks
 - 4.3.2 Little Traditions and Great Traditions
- 4.4 Village as an Economic Unit
 - 4.4.1 Economic Relationship between Village and the Outside World
- 4.5 Village as a Political Unit
 - 4.5.1 Panchayati Raj System
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 References
- 4.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the nature of villages in Indian society;
- describe village as a social unit as well as the caste system and traditions that exist in village society;
- explain the village economy both in the pre-colonial and post-colonial India; and
- examine village as a political unit in relation to the state and its transition from pre-colonial to post-colonial period and also the present Panchayati Raj system.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous block we have examined Indian society as civilization, as a colony and as a nation-state. The previous block attempted to look at India in a broad sense by examining the nature of the society not only in terms of its essential elements and its civilizational heritage but also in terms of the various changes that came about due to colonialism and the influence of modern institutions and values.

In this unit, we are going to look at the village societies and culture as they exist in India. India still lives in villages as more than sixty percent of the population even today reside in rural areas and depend on agriculture and related professions. We are going to examine village as a social, economic and political unit, along with the caste system, the interactions between Little and Great Traditions, and Panchayati Raj system. The colonial period witnessed and brought large scale

*Contributed by Uzma Azhar, Independent Scholar

changes in political, economic and social spheres which had an effect on rural life as well.

Even though growth of urbanism and rise of cities attracted rural population to shift to cities, village as an entity continues to be important in the social, cultural, political and economic landscape of India. The centrality of village in Indian society can be gauged from the number of village studies in the 1950s and 60s. These studies give us some insights on village as social unit.

4.2 INDIAN VILLAGE: MYTH AND REALITY

With regard to Indian village we have a lot of myths, let us look at those beliefs and their realities in detail.

India's village can be traced far back in history which creates a sense of timelessness and continuity. The *Arthashastra* (400 BCE-200AD) provides us with a classification of the king's duties related to the administrative affairs of the village. In the medieval times Al Biruni's *Kitab al Hind* (early eleventh century) gives us an account of the caste occupation based organisation in the village.

British colonial administrative view of India was based on the category of 'village'. The perspective developed and forwarded was that India was primarily composed of villages which were self-sufficient and independent. The writings of James Mill and Charles Metcalfe and their notion of the Indian village community influenced the later scholars of Indian village. Metcalfe in 1810 had said that, 'the Indian village communities were little republics, having nearly everything they wanted within themselves and almost independent of foreign relations. They seemed to last where nothing else lasted. Dynasty after dynasty tumbled down; revolution succeeded revolution but the village community remained the same' (quoted in Cohn, 1987:213). This was similar to Thomas Munro's 'mini republics' description for the Indian villages. Although Metcalfe's assessment of the Indian village was not shared by all colonial administrators, it nonetheless became the most accepted and dominant representation of India. In the colonial discourse, the Indian village was described as a self-sufficient community which had everything within its periphery. Caste system through its division of labour provided this view a practical functionality which meant communal ownership of land was marked by a functional integration of various occupational groups in the village. The famous attributes of Indian civilization of timeless continuity, simplicity and social harmony were attributed to the village. 'Each village was an inner world, a traditional community, self-sufficient in its economy, patriarchal in its governance, surrounded by an outer one of other hostile villages and despotic governments.' (Inden, 1990:133).

B. H. Baden-Powells' three volumes of *The Land System of British India* (1892) were not just a compilation of data but had a series of arguments about the nature of Indian village and its resources in relation to the state and its demand over these resources. Despite several research studies by Henry Maine and Baden-Powell on Indian villages that discussed village level conflict and regional variations of villages in terms of both structure and culture, the categorical and conceptual thinking about villages remained fixed on harmony and wholeness. This directed attention away from internal politics and conflicts at village level.

Also aspects of inequality, patterns of wealth distribution and divisiveness remained unattended. In the later decades of the nineteenth century we also find several emerging problems of famine, riots, land alienation and violence in the rural economy which deeply troubled the colonial masters, shaking their somewhat simplistic understanding of village India.

In many ways, even for the Indian nationalists, the idea of village as a representative of authentic native life was derived from the same kind of imagination. Though Gandhiji was careful enough not to glorify the decaying village of British India, he nevertheless celebrated the 'assumed' simplicity and authenticity of village life, as being representative of Indian-ness, an image largely derived from colonial representations of the Indian village. For Gandhi, India's soul lived in her villages. He imagined that every village would be a republic or panchayat, self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs (*Gram Swaraj*). He however also admitted it as being a dream, hence not practical in reality. For B. R. Ambedkar, village was 'a cesspool of factionalism and den of inequity' due to the practices of caste system.

Box 1: Views of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru on Indian villages

Mahatma Gandhi in his letter to Shri Jawaharlal Nehru on October 5, 1945 originally written in Hindi expressed his views on village, in general and specially in India. He wrote "..... I am convinced that if India is to attain true freedom and through India the world also, then sooner or later the fact must be recognised that people have to live in villages, not in towns, in huts, not in palaces. Crores of people will never be able to live in peace with each other in towns and palaces. They will then have no recourse but to resort to both violence and untruth. I hold that without truth and nonviolence there can be nothing but destruction for humanity. We can realise truth and non-violence only in the simplicity of village life....."

Jawaharlal Nehru, in his reply to Babu's letter, wrote amongst other things, that, "The whole question is how to achieve this society and what its content should be. I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody truth and non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent".

(*The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. IV. Selected Letters General Editor Shriman Narian. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. pp. 98-101).

In the early 1950s, many social scientists, many of whom were trained in the western universities or from the West, initiated field studies. The Economic Weekly (which later became Economic and Political Weekly) in the period between October 1951 and May 1954 published a series of short essays on individual villages, being studied by different anthropologists. These essays were later put together by M.N. Srinivas in the form of a book with the title *India's Villages* in 1955. The year 1955 saw some very serious studies on Indian Villages: McKim Marriot's book *Village India* appeared in the same year. The first volume of *Rural Profiles* by D.N. Majumdar also appeared in 1955. Full length study of a village near Hyderabad, *Indian Village* by S.C. Dube was also published in the same year.

Village Studies in India were contested by anthropological studies. Beteille, for example, argued ‘at least as far back in time as living memory went, there was no reason to believe that the village (he studied) was fully self-sufficient in the economic sphere (Beteille, 1996:136-7). Similarly Srinivas too contested the colonial notion of the Indian village being a completely self-sufficient republic. The village, he argued, ‘was always a part of a wider entity. (Srinivas, 1960:10).

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Mention two British and two Indian scholars and the main themes of their work on Indian Villages.

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In the next section we will be looking at Indian village as a social, economic and political unit in detail and also would be discussing how ‘independent’ Indian villages existed and how outside network of relations had an effect on rural life.

4.3 VILLAGE AS A SOCIAL UNIT

Village social life is organised around caste, kinship, economy, politics and religion. People’s social lives are mostly confined to their villages, their livelihoods and lives revolve around the rural environment and resources. The village is thus a point of prestige and personal identity. Along with caste, class or locality, village provides an important source of identity to its residents. At the same time the village is not an isolated unit, fairs, festivals and other celebrations required village to connect ritually with the wider world. In case of North Indian villages, the practice of village exogamy links the village in kinship and affinal relationships to other villages. According to Srinivas, an insult to one’s village had to be avenged like an insult to oneself, one’s wife, or one’s family (Srinivas, 1976:270).

Village studies from M.N. Srinivas’s study of the Coorgs (1952) to A.M. Shah and I.P. Desai (1988)’s works discuss how the solidarity marks inter-caste and intra-caste relations, to maintain stability within the village. Similarly, Dube argued that though Indian villages varied greatly in their internal structure and organisation, in their ethos and world-view, and in their life-ways and thought-ways; village communities all over the Indian sub-continent had a number of common features. The village settlement, as a unit of social organisation, represented a kind of solidarity which was different from that of the kin, the caste, and the class. Each village was a distinct entity, had some individual mores and usages, and possessed a corporate unity. Different castes and communities inhabiting the village were integrated in its economic, social, and ritual pattern by ties of mutual and reciprocal obligations sanctioned and sustained by generally accepted conventions. Notwithstanding the existence of groups and factions inside

the settlement, people of the village could, and did, face the outside world as an organised, compact whole (Dube,1960:202).

Activity 1

How is India's village represented in popular films? Was it seen as divided or depicted as having a collective unity? Share your thoughts with your fellow learners at the study centre.

Srinivas (1955), Dube (1955) and earlier Wisner (1936) emphasised on the unity of the village. Some of the anthropologists explicitly contested the unity thesis while others qualified their arguments by recognising the conflicts within the village and the ties that villagers had with the outside world. For instance, Beteille had argued that his study of village 'Sripuram as a whole constituted a unit in a physical sense and, to a much lesser extent, in the social sense' (Beteille, 1996:39).

Among those who nearly rejected the idea of the communitarian unity were Lewis (1958) and Bailey (1960). F.G. Bailey, for example provided a radical critique of the 'unity-reciprocity' thesis and offered an alternative perspective. Stressing on the coercive aspects of caste relations, Bailey (1960) says that the degree of interdependency and harmony between castes in the caste system is highly exaggerated. Since interdependency means reciprocity and consequently some degree of equality, that is not the case when we analyse caste system and relationship between castes. He says that the "the system works the way it does because the coercive sanctions are all in the hands of a dominant caste. There is a tie of reciprocity, but it is not a sanction of which the dependent castes can make easy use" (Bailey, 1960:258).

4.3.1 Caste System and Kinship Networks

The world of caste society is based on hierarchy. People were divided into higher or lower groups based on birth, their food, their dresses, ornaments, customs and manners were all ranked in an order of hierarchy. The first three *Varna*, namely, Brahmins (the priests or men of learning), Kshatriyas (rulers and warriors) and *Vaishyas* (traders) were regarded as *dvijas* or the twice born. The fourth category was that of Shudras, composed of numerous occupational castes that were regarded as relatively 'clean' and were not classed as "untouchables". In the fifth major category were placed all the "untouchable" castes. Within each category there were several sub-groups (*jatis* or sub-castes), which could be arranged in a hierarchical order within them. The empirical studies pointed out that 'in fact only the two opposite ends of the hierarchy were relatively fixed; in between, and especially in the middle region, there was considerable room for debate regarding mutual position' (Srinivas, 1994:5). Mutual rank was uncertain and this stemmed from the fact that mobility was possible in caste' (Srinivas, 1976:175).

Attempts to claim a higher ritual status through, what Srinivas called sanskritisation, was not a simple process, and could not be achieved only through rituals and life-style imitation. The group had to also negotiate it at the local power structure. Similarly, stressing secular factors, 'There was a certain amount of overlap between the twin hierarchies of caste and land. The richer landowners generally came from such high castes as Brahmins, and Lingayats while the

Harijans contributed a substantial number of landless labourers. In contrast to the wealthier household, the poor one was almost invisible (Srinivas, 1976:169).

4.3.2 Little Traditions and Great Traditions

Any study of the religion of Indian village show double processes working simultaneously between the religious beliefs and practices of the village and the wider Indian civilization. McKim Marriott, takes the concepts of ‘great tradition’ and ‘little tradition’ from Robert Redfield (1955) and has given the terms universalisation (elements of village culture being incorporated into a wider regional or even larger society) and parochialization (cultural elements of a pan-Indian nature filtering down to the village level through various modes of communication such as story-telling and folk drama) respectively to refer to the two aspects of this double process of interaction between the little and great traditions.

M.N. Srinivas’ (1950) concept of Sanskritisation also shows the interaction between religion at the local level and all India Hinduism which is *varna* based. Orthodox sanskritic elements travel from the higher castes to the lower castes. Modern western technology — railways, printing press, radio, films and now, television have also helped in the spread of Sanskritisation.

Sanskritisation is also about ‘universalization’ or identification with the larger religion, the identification of a local God or Goddess with some deity of the Hindu pantheon. Thus among the Coorgs, Ketrappa is identified with the Vedic deity Kshetrapala while the local cobra deity is identified with Subramanya or Skanda, the warrior son of Shiva. This helped the Coorg religious community to become incorporated in the wider Hindu religious community. Apart from festivals and deities, another important aspect of the religion of the village community is pilgrimage. Pilgrimage centres have attracted people from distant places in India. In traditional India, temple towns and sacred cities like Gaya, Mathura, Ajmer, Varanasi, Puri, Tirupathi and Amritsar attracted pilgrims even though roads were very poor and unsafe. Thus we see a continuous interaction between the little and great tradition in the religion of the village.

Caste endogamy (marriage within caste) and village exogamy (marriage outside village) were widely practiced. Relations outside the village meant travel to those areas where kins/ relatives lived at the time of festival or special occasions.

Social networks of the village through caste, kinship, marriage meant social relations with the outside world and thus, villages were not isolated units socially.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Explain the processes of universalization and parochialization.

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ii) What do you understand by the term village exogamy?

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4.4 VILLAGE AS AN ECONOMIC UNIT

Indian village as an economic self-sufficient unit was a long held myth. Even for Marx, Indian village represented a different kind of economic system — the Asiatic mode of production — which combined agriculture with production. The distinctiveness of the system, he believed also contributed to the unchanging and stifling character of society. For him, colonialism leading to class based stratification would bring positive changes for Indian society.

The impression that the village in pre-British India was economically self-sufficient was created by the existence of the *jajmani* system (relationship of reciprocity of economic exchange between landlords and peasants over generations), where payment was in kind/ grains (absence of monetisation), and the poor communications which limited the flow of goods.

It was William and Charlotte Wiser (1936/1969) who had conceptualised the social relationships among caste groups in the Indian village in the framework of ‘reciprocity’ in their study of Western UP village of Karimpur in the 1930s, regarded as one of the earliest work on the ethnographic study of village life in rural India, and of the *jajmani* system,.

Kathleen Gough’s study of Kumbapettai (1989) village in Tanjore, Andre Beteille’s study of Tamil village of Sripuram (1965), demonstrate how the structures of traditional caste hierarchy were getting replaced by class based categories of stratification. Gough (1989), over a period of three decades, studied caste and class relations and found that the castes of Brahmins, Non- Brahmins and Adi-Dravidas were also owners, tenants and laborers. The new classes of petty bourgeoisie, independent entrepreneur and semi proletariat came up, with the commercialisation of agriculture, achievement and skill criteria came up instead of the ascription based categories.

4.4.1 Economic Relationship between Village and the Outside World

Village markets that are to be distinguished from capitalist markets not only serve an economic purpose but also political, recreational and social purposes. The weekly markets or *Haats* that exist all over rural India from ancient times form major links with neighbouring villages and towns. They are important nodes for drawing in goods not available locally including, silver and gold which were essential for weddings in rural India. The annual camel fair in Pushkar, is an example of a rural market that has existed from times immemorial. The institution of weekly markets are cultural institutions with significance beyond mere

economic exchange and still prevail even though considerable improvements in transport and communication have made towns with regular markets accessible to villagers.



(A cattle fair in a village which attracts many buyers and sellers who come from afar (photo credit: Kiranmayi Bhsuhi)

The institution of caste based specialisation means that only some people can do certain tasks, like only those of potter caste can make pots, those of blacksmith caste can make iron implements and so on. All the artisan and servicing castes did not live within a single village, especially in the case of the smaller settlements. Certain castes provide services to a number of villages and were shared amongst the villages like, barbers, priests, doctors, etc. Again the urban sector depends on the rural hinterlands for its basic needs of food grain, raw materials for processed food, and handicrafts.

The village market became linked to the formal market networks when the capitalist system penetrated the rural areas. The availability of new economic opportunities differed in different villages especially with processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, which made the village a part of the wider economic system.

Following are some examples from the relevant case studies:

- i) S.C. Dube's *Indian Village* (1955) was the first full length study of a village, Shamirpet. It devoted one full chapter to the nature of changes coming in rural life which include increasing economic ties with the city of Hyderabad, even for social groups like the washerman.
- ii) McKim Marriot in the study of Kishan Garhi in Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh (1955) gives an elaborate description of interaction between the people of different villages. He talks about how castes of Brahman priests, barbers, potters, carpenters, washermen and sweepers who live in Kishan Garhi go out to serve hereditary patrons (*Jajmans*) in some fifteen other villages and derive about one half of their income from these outside patrons.

Traders, wage workers living in Kishan Garhi regularly traveled many miles of the country side to other areas.

- iii) M.N. Srinivas in his study of village Rampura in Karnataka (1955) observes how World War-II brought increased cash for the dominant landowning Okkaliga caste with wartime rationing and shortages, which encouraged black marketeering. The profits of the wartime were used in different ways, as village was electrified, two rice mills were set up, bus lines were also started which made contact with Mysore City much easier.
- iv) Kathleen Gough's study of Kumbapettai village (1955), situated in the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu, describes how dominant Brahmin groups migrated to towns for education and employment and the immigration in Kumbapettai of lower castes from the neighbouring and less fertile areas was responsible for Kumbapettai coming in contact with the wider economic system.
- v) M.S.A. Rao in his study of Yadavpur (1974), a village situated on the fringe of Delhi, observed that growth of the city of Delhi created diverse opportunities of urban employment in sectors like gardening, dairy and poultry farming, trading, transport, etc.

Finally, we can conclude that the Indian villages were not economically self-sufficient even in the British times. Processes of industrialisation and urbanisation which began with the British colonial rule and gained further impetus after independence have made the village a part of the wider economic network. Rural economy has been even more affected with the planned development and welfare programs being introduced by the government.

In India, no two villages are same, even though they may share some similarities on various socio-economic scales. Welfare and development programs aimed at co-operative banking, commercial farming, Green Revolution techniques of farming, democratic processes, growth of Self-Help Groups for women, and various other progressive development programs by government have been attempted as village became the template for nation building exercise in post-independence India.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Briefly mention two studies by Indian scholars explaining economic ties of villages with the outside world.

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4.5 VILLAGE AS A POLITICAL UNIT

Many ethnographic studies, based on fieldwork, have explained that the Indian village have always been a part of the wider society and civilisation and not self-sufficient units.

British administrators in the early nineteenth century described Indian villages as 'little republics' with their simple form of self-government and almost no interference from the higher political authority. The state only demanded young men to serve in the wars and also claimed a share in the produce of the land as revenue for the state. This description of Indian villages was over-simplified and stated that the villages functioned unconcerned about who occupied the throne in the kingdoms of which they were a part territorially. The assumption that in pre-British India the village was autonomous politically (i.e. roughly the period just before the consolidation of British rule in India) except for paying tax to the local chief or the king and providing young men for wars is incorrect. The relationship between the king and his subjects was a complex one. There were several duties performed by the king towards his subjects. Roads, tanks and canals for irrigation were built along with temples. He also granted gifts of land to learned and pious Brahmins. The king was the head of all caste groups and panchayats. Any disputes regarding mutual caste rank and other inter-caste conflicts were ultimately settled by him. This task was not confined to just the Hindu rulers but even the Mughal kings and feudal lords settled questions affecting a caste.

In pre-British India, the villages enjoyed an active relationship with the State (mostly the Princely States or the Native States). The common people were concerned about who occupied the throne as they preferred a king who would protect them from raiding troops and thugs. If the chief or king belonged to a dominant local caste, his fellow caste members would help him in a crisis. It was not an unequal relationship with the kings as villagers could rebel and support a rival to the throne. The villagers could also migrate collectively in response to oppressive rule. If such mass-migration took place, the ruler lost out on revenue as land was available for settlement while labour was scarce. At the same time villages enjoyed a significant amount of independence as well as discreetness from the higher levels of the political system due to the absence of roads and poor communication. In day-to-day matters, the kings let the villagers govern themselves. The dominant caste formed the village panchayat to exercise authority in local matters, settled inter-caste disputes and maintained law and order in the village.

The relationship between the village and the ruler changed with the British colonial rule. British established an effective administration as development of communications followed the political occupation. Power of the village panchayat was greatly reduced by the system of modern law courts as major disputes and criminal offences were now settled there. Other government employees like the police, revenue officials, etc. came to the village.

4.5.1 Panchayati Raj System

The introduction of parliamentary democracy and adult franchise has made the village even more fully integrated with the wider political system in the post-

Independent era. In the present system, villagers elect members of local bodies like the Gram Panchayat and also elect members of the state legislature and Parliament. During election campaigns, regional and national political parties become active in the village and mobilise support for their parties. As we have discussed previously, government policies and programs like the Community Development Schemes affect the village.

The study of Rajasthan village, Devisar (1975) by Anand Chakravarti analysed concepts of power and authority and studied how land reforms and Panchayati Raj based political processes influenced and brought changes in social and political relations in the village.

The 73rd amendment of 1992 introduced SC/ ST reservation as well as 1/3rd reservation in seats for women in the Panchayats and made elections compulsory after every five years apart from other provisions, as road towards self-governance. Various schemes could be monitored through the Gram Panchayat bodies.

Although the village is a political unit with an elected panchayat to run the day-to-day administration, it is part of the district or zilla, which is part of the state. The state is part of the Indian Union. There is interaction between these different levels of the political system.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Describe briefly relationship of Indian Village with the State in pre-British India.

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we discussed that although the village has a definable structure and is a clear entity for the villagers themselves, it is also a sub-system within the larger political, economic, social and religious system in which it exists. Socially, the village has never been an isolated unit as caste and kinship ties have extended beyond the village. The continuous interaction between the localised little traditions and the great traditions of Indian civilization take place through the double processes of universalisation and parochialisation. Traditionally, the village was not economically self-sufficient. Essential items like salt, cooking gas, metals, sugarcane, etc., were not produced in most of the villages and they had to visit weekly markets and towns for them. Again every village did not have all the essential artisan and servicing caste and there was mutual dependence between villages for this purpose. Processes of industrialisation and urbanisation since Independence especially, have made the village a part of the wider economic network. Politically, villagers governed themselves in day-to-day matters, but

the payments of revenue was a symbol of the village's dependence on the king, as the king protected against foreign invasions and maintained law and order in the area. Introduction of a uniform law and a centralised administration made the village a part of the wider political system of the country as British brought most of the country under their rule. Introduction of parliamentary democracy and adult franchise increased further the integration of the village with the different levels of the political system.

You may also like to see and hear Prof Jodka give an overview of the village and studies done on them. You may access the link to youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vl4ljMopY>

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4.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Henry Maine and Baden-Powell discussed village level conflict, regional variations of villages in terms of both structure and culture within India

Short essays providing brief accounts of individual villages were put together by M.N. Srinivas in the form of a book titled *India's Villages* in 1955. S.C. Dube published full length study of a village near Hyderabad, *Indian Village* in the same year.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Marriott (1955) refers to processes of universalization (elements of village culture being incorporated into a wider regional or even larger society) and parochialization (cultural elements of a pan-Indian nature filtering down to the village level through various modes of communication such as story-telling and folk drama).
- ii) Village exogamy is practice where marriage was to be with person who is not from the same village and who is outside the village.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) M.N. Srinivas in his study of village Rampura in Karnataka (1955) observes how World War-II brought increased cash for the dominant landowning Okkaliga caste with wartime rationing and shortages which encouraged black marketeering. The profits of the wartime were used for electrification, two rice mills were set up, bus lines were also started which made contact with Mysore City much easier.

Kathleen Gough's study of Kumbapettai village (1955), situated in the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu, dominant Brahmin group migrated to towns for education and employment and the immigration in Kumbapettai of lower castes from the neighbouring and less fertile areas was responsible for Kumbapettai coming in contact with the wider economic system.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Politically, villagers governed themselves in day-to-day matters, but the payments of revenue was a symbol of the village's dependence on the king, as the king protected against foreign invasions and maintained law and order in the area. Villagers also approached King's court for settlement of disputes.

UNIT 5 URBAN INDIA*

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Urbanisation and its Dimensions
 - 5.2.1 Social Process of Urbanisation
 - 5.2.2 Urbanism as a Way of Life
- 5.3 Urbanisation in Pre-independent India
 - 5.3.1 Classification of Traditional Towns
 - 5.3.2 Urbanisation in Ancient and Medieval India
 - 5.3.3 Urbanisation Under Colonialism
- 5.4 Urbanisation in Independent India
- 5.5 Rural-Urban Continuum
- 5.6 Issues of Urbanisation in India
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 References
- 5.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

5.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- explain various dimensions of urban India;
- narrate the history of urbanisation in India;
- examine various facets of urbanisation in Independent India;
- explain the complex interrelationship between the rural and the urban; and
- describe urban problems in India.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

We have discussed different aspects of Indian society so far. In the previous unit, we looked at the Indian villages and in the present unit we are going to discuss urban India. As we know from our discussions in the previous unit, the shift from agriculture to industry escalated with colonialism and brought large scale changes in political, economic and social spheres and led to the rise of modern, especially economic cities such as Kolkata and Mumbai in India. However, one of the misconceptions about urbanisation in India is its association with industrialisation and colonialism, while colonialism did have significant role in urbanisation process; India had a long history of urbanisation. Thus, a section in this unit is devoted to urbanisation in Pre-independent India. Following this section we examine the urbanisation process in post Independent India through its various dimensions. Many conceptualisations of the urban India are from the administrative and planning perspectives that have centred on the spatial and

*Contributed by Uzma Azhar (Independent Scholar), with sections adapted from Unit 4, Patterns of Urbanization in Society in India, ESO-012

demographic aspects of urban centres. Urban centres and urbanisation also have been defined often in relation to rural societies and settlements, this has resulted in the view that the urban and rural are contrasting categories and mutually exclusive. Many sociologists on the other hand were well aware of the dynamics of the categorisation of urban. The Indian society presents a complex picture of the urban and rural scenario. In our section on rural-urban continuum, we shall examine the nature of this complexity and examine how in reality the urban and rural interact and influence each other. We end the unit with brief look at the problems of urbanisation.

5.2 DIMENSIONS OF URBANISATION

Very simply put urbanisation is the movement of people from villages to town/city where economic activities are centred around non-agricultural occupations such as trade, manufacturing industry, administration and others. This movement of people not only transforms new locations in demographic, spatial, occupational sense but it also influences the social condition of life. Louis Wirth believed that urbanism is a way of life and it impacts social relationships and personalities. Let's examine these two dimensions of urbanisation.

5.2.1 Urbanisation as a Social Process

Urbanisation is the process of transformation of rural agriculture based economy to urban trade and service based economy. However no urban centre can materialise without a hinterland that supplies the food to feed the urban non-producers. Thus, one of the key variables that enables the emergence of an urban centre is the production of surplus food and the transition of the rural economy from subsistence production to surplus production. A certain level of technological transformation thus becomes necessary before any urban centre is possible.

Compared to rural settlements urban centres have a larger population, higher population density and greater social differentiation. Most of the people residing in urban centres engage in activities that are not directly related to food production. These activities consist of social, cultural, industrial, commercial, religious, artistic, educational, military, political or administrative functions. Such diverse activities require people having different kinds of skills. This heterogeneity or diversity implies that there is greater social differentiation in the cities: "urban centres are home to rich and poor, rulers and the ruled, buyers and sellers, craftsmen and traders" (Wirth, 1938:360-366).

Urban centres are also associated with centralised political authority and the state that needs to keep a count of the numbers of people in the urban centres for administrative purposes. Urbanism thus gave rise to bureaucracy and a class of people who are administrators on a full time basis. The earliest known class of bureaucrats are the Mandarins of China.

The idea of urbanisation may be made more precise and meaningful when described using the theoretical concepts of diffusion and acculturation. Urbanisation may be understood either as intra -society or inter-society diffusion, that is, urban culture may spread to various parts of the same society or it may cross cultural or national boundaries and spread to other societies. It involves both borrowing and lending. A process complimentary to diffusionist

acculturation, the process whereby, individuals acquire the material possessions, behavioural patterns, social organisation, bodies of knowledge, and meanings of groups whose culture differs in certain respects from their own through direct contact and sometimes political subordination. Thus, urbanisation can happen when two cultures come in contact and also when one is in a superior position to either forcefully or in a benign way impose its culture and way of life on the other. This is the way that western colonisation had introduced urbanisation among the countries that it ruled making urbanisation often synonymous with westernisation both economically and culturally. However urban centres exist in many ancient civilizations based on settlements grown around religion, trade and politics. In India, Varanasi can be seen as an example of what can be called as a sacred complex, while Surat in Gujarat is a trading town and Delhi has always been a politically strategic urban centre. As seen in this light urbanisation is a complex process involving multiple factors.

5.2.2 Urbanism As Way of Life

Louis Wirth in his book *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (1938) writes that living in a city affects the way we interact with each other and it influences our personalities. He writes that the city is characterised by a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals, gives rise to various kinds of social relationships and patterns of behaviour among the city-dwellers. Further, Louis Wirth also argues that the city effects are wider than city itself. Thus, the city draws the surrounding villages and even remote communities into its orbit. In other words, urbanism as a way of life is not peculiar to city-dwellers alone as the influences of the city (i.e., impact of urbanisation) stretch far behind its administrative boundaries. In brief, urbanisation in its demographic sense refers to the trends of growth of the urban population. In societal context and in its sociological sense, Urbanism denotes a distinct way of life typically associated with living in the city and the process of transforming rural ways of life into urban ones. (See: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/louis-wirths-urbanism-as-a-way-of-life.html>)

Urbanisation implies a cultural and social psychological process whereby people acquire the material and non-material culture, including behavioural patterns, forms of organisation, and ideas that originated in, or are distinctive of the city. Although the flow of cultural influences is in both directions – both toward and away from the city – there is substantial agreement that the cultural influences exerted by the city on non-urban people are probably more pervasive than the reverse. Urbanisation seen in this light has also resulted in what Toynbee has called the “Westernisation” of the world, since industrial economy originated in the West and spread across the world through colonisation and the global reach of capitalism.

Activity 1

Have you had a chance to be in a big city and in a village? What was your interaction with strangers in a city and in a village? Write a small note and compare it with your fellow learners in the study centre.

5.3 URBANISATION IN PRE-INDEPENDENT INDIA

Urbanisation in the Indian context is often associated with industrialisation and the coming of the British, there is no doubt that mercantile and trading activities of colonisation spurred industrialisation and commercialisation giving rise to whole set of urban centres; but urbanisation in India is not a modern phenomenon. There have been urban centres throughout Indian history. In fact, the first cities in the subcontinent can be traced back to as early as the Indus Valley Civilization (2500 BCE).

There are several factors that have contributed to the process of urbanisation in India. Agricultural surplus production, which is an outcome technological intervention, is one of the factors which has paved the way for differentiation in occupations and growth of centralised political structures and resultant growth of urban centres. The cities were dependent on the hinterland of villages as source of sustenance from agriculture. Historian, Fernand Braudel writing on the medieval towns of France argues that towns were linked by villages, where, through a system, agricultural surplus was extracted. (Braudel, 1989:182-185) In the Indian contexts too, surplus became source and sustenance for the urban centres. Historian P. K. Basant writes: “Urban centres develop a variety of institutional mechanisms to extract food from villages. This mobilisation of ‘surplus’ might take the form of tribute to an urban deity who might be believed to own the land, the source of all produce. It might take the form of taxes imposed by the king or it might take the form of exchange in return for goods supplied by craftsmen and merchants from the city. Thus, laws, traditions and belief systems backed by military force were used to transfer agricultural produce” (Basant, 2017:11). While agricultural surplus was important for growth of cities, the trading activities had a bearing on the rise of urban centres, especially around trading routes and ports. Equally important were the rise and fall of various kingdoms, empires, principalities in whose wake cities arose and fell. In the sub sections to follow we look at various aspects of urbanisation in ancient, medieval and colonial India, but first let’s look at some categories of towns through history.

5.3.1 Classification of Traditional Towns

There were several kinds of towns in ancient India. The Vastushastra (Treatise on Classical Indian Architecture) has differentiated between several kinds of towns based on their functional specificity such as trade, commerce, manufacturing, administration and military marches. However, the traditional towns can be broadly categorised on the basis of their functional specificities:

- i) **Trading and Manufacturing Towns:** Places termed as *nagar*, *pattana*, *dronamukha*, *kheta*, *nigama* etc. belonged to this category. A *nagar* was an ordinary fortified town with inland trade as an important activity. *Pattana* was a large commercial port situated on the bank of a river or sea. The special feature of the *pattana* was that it was a city of the trading castes (*Vaisya*) and was full of jewels, wealth, silk, perfumes and other articles. *Dronamukha*, *kheta* etc. were also small size trading centres. Again *nigama* was a market town consisting of the artisans and also serving as a resting place for “traders and caravans”.

- ii) **Political or Military Town:** *Rajdhani* was a distinctively planned political town. It was the royal capital. *Durga* was a fortified town equipped with an arsenal and well-stored with food stuffs. Similarly *senamukha* and *shaniya* were also the fortified towns of varied locations and importance.
- iii) **Educational or Pilgrim and Temple Towns:** *Matha* and *Vihara* were the towns based on educational and religious activities. A classic example of this was Nalanda. Again, there were temple towns like Dwaraka, Tirupati, Puri etc. and pilgrim centres like Haridwar, Gaya, Benaras etc.



Temple city of Kashi/Benaras, now Varanasi

(Photo Credit: Marcin Biaek [<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>], from Wikimedia Commons)

After the decay of the Harrapan Civilization new urban centers came up in the Doab region and the area around present day Delhi, Delhi itself saw many layers of urban civilization, including the ancient city of Hastinapur and the subsequent settlements through medieval India and its colonial avatar as the imperial capital city and finally as a National Capital Region.

5.3.2 Urbanisation in Ancient and Medieval India

The distinctive spatial, economic, political and demographic features of urban ancient and medieval India can be described as following:

- 1) **Political and Demographic:** The rise and fall of different political regimes and cultural history of India impacted early processes of urbanisation. In fact, it was the political considerations on which cities emerged in those periods. “The composition of these towns was built around the ruler and his kinsmen and followers, whose principle interests were centered on agricultural activities in their vicinity and the surplus they could extract from these” (Sabarwal 1977:2).
- 2) **Spatial:** An important physical feature of the traditional towns was fortification in the form of a girdle of walls and defensive trenches as well

as the social composition in ancient cities, i.e. the settlement of various castes in separate wards. The location of different activities, for example, lower castes engaged in physical labour lived near the outskirts or walls of the city and higher castes involved in bureaucracy/ administration lived near the fort.

- 3) **Economic and Social:** Although kingdoms rose and fell throughout history, the social and economic institutions of the traditional cities demonstrated considerable stability. Craftsmen and merchants were organised into guilds called *shreni*. In these towns, the guilds based on the occupation of one caste were called *shreni* and the guilds based on different castes and different occupations were called *puga*. The important function in the traditional towns like banking, trading, manufacturing (and to an extent judicial as well), etc. were performed by the guilds, according to Rao (1974).

5.3.3 Urbanisation Under Colonialism

The process of urbanisation entered into a new phase with the coming of European colonial traders to India. The coastal areas as ports-cum-trading centres became important initially for trading purposes and new cities came up in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The nineteenth century saw cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras become political centres as British empire consolidated itself in India. In this period, the process of urbanisation became smooth and widened the structure of economic opportunity had widened the social horizons of people with the introduction and development of new economic and political institutions, new modes of communication such as telegraph, railways, advanced system of roads and waterways. The destruction of traditional cottage and small industries pushed rural artisans and labourers to urban areas for employment, either temporarily or permanently to the urban areas.

New process of urbanisation under colonialism changed urban centres with the spread of education and establishment of new institutions. Jobs like teachers, journalists, lawyers, etc. brought about a new worldview and urban centres gradually grew into centres of new social and political ideas, diverse economic activities and of heterogeneous populations. Various economic opportunities and occupational and social mobility became possible in urban India.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Differentiate between *Shreni* and *Puga*?

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ii) On what basis were traditional towns in ancient India categorised?

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5.4 URBANISATION IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

In India, urban area’s definitional parameters have undergone several changes and modifications over the years. In 1901, main criterion for describing any area or settlement as urban was its administrative set-up and size and not the economic characteristics. Consequently, many of the towns in reality were considered only as overgrown villages. In addition to other administrative and demographic features, in 1961 the ‘urban area’ was redefined taking into account the economic characteristics. The definition adopted in 1961 census was also used in 1971, 1981 then in 1991 and 2001 as well. According to this definition an urban area is: a) a place which is either a municipal corporation or a municipal area, or under a town committee or a notified area committee or cantonment board, or b) any place which satisfies the following criteria of:

- a minimum of 5,000 persons
- at least 75 per cent of the working occupations are non-agricultural
- a density of not less than 1,000 persons per square mile, and
- a place should have certain pronounced urban characteristics and amenities such as newly found industrial areas, large housing settlements, places of tourist importance and civic amenities.

An urban agglomeration forms a continuous urban spread and normally consists of a town and its adjoining urban outgrowth or two or more physically contiguous towns together with contiguous and well organised outgrowths, if any, of such town. (Census Report, 2001).The Census of India (Bhidae, 2017) has broadly categorised urban areas into following types :

- i) Statutory towns: all places with municipality, corporation, cantonment board, notified town area committees, etc. ii) Census towns: all villages with a minimum population of 5000 persons in the preceeding census, at least 75 per cent of male working population engaged in non-agricultural activities and a population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km. iii) Urban Agglomerations (UAs): a continuous urban spread comprising one or more towns. iv) Urban Growths (OGs): areas around a core city or town, such well recognised places like railways colony, university campus, port areas, etc. lying outside the limit of town.

Apart from well defined towns and/or cities, the outgrowths of cities and towns have also been treated as urban agglomerations. At the 1961 census, the concept of ‘town group’ was adopted to obtain a broad picture relating to urban spread.

This was refined in 1971 with the concept of urban agglomeration to obtain better feedback with regard to urban continuity, process and trends of urbanisations and other related matters. This concept without any change or modification has remained operative till 2001 census.

Table 5.1: Classification of centres (Tier-wise)

Population classification	Population) (2001 Census	Example of Cities
Tier-1	100,000 and above	Delhi, Mumbai
Tier-2	50,000 to 99,999	Pune, Jaipur
Tier-3	20,000 to 49,999	Kochi, Agra
Tier-4	10,000 to 19,999	Allahabad, Faridabad
Tier-5	5,000 to 9,999	Raipur, Mysore
Tier-6	less than 5000	Jamnagar, Etawah

Let us look at the different dimensions of urbanisation in independent India.

- 1) **Demographic:** In the Post Independence Period, urban population has significantly increased. Urban population of India has increased from 25.8 million in 1901 to 62.4 million in 1951 and 285.4 million in 2001, Thereby showing more than tenfold increase in total urban population. The total urban population of India, according to census 2001 is more than 10 percent of total urban population of the world.

Table 5.2: Urban populations in relation to the total population

Census Year	Total Population (Million)	Urban Population (Million)	Percentage of urban population to total population
1901	238.3	25.8	10.83
1911	252.1	25.9	10.27
1921	251.3	28.1	11.18
1931	278.9	33.5	12.01
1941	318.6	44.2	13.87
1951	361.0	62.4	17.29
1961	439.2	78.9	17.96
1971	548.1	109.1	19.91
1981	683.3	159.4	23.33
1991	846.3	217.6	25.71
2001	1027.1	285.4	27.78
2011	1210.2	377.1	31.16

Source: Census of India 2011

- 2) **Spatial:** Disparities have marked the Indian urban scenario spatially as well. These disparities emerged mainly due to imbalanced population concentration, regional disparities and sometimes because of the change in the census definition of “urban areas”. In this context we need to mention about two concepts, namely over-urbanisation and sub-urbanisation. When towns or urban areas have certain limitations in accommodating population (eg. Kolkata, Mumbai) providing civic amenities or catering to such needs as schooling, hospitals etc. it is known as over-urbanisation.

Delhi is a typical example (among others) of sub-urbanisation. It means urbanisation of rural areas around the towns characterised by the following features: a) a sharp increase in the ‘urban (non-agricultural) uses’ of land; b) inclusion of surrounding areas of town within its municipal limits, and c) intensive communication of all types between town and its surrounding areas.

- 3) **Economic:** While talking about the economic features of urbanisation in independent India, occupational diversification and migration are major factors. In 1991 around 67 per cent of the total workers were in the agricultural sector. In 2001 only 58 per cent of the total workers have been recorded to be in the agricultural sector. The results from 2001 census clearly suggest a shift in the composition of labour force from a predominantly agricultural to moderately non-agricultural sector. (Census Report, 2001)

Rural distress and unemployment is one of the reasons why urban population is on the increase. Surplus rural labour force gets pushed to urban centres with the hope of getting employment due to the increase of unemployment in the rural areas. The expectation of a variety of glamorous jobs, good housing, medical, educational and communication facilities are the other factors which have pulled sections of the rural population (including the affluent sections) toward the city. The process of migration from village starts when a relative saturation point is reached in the field of agriculture, thus industrialisation should not be taken as prerequisite for urbanisation, a result of an imbalanced land/man ratio in the countryside

- 4) **Socio-cultural:** Towns and cities of India have achieved heterogeneity in terms of ethnicity, caste, race, class and culture. But, migrants have maintained their distinctive cultural traditions in the towns. N.K. Bose (1968: 66) points out that the migrants tend to cluster around people with whom they have linguistic, local, regional, caste and ethnic ties. Many of the Indian towns have a “mixed” character, i.e., they are the capital cities, centres of trade and commerce, important railway junctions etc. The oldest or the ‘core’ area in the city is where older inhabitants stay and on its fringe we find the new immigrants.

In many Indian cities, Lynch (1974) points out, especially traditional cities like Agra, neighbourhoods have remained homogeneous in terms of caste and religious groups. There the untouchable Jatavs caste is concentrated in particular areas called mohallas (ward). But some changes have taken place mostly because of politicisation, spread of education, and occupational diversification. But D’Souza (1974) noticed that in the planned city like Chandigarh neighbourhood has not been developed on the basis of ethnicity,

common interest and other similarities. In this city the religious activities, friendship and educational ties are often outside one's own neighbourhood.

Social stratification takes a new form in the urban independent Indian society. It is assumed that with urbanisation caste transforms itself into class in the urban areas. But caste systems do exist in the cities though with significant organisational differences. For example, Harold Gould (1965) points out that the *rikshawalas* of Lucknow belonging to several religious and caste groups exhibit uniformity in the pattern of interaction and attitudes in respect to their common occupation. Again it has been found that caste has not played a significant role in determining the choice of occupation in the urban areas.

Many inter-caste and inter-religious marriages in the urban areas are happening now than earlier. Though it has been pointed out that joint families are breaking down in the urban areas, studies conducted in several parts of the country also suggest that joint families do exist in the cities among certain castes like Khatris of Delhi and Chettiars of Madras (for details see Kapoor 1965, Singer 1968).

(Source; Unit 4, Patterns of Urbanisation in *Society in India* ESO-012, 2017)

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Describe how Census of India categorises urban India?

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5.5 RURAL URBAN CONTINUUM

We have discussed village and urban India as spatial and social formation separately, as they both have distinct characteristics. However, in reality, especially in India context, urban and rural are not discrete categories, even if they may appear so. Many sociologists suggest that a simple rural-urban dichotomy of population is neither adequate, nor sufficient and is too simplistic. We can well see in our cities that the cultural traits which are rural are very much prevalent and that villagers show the profound impact of city life on them. Many sociologist argue that rural-urban are continuum with gradations of urban and rural characteristics. The sociologist Maclver (1931) believes that though one tends to divide communities in terms of rural and urban, the line of demarcation is not always clear between these two types of communities. There is no sharp demarcation to tell where the city ends and country begins, he argues. Every village possesses some elements of the city and every city carries some features of the village. Redfield (1947) has given the concept of rural-urban continuum on the basis of his study of Mexican peasants. The rapid process of urbanisation through the establishment of industries, urban traits and facilities has decreased the differences between villages and cities.

Rama Krishna Mukherjee (1974) found the rural urban continuum on aspects of migration, family and caste. He writes that out-migration of rural population to urban areas carries with it social organisational elements of the village society. Thus, he found that the caste elements are substantially the same in urban areas and that the extended family structures too continued in the city. Mukherjee while presenting a continuum model argues that the degree of urbanisation is a useful conceptual tool for understanding rural-urban relations. Like Mukherjee O.M. Lynch (1968) has noted in his study of Agra city that there is a caste panchayat like in villages. Rao (2001) has pointed out in the Indian context that although both village and town form a part of the same civilization characterised by institution of kinship and caste system in pre-British India, there are certain specific institutional forms and organisational ways to distinguishing social and cultural life in towns from that of villages. In his book “Modernization of Indian Tradition” (1973) Prof. Y. Singh, has argued that rural-urban are interrelated and structural characteristics of rural society are not totally absent in urban society for that matter it cannot be assumed that there is total absence of urban characteristics in rural society.

Activity 2

If you live in a rural area find out how many of your relatives in the village have migrated to the urban areas. After making this survey, write a note on the cause(s) of their migration.

Or

If you live in an urban area, visit and make notes on migrant neighbourhoods.

In any case the rural and urban societies depend on each other for exchange of goods and services. Cities depend on rural India to supply them with food, agricultural produce, labour, artisans, traditional occupations based labour and skilled artisans etc. The Rural population depends on finished, often industrially produced goods, and for education, recreation, and administrative services.

Box 1: Delhi’s Urban Villages

Delhi is unique in the way it is made of many villages. As the city expanded many village settlements with distinct agricultural practices and its allied social life were engulfed in to Delhi city. They were considered as urban villages or Lal Dora areas, areas which were earlier villages A red thread was tied to mark the boundary by authorities, hence *lal dora*. In 1908 they were classified as *Abadi* land and to be used for non- agricultural purposes. The jurisdiction of the municipal authorities or the urban development is not applicable here. Lal Dora areas are exempted from the building bye laws, and strict construction norms and regulations, as regulated under the Delhi municipal act. The term Lal Dora applies to both Rural & Urban villages and prime areas of Delhi today (though still classified as Lal Dora) operate commercial & high end residential areas like Hauz Khas Village, Lado Sarai, Khidki village, Shahpur Jat, Chhatarpur, etc.

5.6 ISSUES OF URBANISATION IN INDIA

Most of the countries (including India) are experiencing rapid urbanisation. The unplanned urbanisation particularly in developing countries has culminated

several problems. This rapid urbanisation envisages that within the next two to three decades, there will be need for increased demand for basic infrastructure, housing and living facilities in major urban centres. The demand for clean water sanitation, solid waste disposal, sewage for liquid waste, health and transport facilities will grow manifold. The most demanding of the urban challenges undeniably is the challenge posed by poverty; the challenge of reducing exploitation, relieving misery and creating more human condition for urban poor. Rising crime rate due to unemployment and poverty is another issue in urban areas. Rapid urbanisation leads to massive growth of slums followed by misery, poverty, unemployment, exploitation, inequalities, degradation in the quality of urban life. Consequently, the urbanisation process and growth faces many challenges.

We will have a detailed discussion on various aspect of urban India in our elective course 'Urban Sociology'

5.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we started with the concept of urbanisation, its various dimensions and urbanism as a distinct way of life. Then, we have examined the long history of urbanisation in India, from ancient and medieval to its form under the colonial rule. We have also observed the urbanisation process in post Independent India and the factors which have affected its growth and form. Urban centres and urbanisation have been defined often in relation to rural societies and settlements, often resulting in the view that the urban and rural are contrasting categories and mutually exclusive. Under the section, rural-urban continuum, we have observed the nature of this complexity to see how in reality the urban and rural interact and influence each other. In the last section, we discussed briefly the problems affecting urban India.

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5.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) In the ancient and medieval towns, the guilds based on the occupation of one caste were called shreni and the guilds based on different castes and different occupations were called puga.
- ii) The *Vastusastra* (Treatise on Classical Indian Architecture) has differentiated between several kinds of towns based on their functional specificity such as trade, commerce, manufacturing, administration, religion, education and military marches.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Census of India (Bhida, 2017) has broadly categorized urban areas into following types :
 - 1) Statutory towns: all places with municipality, corporation, cantonment board, notified town area committees, etc.
 - 2) Census towns: all villages with a minimum population of 5000 persons in the preceding census, at least 75 percent of male main working population engaged in non-agricultural activities and a population density of at least 400 persons per sq. km.
 - 3) Urban Agglomerations (UAs): a continuous urban spread comprising one or more towns.
 - 4) Urban Growths (OGs): areas around a core city or town, such well recognised places like railways colony, university campus, port areas, etc. lying outside the limit of town.

UNIT 6 LANGUAGE AND RELIGION*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 India: The Land of Religious and Linguistic Pluralism
- 6.3 Language-Religion Interface: Medieval Context
- 6.4 British India and Language
- 6.5 The Constitution and India's Plurality
- 6.6 Language as a Tool of Reorganising State Boundaries
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 References
- 6.9 Specimen Answers to Check your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- give an account of religious and linguistic diversity in India;
- explain the interface of language and religion in the medieval period;
- understand how pluralism of religion and language were addressed in colonial period;
- explain the relationship of constitution with India's plurality; and
- elaborate on how language plays a role in reorganising state boundaries.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we take a look at yet another aspect of India's plural culture which is its religious and language diversity. India is a land of diverse religions. While some of the religions are well organised with a definitive philosophy and orientations, many may lack such structures. Still, all the religions practiced in India have their distinct sets of religious customs, sacred beliefs and taboos. Apart from many indigenous tribal religions that continue to survive in India, the country is also the land of origin for many significant religions of the world, viz. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

In this collage of religious pluralism, one religion that remains the most predominant, is Hinduism. The roots of the Hindu religion can be traced back to the early Vedic period, wherein Sanskrit was the most prominent language of religious behaviour. However, what we know as classical Hinduism today is basically a product of interaction of the Vedic Hindu thought with the non-Aryan cultures and its politicisation in the medieval and the modern epochs.

Today, regionalism, ethnicity and modernity have a bearing upon the interplay between language and religion. So, for example; while the wedding rituals can

*Contributed by Geetanjali Atri, Research Scholar, JNU

be conducted in Sanskrit, the event of blessing the newlyweds by the relatives can be done in Hindi or any other regional languages, while the wedding invitation can still be written in English.

6.2 INDIA: THE LAND OF RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC PLURALISM

In Sociology, pluralism may refer to the diversity of religious and linguistic traditions within the same cultural or social space. The Indian context of religious pluralism is shaped by the co-existence of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, etc. across the length and breadth of the country. Hinduism is the oldest of all living great religions not only of India but across the World. To read more about Hinduism, Hindu and its modern-day derivative Hindutva, you can refer to the Box 1. given below. In the process of social evolution and change, several other religions either originated from India or penetrated into it from outside. While the debates concerning the origin or arrival and a subsequent chronology of religions in India, is a vast topic beyond the purview of this unit, a brief discussion of the same is essential to draw a sketch of religious pluralism in India.

The sixth century B.C. was marked by religious turmoil, resulting from the rigid and complicated practices that had marred Hinduism, like Brahminical exclusivity of religious ceremonies and caste system. Owing to the resultant unrest among the common masses, many sects arose. The most prominent among them were Jainism and Buddhism, both of which emerged in India around 800-600 B.C.E. This makes these the oldest religions being practiced in India after Hinduism.

Box 1: Hindu, Hinduism and *Hindutva*

In linguistic usage, the term Hindu originated with a geographical connotation, in order to refer to the people inhabiting land on the east of the river Sindhu (or Indus in Greek). But, with the advent of Islam in India, the term was used to indicate a religious group contrasting to the Muslim community. Continuing with this approach, even today a Hindu is identified on religious basis. Hinduism is a philosophy concerning religious and cultural practices of the Hindus. It includes Pre-Dravidian, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan religious elements in its fold. The followers of Hinduism believe in ultimate force, which they call as *Brahman*, along with the doctrine of *Dharma* (Duty), *Karma* (good deeds), immortality of *Aatman* (Soul), cycles of rebirth, and *Moksha* (Salvation). With Hinduism, the multiple ways of conceptualising God can be broadly classified as *Nirgun Bhakti* (devotion to a formless God) and *Sagun Bhakti* (devotion to a God in definitive form). These alternative paths of devotion are represented by the various sects of Hinduism, viz. The Saiva, the Sakta, the Lingayat, the Satnami, the Arya Samaj, the Kabirpanthi etc. On the other hand, the term *Hindutva*, as coined by V. D. Savarkar in his pamphlet '*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*' (1923), refers to a political ideology that differentiates everything indigenously Indian from anything that is not, especially in the domain of religion.

Almost six centuries later, Christianity arrived in India. It touched the West coast in the first century of the Christian Era with the arrival of the Syrian Christians.

Later on, much before the Muslim conquest of the country, Islam reached the Western coast of India with the Arab traders. Sikhism is the newest of all religions practiced in India, today. It originated from the pre-independence state of Punjab in around 1500 C.E. with the preaching of Guru Nanak. However, of all these religions, Hinduism continues to be the religion of the majority, as is also evident by the census data of 2011, provided in the table below.

Religion	Estimated Population	Percentage
Hindu	96.62 Crores	79.80
Muslim	17.22 Crores	14.23
Christian	2.78 Crores	2.30
Sikh	2.08 Crores	1.72
Buddhist	84.43 Lakhs	0.70
Jain	44.52 Lakhs	0.37
Other Religion	79.38 Lakhs	0.66
Not Stated	28.67 Lakhs	0.24

Source: Census, 2011

Not just religion, India is remarkably diversified also on the basis of languages. In fact, the linguistic pluralism in the country is just as complex to understand as its religious pluralism. Like there are many sects and other syncretic alternatives to a given religion, similarly there are variations to all significant languages of India, based on region, ethnicity and the language family to which they belong. For instance: The census of India, 2011 mark out some 57 regional and other variations of Hindi language. The languages of India can be classified into four major families – Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic. Of these, Indo-Aryan covers the widest area of the country and is spoken by the largest proportion of its population, especially in the North, East and West. The root language of this family is Sanskrit and its principal spoken languages include Hindi, Bengali, Bihari, Pahari, Gujarati, Bhili, Rajasthani, Konkani, Marathi, Oriya, Assamese, and Punjabi. In the south of India, languages from Dravidian family are predominant, like Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Toda, Telugu, Kodagri, and Badaga. In Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Sikkim and the Himalayan regions of Jammu and Kashmir languages from the Tibeto-Burman family are used, while the population in Meghalaya and some parts Orissa and Bihar uses Austro-Asiatic languages, like Samthali, Bhandari, Koku, Ho, and Savara. For understanding the language classification based on geographical patterns in India, you can also refer to the map below.

Activity 1

Conduct a brief survey of the religious orientation of at least 10 households in your neighbourhood. Ask them about the religion they practice, its beliefs and practices, their significant festivals, pilgrimage centres, and their religiously sanctioned everyday behaviour. Compare this, if possible, with other students at your study centre. This would help you bring out a picture of religious pluralism in your locality.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Name four major religions of the world that originated from India.

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ii) Which are the major religions that are practiced by a large chunk of population in India, but did not originate in the country?

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iii) Which are the four significant language families to which the languages of India belong?

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**6.3 LANGUAGE-RELIGION INTERFACE:
MEDIEVAL CONTEXT**

With the medieval period came a major shift in the language-religion interface in India. Till then, all the major religions were usually expressed in their single language, respectively. For instance: Sanskrit was the language of Hinduism, Ardhamagadhi of Jainism and Pali of Buddhism. Each of these languages had the power to completely express their respective religions. However, in the medieval period, mystics and saints from various parts of the country (like Jnaneshwar from Maharashtra, Basavanna from Karnataka, Nammalvar from Tamil Nadu, Tulsidas, Mirabai, Nanak and Kabir from North India) started arguing for the legitimacy of vernacular languages for the expression of religion, challenging the hegemony of classical religious languages. They started writing their religious poetries in vernacular languages specific to their regions, like Tamil, Marathi, Awadhi, Rajasthani, etc. These saints were the reformists who on one hand liberated religion and religious practices from the hold of single classical languages, often the possession of the elite; also raised the status of vernacular languages in the context of religious conduct, opening the access to religion for the masses.

With this even the scriptures were made accessible to the masses in the language they spoke. For example: Jain scriptures were translated into Kannada and Hindi. The impetus for the translation of religious texts into vernacular languages came from many reasons – a) in order to make them accessible for the common masses who usually were not literate in the classical languages, which were used mostly by the elites of their respective religion, like: Brahmins within Hinduism could receive a formal training in Sanskrit, whereas the lower castes were devoid of it; b) the Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries had started escalating their activities in India of converting the local population into Christianity. Thus, converting the canonical religious texts into the language of the masses became a pressing need.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Name the mystics and saints, along with their corresponding regions, who played a significant role in taking religious scriptures to the masses in their vernacular language.

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- ii) What were the major social factor prompting translation of religious texts into vernacular languages?

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6.4 BRITISH INDIA AND LANGUAGE

Ignoring the vast linguistic diversity of India, its colonial masters took a keen interest in educating its people in English language for reasons more than one. Indians educated in English language would have meant low-wage labourers for their clerical jobs. This would have in turn reduced their expenditure on administration. English language was also expected to generate a class of British-loyal Indians. Thus, language was used as a tool to aid their political and economic authority over the country. They gave government jobs to only those who knew English language. Thus, compelling Indians to opt for English education. This created and strengthened the class divide between the rich city dwellers and the poor within Indian population as well as regional disparities as some regions

were more under British influence than others. But most Indians remained loyal to their mother tongues even if they used English as an official language outside the home. Moreover because women did not go to school or get higher education, especially in English, the home language remained and still largely remains the mother tongue. Due to this, the colonial dream of making English their national language could never materialise. The many languages spoken in the country were tied to their regional affinities and had strong social sentiments attached to them. The religious rituals were also conducted in native languages and the texts such as the Ramayana were read in the mother tongue also. The trend has more or less continued even till today. For instance: An English speaking Muslim from West Bengal may want to be identified as a Bengali first and prefer to use his/her regional dialect to assert the peculiarity of his/her identity even in some neutral inclusive public space.

On the other hand, in the case of religion, the British took advantage of the existing religious pluralism. Especially, in the aftermath of the revolt of 1857 by the *sepoys* of British army, the colonial rulers realised that if they wished to continue their rule over India, then they had to break the country from within on religious lines. They adopted the policy based on Roman maxim, ‘*Divide et Impera*’ (Divide and Rule). Even though the revolt was a result of several political, social, religious and economic factors, the unity that Hindu and Muslim *sepoys* showcased in what is considered the immediate military cause of the revolt was alarming for the British. In what was an eye opener for the colonial rulers, both Hindu and Muslim *sepoys* refused to use the cartridges of the new Enfield rifle, which were greased with cow and pig fats.

To break this unity became their primary concern. Soon after in 1905, they divided Bengal, which was then the epicentre of freedom struggle in India, on religious lines. While East Bengal became a Muslim majority state, West Bengal had majority Hindus. Then in 1909, they introduced separate electorate for Muslims through Morley Minto Act, which was a step towards breaking the religious unity and taking the advantage of religious pluralism in India. At another level, the British started giving preference to Sikhs over Hindus and Muslims for their army jobs, giving rise to the notions of Sikhs as the martial race of India. This partiality towards the Sikh was because of the support they had given to the British in the 1857 uprising. They also created the myth of martial races creating the Gorkha identity out of the hill men who were loyal to them. The British sowed the seeds of discord between the major religious communities, especially the Hindus and Muslims as it was the only way they could get control over the various Indian principalities by playing them against each other.

Check Your Progress 3

i) What are the reasons that made British introduce English language education in India?

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ii) What are the various measures adopted by British to practice Divide and Rule in India?

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iii) Which out of the following were fashioned as the martial race of India by the British?

- Hindus

- Sikhs

- Muslims

- Buddhists

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6.5 THE CONSTITUTION AND INDIA'S PLURALITY

The term religion is nowhere defined within the Indian Constitution, as part of a vision to constitute India as a secular state, as was envisaged by 42nd Amendment Act of the Constitution in 1976, which inserted the term 'secular' in the preamble of the Constitution. But even then, the term secular remains undefined in the preamble or in the Constitution. Even though Forty-fifth Amendment Bill of the Constitution (1978) attempted to define the term by appropriating it with the expression 'Republic' in the Article 366 (1), it remained unaccepted by the Council of States. It suggested that the expression 'Republic' be qualified as Secular, in which there is an equal respect for all religions. However, this amendment was not accepted by the Council of States.

Box 2: Secular, Secularism and Secularisation

The term 'secular' is derived from the Latin root *Saeculum*, which means century or age. *Saeculum* was the time of ordinary historical succession as opposed to the sacred time. The Government as an institution in *Saeculum* was in contrast to the Church. Borrowing from this, the term 'Secular' is used to indicate the institutions, like state, economy, judiciary, etc. which together constitute a world separated from religion. The term 'Secularism', on the other hand, was coined by a Socialist, George Jacob Holyoake in 1851, as a by-product of Enlightenment and Renaissance of the nineteenth century. Inspired by the notions of individual dignity as asserted by Renaissance and the supremacy of science and reason as highlighted by Enlightenment, he proposed Secularism to counter the supernaturalism and irrationalism that had corrupted the Christian theology, by re-affirming the dignity of an individual and autonomy of a secular life. Out of the commonly accepted, two definitions of Secularism, one is people-centric, and the other is State-centric. The people-centric definition signifies the separation of religion from economy, education, politics, culture and social life. On the other hand, State-centric definition envisages the need to keep the State neutral of all religions. In the West, when secularism was no longer an active movement, the attention was directed at the secularisation of the institutions. By Secularisation, it was meant that social institutions gained autonomy and the religious consciousness declined. Secularisation was characterised by urbanisation, pluralism, tolerance and pragmatism. Thus, with the process of Secularisation declines the social relevance of religion.

The Constitution of India is resolute to strengthen religious pluralism in the country by guaranteeing equal freedom to all religions. Article 25-30 written in the Part III of the Constitution provide the Indian population with the right to freely practice, propagate and profess any religion. It also gives a right to the religious organisations to establish and maintain institutions for charitable and religious purposes. One of these articles (Article 27) exempts taxation on money generated through religious practices or on activities the proceeds of which are appropriated for religious purposes. A special emphasis in these articles remain on one hand keeping the state-recognised educational institutions away from religious instructions and propagation, and on the other hand on preserving and protecting the cultural and educational rights of the religious and linguistic minorities.

Not just religion, the Constitution of India also acts as a safeguard to the linguistic diversity of the country as well. It specifies 22 languages in the Part A of Eighth schedule as Scheduled languages of India and 99 languages in its Part B are specified as Non-Scheduled languages. The speaker strength of 22 scheduled languages, according to the Census report of 2011 are given in the table below.

This is the list of the 22 scheduled languages that the government of India officially promotes. When the list was first drafted in 1950, it contained only 14 languages. In the past 50 years, however, eight more languages have been added to the list, as a response to the demands of the corresponding linguistic groups. Maithili, Santhal, Konkani and Sindhi are among the languages added subsequently. In India, beyond its scheduled languages, even the individual states have their own list of official languages. But, the real treasure of rich linguistic diversity in

India lies beyond these portals of state patronage, as each state is a treasure-box of multiple local languages.

Check Your Progress 4

i) Which articles of the Constitution guarantee equal freedom to all religions? Write briefly about them.

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ii) There are how many scheduled and non-scheduled languages mentioned in Indian Constitution, and which one of those have the highest speaker strength?

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iii) When was the first Indian state to be re-organised on linguistic basis? Tick the right answer:

- a) 1947 b) 1953 c) 1956 d) 1960

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ACTIVITY 2

Make a list of 99 non-scheduled languages of India and observe the linguistic diversity of the country. If possible, compare your list with your fellows at your study centre.

6.6 LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF REORGANISING STATE BOUNDARIES

Linguistic diversity has always remained an important concern in India, right from the time of its independence. At the time, 571 princely states were merged together to form 27 states in a temporary arrangement, backed by historical and political considerations, rather than on cultural or linguistic account. Below is an indicative map of linguistic diversity and not a complete picture of the variety of languages found in India.



On the basis of India's linguistic diversity, there still remained a need to reorganise the states on permanent basis. Considering this, in 1948, the newly formed government constituted S. K. Dhar Commission to look into the matter. But, dismissing the idea of linguistic reorganisation of the state, the Commission suggested to reorganise states on the basis of administrative convenience. Unconvinced with the findings of the Commission, in the same year itself the government formed JVP Committee with Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabh Bhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya as its members. The committee too rejected the immediacy of reorganisation of states on linguistic basis. In 1953, however, succumbing to the demands and prolonged agitation of the Telugu-speaking people, the government created first linguistic state of Andhra.

Later, in 1956 on the recommendations of the Fazl Ali Commission, the Nehru government divided the country into 14 states and 6 union territories, under the State Reorganisation Act. The states were Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The six union territories were Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands, Manipur and Tripura.

In 1960 again, following agitation and violence, the state of Bombay was divided to create Gujarat and Maharashtra. For Nagas, Nagaland was created in 1963. And in 1966, based on the Shah Commission report, the Parliament passed Punjab Reorganisation Act and Haryana and Himachal Pradesh as a Union Territory were carved out of Punjab. In these, Haryana got the Punjabi-speaking population. Following the pressing demands of the Uttarakhand movement, at the core of which lied the Pahari identity, with Kumaoni and Garhwali languages of their own, totally distinct from the rest of Uttar Pradesh, the state of Uttarakhand was carved out of UP in 2000. Similarly boundaries were drawn in the same year to create Jharkhand out of Bihar and Chhattisgarh out of Madhya Pradesh. And, the most recently in 2014 Telangana was created from Andhra Pradesh. This is the brief trajectory of reorganisation of states on linguistic, along with other administrative, political, historical and cultural grounds.

Check Your Progress 5

- i) When was the first state created on linguistic grounds in Independent India?

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- ii) Name the 14 states and 6 union territories after the first linguistic reorganisation of states in 1956?

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- iii) Which is the last state created on the linguistic and cultural grounds in India?

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6.7 LET US SUM UP

India is land of diversified religions and languages. The co-existence of various religions and languages lie at the core of religious and linguistic pluralism in India. Language has historically played the most significant role in shaping the religious consciousness of people in India, especially in the medieval period. In the colonial period, the rulers had to suffer many blows owing to their over exploitation of religious pluralism on one hand and under-estimation of linguistic diversity on the other. Subsequently, in the independent India, Constitution acts as a safeguard to both religious and linguistic pluralism as it ensure equal freedom to all the religions and recognition for all significant languages of the country. In the modern times, language has played a crucial role in the reorganisation of the state boundaries. Thus, religion and language have been intrinsically woven into the consciousness of Indian population, who despite all political, social and cultural complexities around the two, remain free to mould the two to their convenient use.

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6.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.
- ii) Islam and Christianity.
- iii) Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic.
- iv) Indo-Aryan.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Jnaneshwar from Maharashtra, Basavanna from Karnataka, Nammalvar from Tamil Nadu, Tulsidas, Mirabai, Nanak and Kabir from North India.
- ii) The impetus for the translation of religious texts into vernacular languages came from many reasons - a) in order to make them accessible for the common masses who usually were not literate in the classical languages, which were used mostly by the elites of their respective religion, like: Brahmins within Hinduism could receive a formal training in Sanskrit, whereas the lower castes were devoid of it; b) the Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries had started escalating their activities in India of converting the local population into Christianity. Thus, converting the canonical religious texts into the language of the masses became a pressing need.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) The colonial masters took a keen interest in educating its people in English language for reasons more than one. Indians educated in English language would have meant low-wage labourers for their clerical jobs. This would have in turn reduced their expenditure on administration. English language was also expected to generate a class of British-loyal Indians. Thus, language was used as a tool to aid their political and economic authority over the country. They gave government jobs to only those who knew English language.
- ii) In 1905, they divided Bengal, which was then the epicentre of freedom struggle in India, on religious lines. While East Bengal became a Muslim majority state, West Bengal had majority Hindus. Then in 1909, they introduced separate electorate for Muslims through Morley Minto Act, which was a step towards breaking the religious unity and taking the advantage of religious pluralism in India. At another level, British starting filling in Sikhs over Hindus and Muslims for their army jobs, giving rise to the notions of Sikhs as the martial race of India.

iii) Sikhs

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Article 25-30 written in the Part III of the Constitution provide the Indian population with the right to freely practice, propagate and profess any religion. It also gives a right to the religious organisations to establish and maintain institutions for charitable and religious purposes. One of these articles (Article 27) exempts taxation on money generated through religious practices or on activities the proceeds of which are appropriated for religious purposes. A special emphasis in these articles remain on one hand keeping the state-recognised educational institutions away from religious instructions and propagation, and on the other hand on preserving and protecting the cultural and educational rights of the religious and linguistic minorities.
- ii) Scheduled Languages - 22, Non-Scheduled Language - 99, Hindi

iii) 1956

Check Your Progress 5

- i) 1953
- ii) The states were Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The six union territories were Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands, Manipur and Tripura.
- iii) Telangana (2014)

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 7 CASTE AND CLASS*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Varna and Caste
 - 7.2.1 Features of the Caste System
 - 7.2.2 Nature of Caste
- 7.3 Social Classes in India
 - 7.3.1 The Impact of British Rule on Class Formation in India
 - 7.3.2 Growth of Social Classes in India
 - 7.3.3 Social Classes in Rural India
 - 7.3.4 Social Classes in Urban Areas
- 7.4 Relationship Between Caste and Class
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 References
- 7.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- define caste and class as an institution;
- explain caste mobility in the caste system through the concept of sanskritization;
- discuss classes in rural and urban India in detail and its uneven growth; and
- discuss the relationship between caste and class.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Caste has for long been viewed as distinctive features of the Indian society. It is not merely an institution that characterises the structure of social stratification in India. Caste has often been seen to represent the core of India. It has been viewed both as an institution as well as an ideology. Institutionally, caste provided a framework for arranging and organizing social groups in terms of their statuses and positions in the social and economic system. It fixes individuals into the structure of social hierarchy on the basis of their birth. As an ideology, caste is a system of values and ideas that legitimises and reinforces the existing structure of social inequality. It also provided a worldview around which a typical Hindu organised his/her life.

Apart from being an institution that distinguished India from other societies, caste was also an epitome of the traditional society, a “closed system”, where generation after generation individuals had similar kinds of work and lived more or less similar kinds of lives. In contrast, the modern industrial societies of the

*Adapted from ESO 12, Unit 20 & 23 by Prof. Rabindra Kumar, Sociology Faculty, IGNOU

West were projected as an “open systems” of social stratification, societies bases on class, where individuals could choose their occupations according to their abilities and tastes. Wealth, income, education, occupation are some of the basic determinants of class. If individuals worked for it, in such open systems of stratification, they could move up in the social hierarchy and change their class position. Such mobility at the individual level was impossible in the caste system. Caste has been seen an extreme form of social stratification.

7.2 VARNA AND CASTE

In theory, the caste system is interlinked with the ‘*Varna*’ model which divides the Hindu society into four orders, viz., Brahmana, (traditionally, priest and scholar), Kshatriya (ruler and soldier), Vaishya (merchants) and Shudra (peasants, labourers and servants). The first three castes are ‘**twice-born**’ or ‘*dvija*’ since the men from these castes are entitled to do the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of *upanayana*, which the Shudras were not allowed to perform. The untouchable castes are outside the varna scheme. The term ‘*varna*’ literally means colour and it was originally used to refer to the distinction between *Arya* and *Dasa*, in ancient India (Ghurye 1950: 52).

The caste system is an all-India phenomenon of which the *varna* model provides an all-India macro-structural scheme. In other words, the *varna* model only provides a framework within which the innumerable variations of castes throughout India are found. According to Srinivas (1962: 65) the *varna*-scheme is a ‘hierarchy’ in the literal sense of the term because the criteria of ritual **purity and pollution** are at the basis of this differentiation. Generally speaking, the higher castes are also the better off castes, and the lower castes are generally, the lower classes. However, this association between caste and class is not always true. A caste can be ritually high but ranked lower in the local caste hierarchy because this hierarchy is determined by secular factors like economic, political, educational status. Thus, one of the most striking features of caste system, as an actual reality, has been the vagueness in the hierarchy, especially in the middle rungs.

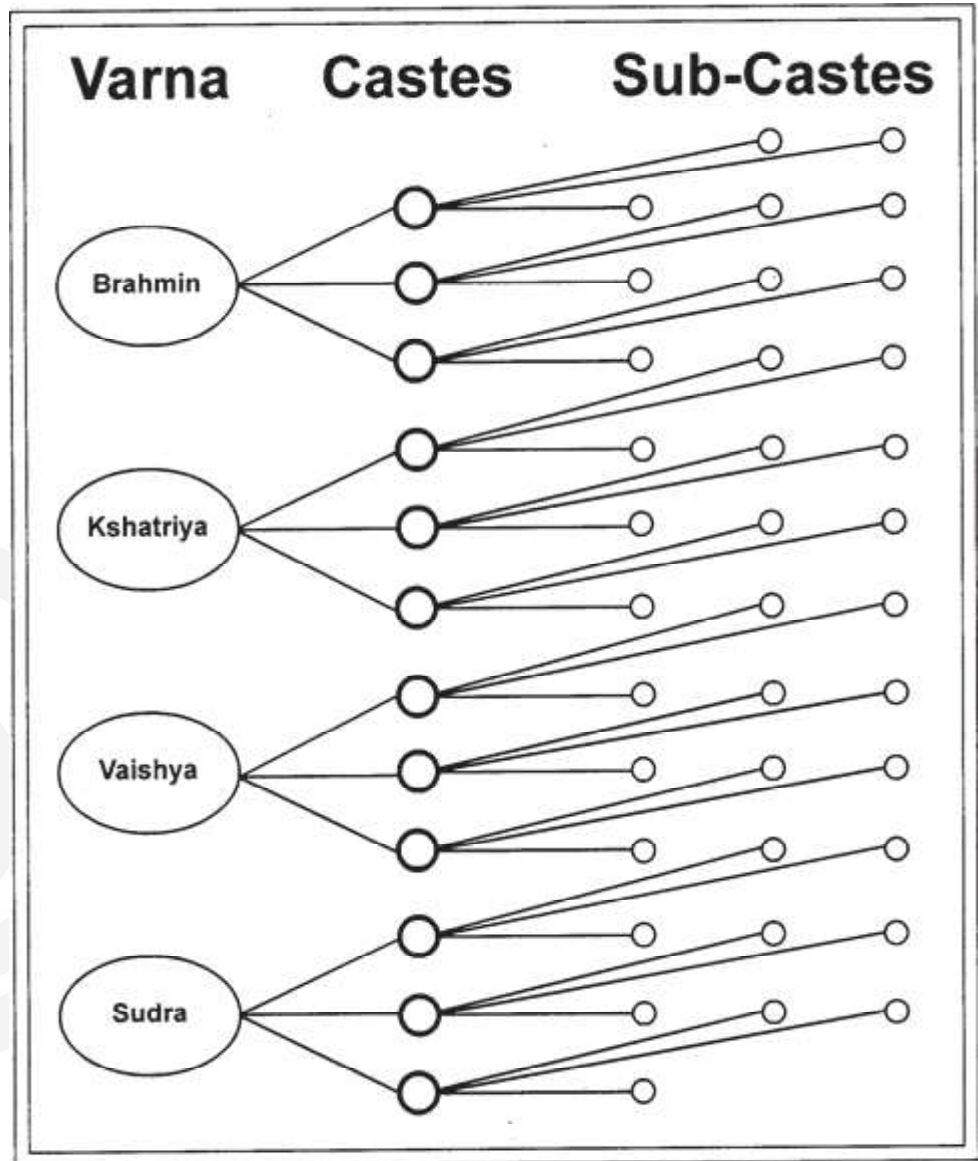
According to the *Varna* scheme there are only four categories of caste. This scheme excludes the untouchables who are same throughout India. But this is not true in reality since even during the Vedic period, occupational groups existed which were not subsumed by *Varna*, although one cannot be sure whether these groups can be called castes or not. According to Ghurye, in each linguistic region, there are about 200 caste groups which are further sub- divided into about 3,000 smaller units each of which is endogamous and provides the area of effective social life for the individual. Therefore, one can say that the *Varna* scheme refers at the most only to the broad categories of the society (Srinivas 1962: 65). Figure shows that a Varna may include different castes and these castes may be divided into different subcastes.

7.2.1 Features of the Caste System

The main features of caste system are:

- i) hierarchy,
- ii) endogamy,

- iii) association with a hereditary occupation,
- iv) restrictions on food and social relations,
- v) distinction in custom, dress and speech, and
- vi) civil and religious disabilities and privileges, enjoyed by different caste groups in the society (Ghurye 1950: 50).



The Hindu society is divided into segmental divisions of caste. Caste is an ascribed status. In the caste society, the untouchables are ritually most impure. Thus, the concept of hierarchy forms the crux of the caste society. Each caste is considered to be more pure or impure than the other in the ritual sense of the term. The very shadow of some castes was once considered polluting. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the Shanar or toddy tappers were to keep 24 paces away from a Brahman. and a member of Tiyyan caste was supposed to keep himself at a distance of 36 steps from a Brahman (Ghurye 1950). Therefore traditionally the castes considered to be untouchable were forbidden entry into the upper-caste houses. In South India, till the British period, certain parts of the town and cities were inaccessible to the untouchable castes.

Endogamy or marriage within one’s own caste or sub-caste group is an essential feature of caste system. It is one of the main reasons for the persistence of caste system. People generally married within one’s own caste group.

Traditionally, each caste was associated with an occupation. *Jajmani* system, found in rural India enabled each caste to have a near monopoly over their hereditary occupation. Each caste was also ranked higher or lower on the basis of the ritual purity or pollution of their associated occupations. Thus, the Chamar castes of north India were considered untouchables since their occupation involved use of leather.

Each caste had its own caste council or *panchayat* where the grievances of its caste members were heard. These caste-councils headed, generally by the elder members of that caste, had the power to excommunicate a member from his or her caste if they did not accept caste restrictions. Caste restrictions operate in marriage, commensality or inter-dining and general social interaction, as well.

Check Your Progress 1

i) Define the concept of caste and mention its features.

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ii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.

a) Caste status is an status.

b) Ritual and determines the place of a caste in the caste hierarchy.

c) The term literally means colour.

d) Varna is an all India category while varies from one region to another.

7.2.1 Nature of Caste

The above presentation of the caste system as a closed system based on all inclusive principle of hierarchy which does not permit mobility for its members, have not been accepted by all. Some sociologists and social anthropologists have raised objections and made valuable criticism of such conceptualisation. Criticism made by M.N. Srinivas through the concept of Sanskritisation is the most noteworthy.

Sanskritisation: The concept of sanskritisation was developed by M.N. Srinivas to describe the dynamic nature of the caste system. Srinivas, defines the concept Sanskritisation as “a process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, frequently, ‘twice born’ caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community”. It is a much broader definition of Sanskritisation. It is neither confined to Brahmins as only reference group nor to the imitation of ideologies.

His observation points out variations in and varieties of mobility or changes in the caste system. To make his observation more powerful and empirically substantiated, he cites the historical study of K.M. Pannikar who holds the view that all Kshatriyas have come into being by usurpation of power by the lower castes and consequently the Kshatriya role and social position.

Srinivas further adds that though all non-dominant, particularly low or non-twice born castes want to sanskritize themselves but only those succeed whose economic and political conditions have improved.

7.3 SOCIAL CLASSES IN INDIA

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

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

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

Besides these classes there were also classes of administrative officers of various ranks, of merchants, artisans and specialists of various kinds. The colonial rule in India proved to be one of the turning points in Indian history. It introduced new elements, which led to some radical changes in Indian society. Now let us see what the impact of the British rule was on the class formation in India.

7.3.1 The Impact of British Rule on Class Formation in India

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

- a) **Change in Agriculture:** British created individual ownership rights in land by introducing several land reforms during the eighteenth century, such as the Permanent Settlement, the Ryotwari settlement, and the Mahalwari settlement. With this, land became private property, a commodity in the market. It could be mortgaged, purchased or sold. A new method of fixing land revenue and its cash payment was introduced. This commercialisation of agriculture, in turn, stimulated the growth of trade and commerce in India.
- b) **Trade and Commerce:** Trade and commerce were centred around two things: (i) Supply of raw material for industries in Britain and procurement of the British manufactured goods for consumption in India. (ii) The latter had a disastrous effect on indigenous economy of towns and villages based on handicrafts.
- c) **Development of Railways and Industry:** Alongside the growth of trade and commerce, there was rapid development of the transport system in India. The railways expanded on an increasing scale from the middle of the nineteenth century. These developments were undertaken with a view to meet the raw material requirements of industries in Britain. The construction of railways and roads also gave scope for investment of British capital in India. It led to better mobility of troops and for establishment of law and order. By then, there was accumulation of sufficient savings on the part of Indian traders and merchants. This served as capital and made possible the creation of Indian owned industries.
- d) **State and Administrative System:** Even before these developments, the British government had organised a huge and extensive state machinery to administer the conquered territory. A large number of educated individuals were required to staff this machinery. It was not possible to secure the staff of educated people from Britain for running such huge administrative machinery. Therefore the foreign rulers felt that there was a need for the introduction of Western education in India. Thus, schools, colleges and universities were established to impart Western education in India and to cater to the needs of the expanding economy and growing state machinery. As a consequence of the impact of British rule in India, the Indian society experienced an uneven growth of social classes. We are going to examine some aspects of this uneven growth in the next section.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Define the concept of social class.

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ii) List some of the changes that have lead to the emergence of social classes in India.

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

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7.3.2 Growth of Social Classes in India

Social classes in India, as we see them today, had their genesis during the British rule. This is not to say that the class phenomenon was absent in the pre-British Indian society. The class dimension of Indian society was only less pronounced than it turned out to be during the British period. The process of the rise of new social classes was an uneven one. It did not develop uniformly in different parts of the country and also among various communities. This was due to the fact that the social forces, which developed during the British rule, spread both in time and tempo unevenly. This was, in turn, dependent on the growth of political power in India. For example, it was in Bengal that two of the social classes - zamindars and tenants - came into existence first. Again it was in Bengal and Bombay that the first industrial enterprises started. This led to the emergence of the class of industrialists and workers in this region. It was for this reason that the British established a complex administrative system and introduced modern education first in Bengal and Bombay.

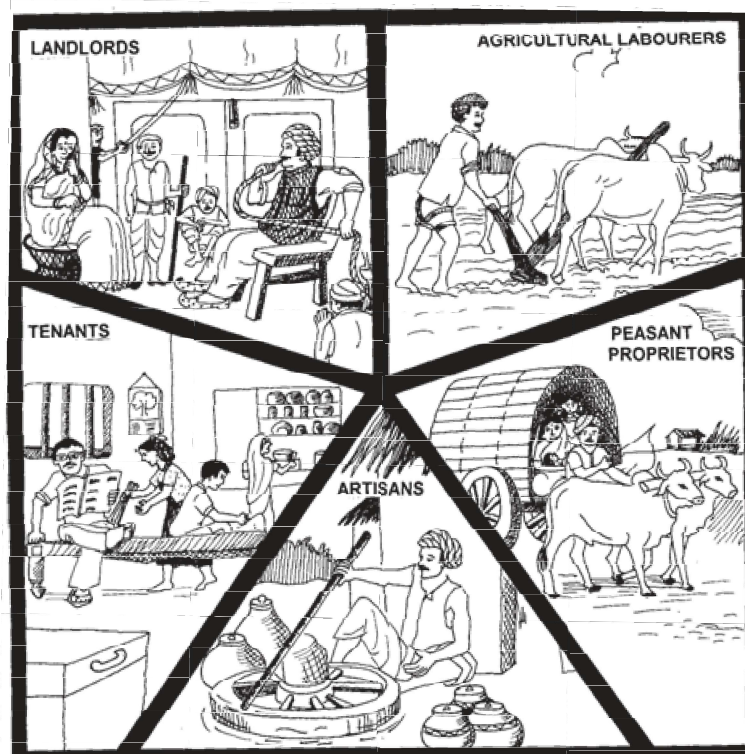
The process of the rise of new social classes among different communities was also uneven. This was due to the fact that certain communities were already engaged in definite economic, social or educational vocations in pre-British period. For example Baniyas were traders by vocation in our traditional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

7.3.3 Social Classes in Rural India

In rural areas, classes consist principally of a) landlords, b) peasant proprietors, c) tenants d) agricultural labourers and e) artisans.

- a) **Landlords:** The land reform measures after Independence in the 1950s failed to create a socially homogeneous class of cultivators. All the same, the top strata of the agrarian hierarchy, the *Zamindars*, lost their right to extract taxes from the peasants. They were left with truncated landholding. Their economic, political and social supremacy was also broken. A small proportion of them continue to live as rentiers. The rest have taken to active participation in the management and improvement of their farm.
- b) **Peasants proprietors:** They may be broadly divided into three categories, i) Rich peasants: They are proprietors with considerable holdings. They perform no fieldwork but supervise cultivation and take personal interest in land management and improvement. ii) Middle peasants: They are landowners of medium size holdings. They are generally self-sufficient. They cultivate land with family labour. iii) Poor peasants: They are landowners with holdings that are not sufficient to maintain a family. They are forced to rent in other's land or supplement income by working as labourers. They constitute a large segment of the agricultural population.
- c) **Tenants:** On the eve of Independence, there were various categories of tenants. Broadly they could be classified as tenants, subtenants, sharecroppers, etc. In *zamindari* areas, of course, there were many sub-categories between the *zamindars* and the actual cultivators who were in general sharecroppers. Tenants on the whole enjoyed occupancy right. They could not be evicted. Sub-tenants in general enjoyed some security of tenure but were liable to eviction. Sharecroppers on the other hand did not have any security of tenure and were at the mercy of the affluent section of tenants and subtenants were transformed into peasant proprietors with tenancy reform programme. Sharecroppers on the other hand, gained little from these programmes. With the second phase of land reform viz. ceiling on land holding, there was reduction in the extent of tenancy. Sharecropping however, continue even thereafter. Indeed, sharecroppers constitute the most important, if not the only, segment of tenant class in rural India today. Organisationally and politically, they are weak though they form a very important component of peasant organisation in India.
- d) **Agricultural Labourers :** The agricultural labourers were and still are broadly of three types. Some owned or held a small plot of land in addition to drawing their livelihood from sale of their labour. Others were landless and lived exclusively on hiring out of their labour. In return for their labour, the agricultural labourers were paid wages, which were very low. Their condition of living was far from satisfactory. Wages were generally paid in kind i.e. food grains like paddy, wheat and pulses. Sometimes cash was paid in lieu of wages in kind. A certain standard measure was employed to give these wages. In fact, payment in kind continued alongside money payments.

Legislation towards abolition of bonded labour and minimum wage structure on the one hand, and employment generating programmes on the other, reflect concern by the government for this section. Such measures are, however, far from effective. The agricultural labourers hence constitute the weakest section of the rural society.



- e) **Artisans:** Some of these are like the carpenter (Badhai), the ironsmith (Lohar), the potter (Kumhar) and so on. Not all villages had families of these artisans but under the *Jajmani* system, sometimes a family of these occupational castes served more than one village. Rural artisans and craftsmen were hard hit under the British rule as they could not compete with machine-made and cheap industrial goods.

7.3.4 Social Classes in Urban India

In the urban areas social classes comprise principally (a) capitalists (commercial and industrial), (b) corporate sector (c) professional classes, (d) petty traders and shopkeepers and (e) working classes.

- a) **Capitalists (Commercial and Industrial) Classes:** Under the British rule, production in India became production for market. As a result of this, internal market expanded and the class of traders engaged in internal trading grew. Simultaneously, India was also linked up with the world market. This led to the growth of a class of merchants engaged in export- import business. Thus, there came into being a commercial middle class in the country.
- b) **Corporate Sector:** Any organisation that is under government ownership and control is called as public sector units and any organisation, which does not belong to public sector can be taken to be a part of private sector. The firms and organisation which are owned, controlled and managed exclusively by private individuals and entities are included in private sector. All private sector firms can be classified into two categories, such as individually owned and collectively owned.

Collectively owned firms are further classified into i) partnership firms ii) joint Hindu family iii) joint-stock companies and iv) co-operatives. The most important of these is the joint-stock organization, which is otherwise

popularly known as corporate sector. Joint-stock companies which do not belong to public sector are collectively known as private corporate sector. Indian corporate sector is substantially large and highly diversified. In the post-liberal era of the 1990s this sector's role in the Indian economy has grown manifold.

- c) **Professional Classes:** Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in post-independent India has opened the way for large-scale employment opportunities in industries, trade and commerce, construction, transport, services and other varied economic activities. Simultaneously, the state has created a massive institutional set-up comprising a complex bureaucratic structure throughout the length and breadth of the country. This has provided employment on a sizeable scale. The employment in these sectors, whether private or government, requires prerequisite qualifications, such as education, training, skill, and so on. Bureaucrats, management executives, technocrats, doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, are some of the categories who possess such skills.
- d) **Class of petty traders and shopkeepers:** These classes have developed with the growth of modern cities and towns. They constitute the link between the producers of goods and commodities and the mass of consumers. That is, they buy goods from the producers or wholesalers and sell it among the consumers. Thus, they make their living on the profit margin of the prices on which they buy and sell their goods and commodities. It comprises on the one hand self-employed petty shopkeepers traders, vendors, hawkers, and on the other, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the informal sector.



- e) **Working Classes:** Origin of the working class could be traced back to the British rule. This was the modern working class which was the direct result

of modern industries, railways, and plantations established in India during the British period. This class grew in proportion as plantations, factories, mining, industry, transport, railways and other industrial sectors developed and expanded in India. The Indian working class was formed predominantly out of the pauperised peasants and ruined artisans.

7.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CASTE AND CLASS

There are contestations related to the nature of caste and class in India. Some view caste and class as polar opposite and some view of nexus between caste and class. Let us discuss first caste and class are polar opposite.

The western scholars and in particularly by the British administrators and ethnographers understood caste and class as polar opposites. They observe that caste and class are different forms of social stratification. The units ranked in the class system are individuals; and those ranked in the caste system are groups. According to this view, change is taking place from caste to class, hierarchy to stratification, closed to open, and from an organic to segmentary system. Such a distinction between caste and class is of a mechanical sort.

Such view of caste and class is taken by considering it a result of objective rating of positions based on certain attributes. To think of class as a case of fluidity, and of caste as a case of rigidity, is too simplistic and unrealistic a depiction of these two stratification systems. It would obviously mean defining caste through the concepts of status-rigidity and immutability, organic solidarity, functional interdependence, *homo-hierarchicus* and pollution-purity. Class is described by the ideology of individualism, competition and equality. Such constructs of caste and class are erroneous.

Caste as a system of social stratification represents a semblance of both rigidity and fluidity, cooperation and competition, holism and individualism, interdependence and autonomy, and inequality and equality. The genesis of these polar characteristic lies in the notion of superiority of the non-caste western society. These distinctions between caste and class are analytic rather than being based on historic and experiential contents.

The distinction that caste is a real phenomenon and class is a category, an attributional construction, is untenable. Both caste and class are real and empiric. Both are interactional and hierarchical, and incorporate each other. It has been dynamic and full of contradiction. Violation of caste norms does not lead to the removal of caste as a principle of social stratification. Thus, caste incorporates class and class incorporates caste, neither the “caste view” alone nor the “class view” alone can explain the entire gamut of India’s social reality. Now let us discuss caste-class nexus approach to study the Indian society.

Caste-class nexus applies observation of caste and class as mutually inherent phenomena. The caste-class nexus as a framework goes beyond micro-transaction and alternatively filters down the macro conceptualizations to the ground reality. Caste-class nexus implies going ‘beyond caste’ and also going ‘beyond class’ for a fuller comprehension of social reality. It would define ‘nexus’ as “a set of ties in terms of connection which becomes the basis of structural and cultural changes.

Nexus does not imply a correspondence or symmetry between caste and class. Interdependence, contradictions, symmetry and hegemony of social relations are integral features of nexus as a frame of reference. Andre Beteille observes that caste, class and power in the Tanjore village that he studied overlap to some extent, but also cut across (1966). He also states that many areas of social life are now becoming to some extent 'caste-free'. Besides the Brahman tradition, the idea of the martial Rajput, the traditions of Indian craftsman, the Indian merchant, and the class and cultural traditions existed side by side in Indian society.

This nexus is also highlighted by Kathleen Gough in her analysis of the mode of production as a social formation in which she finds interconnections between caste, kinship, family and marriage on the one hand and forces of production and production relations on the other. Class relationships are taken as the main assumption in the treatment of caste and kinship in India. Even the *varna* and *jajmani* systems are explained by some scholars in terms of class relations and the mode of production.

Thus, caste and class represents, to a large extent, the same structural reality. Caste conflicts are also class conflicts as the upper and the lower castes correspond to the high and the low classes, respectively, in terms of their social placement. Castes also function as classes because they function as interest groups. Caste associations undertake several economic and political activities for their members.

7.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the caste and class as an institution. We have explained changes that have always been part of caste system. The flexibility and accommodative nature of caste is one of the essential aspects, which has led to its continuity. We have also outlined growth of classes in India. We have discussed relationship between caste and class.

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7.6 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Caste is a form of social stratification, which divides the society into various social groups, which are placed in a hierarchical order on the criteria of mainly ritual purity and pollution. It is hereditary and endogamous. It has a traditional association with an occupation and observes maximum commensality.
- ii) The main features of caste system are:
 - i) hierarchy,
 - ii) endogamy,
 - iii) association with a hereditary occupation,

- iv) restrictions on food and social relations,
- v) distinction in custom, dress and speech, and
- vi) civil and religious disabilities and privileges, enjoyed by different caste groups in the society (Ghurye 1950: 50).

Check Your Progress 2

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

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UNIT 8 TRIBES AND ETHNICITY*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Tribes in India
 - 8.2.1 Ancient and Medieval Periods
 - 8.2.2 During the British Period
 - 8.2.3 Period after Independence in India
- 8.3 Concepts Associated with Ethnicity
 - 8.3.1 Ethnic and Ethnic Group
 - 8.3.2 Ethnicity
 - 8.3.3 Ethnic Identity
 - 8.3.4 Ethnic Boundry
 - 8.3.5 Majority and Minority Group
- 8.4 Features of Tribes in India
 - 8.4.1 Geographical Distribution
 - 8.4.2 Racial and Linguistic Affinities
 - 8.4.2.1 Three Main Racial Divisions
 - 8.4.2.2 Linguistic Affiliations
 - 8.4.3 Demographic Features
 - 8.4.4 Isolation from and Interaction with Other Groups
- 8.5 Economic Pursuits Among Tribes
 - 8.5.1 Food Gatherers and Hunters
 - 8.5.2 Shifting Cultivators
 - 8.5.3 Settled Agriculturists
 - 8.5.4 Artisans
 - 8.5.5 The Pastoralists and Cattle Herders
 - 8.5.6 The Folk Artists
 - 8.5.7 Wage-Labourers
 - 8.5.8 Recent Economic Changes
- 8.6 Manifestation of Ethnicity
- 8.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.8 References
- 8.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concepts associated with ethnicity and tribes in India;
- describe important external features of the tribe;
- discuss the relationships between tribe and ethnicity; and
- discuss the manifestation of ethnicity in tribes.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous we talked about the religious and language diversity. In this unit we shall introduce you to another aspect of Indian society, which are the ethnic and tribal social formations and their sheer diversity. We shall start by introducing you to the concepts associated with tribe and ethnicity in the Indian context, and discuss some of the important external features of the Indian tribes. We shall also introduce you to the relationship between tribe and ethnicity.

In this unit, we have described external features of the tribal groups. For this purpose, the unit first examines the concept of tribe in the Indian context and also concept associated with ethnic relations. Next, the unit classifies tribes in India by their geographic distribution, racial and linguistic affinities and demographic features. It also discusses the issue of isolation from and interaction with other groups. Further, it describes economic pursuits followed by various tribal populations. These external features of their social structure act like boundary markers and give the tribes an identity. Finally, the unit also describes the socio-economic changes affecting social structure of these groups and manifestation of ethnicity.

8.2 TRIBES IN INDIA

In India, 705 groups had been recognised as scheduled tribes in the census year of India 2011. They formed approximately 8.6 per cent of the total Indian population. In absolute numbers, according to 2011 census, their population was 10,42,81,034. Who are these tribal people?

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

8.2.1 Ancient and Medieval Periods

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

India it appears that the so-called tribal populations interacted with other populations in a variety of ways in the region of their habitation.

8.2.2 During the British Period

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

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

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

8.2.3 Period after Independence in India

Following Independence, the policy of protection and development for the population identified as tribe has been made into a constitutional obligation. A list of tribes was adopted for this purpose. In 1950, this list contained 212 names, which was modified by successive presidential orders. In 2003, the list contained 533 names. The Constitution, however, does not provide a definition of a tribe. The people who have been listed in the Constitution and mentioned in successive presidential orders are called scheduled tribes. This is the administrative concept of a tribe.

To get a better understanding of the what tribe and ethnicity is we will turn our attention to some of the concepts surrounding ethnicity and tribe.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Write how the idea of scheduled tribes has emerged in Independent India?

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8.3 CONCEPTS ASSOCIATED WITH ETHNICITY

In this section we will define the following terms. (1) Ethnic and ethnic groups, (2) ethnicity, (3) ethnic identity, (4) ethnic boundary and (5) majority and minority groups.

8.3.1 Ethnic and Ethnic Group

The term 'ethnic' is derived from the Greek word 'ethno' meaning 'nation'. It was originally used to denote primitive tribes or societies that formed a nation on the basis of their simplistic forms of government and economy.

But sociologists and social anthropologists use the term ethnic in a wider sense, based on their studies of pre-colonial and plural societies. Their studies revealed the coexistence of many groups that can be termed 'ethnic' within a nation. So in the course of time, ethnic has come to mean that which pertains to a group of people who can be distinguished by certain features like race, language or any other aspect of culture.

Ethnic group, is, therefore, defined as a cultural group whose members either share some or all of the following features — a common language, region, religion, race, endogamy, customs and beliefs. Members may also share a belief in common descent. On the basis of this definition we may say that the Jews, Negroes, Japanese, Muslims, Munda, Oraon all form distinct ethnic groups. Ethnic group thus refers to a group of people who share some common physical and/ or socio-cultural characteristics.

Here we may ask the question; why is it so important to understand the concept of ethnic groups in the context of our examination of ethnic relations? We may say it is important because ethnic group defines an individual's social personality. It is formed on the basis of cultural and racial uniformity. The essence of this group lies in the individual's feeling of belongingness to it because of cultural association shared with other members. Birth determines incorporation into these groups, thereby making membership relatively restrictive, however, exception to this rule exists, for instance, in the form of conversions. Conversions constitute an exception to this rule. Conversion, literally, means change into another form. The most popular example of conversion is religious conversion.

Conversions pose a problem in group-identification and boundary maintenance. That is, in situations, where members of one group have become members of another ethnic group, there develops a problem regarding the allegiance of these converted members to either of these ethnic groups.

8.3.2 Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to the interrelationships between ethnic groups. Thus the phenomenon of ethnicity becomes more pronounced when viewed at an interactional level. Cohen (1974) defines ethnicity as a process of “interaction between culture groups, operating within common social contexts”.

Though ethnicity is manifest in intra-ethnic relations, it becomes more apparent in inter-ethnic situations, as the very essence of ethnicity stems from the need to establish ethnic identity.

8.3.3 Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity reflects both ‘likeness’ and ‘uniqueness’. On the one hand, it reflects on what the members of an ethnic group hold in common, and on the other hand, it differentiates them from other ethnic groups. The following is a diagrammatical representation of some of the factors of ethnic identification as arranged around the ‘self’.

NATIONALITY
LANGUAGE
RELIGION
REGION
RACE
TRIBE/CASTE
SELF

The order of arrangement of tribe and caste may vary from one social context to another or from one society to another depending on the issue. For example, in India, tribe or caste happens to be an important form of ethnic identification

8.3.4 Ethnic Boundary

Ethnic boundary refers to a social boundary, which does not always correspond to territorial boundary. The individual defines one self through one’s ethnic identity whereas ethnic boundary defines the social limit of the ethnic group. A dichotomisation of “others” as strangers, as member of another ethnic group, has two implications:

- i) The recognition of one’s own social boundaries (in group and out group) and
- ii) The limitation of common understanding and mutual interest. People outside the boundary are not expected to have a common understanding and interest.

8.3.5 Majority and Minority Groups

The study of ethnic groups incorporates both the majority and the minority groups. The term ‘majority groups’ refer to the numerical representation of persons in a

group and its control over economic and political resources. Usually it has been noticed that one ethnic group appears to be in dominance over other ethnic groups. However, we cannot overlook the internal disparities that exist within each ethnic group in terms of economic status. That is, certain sections in the minority group may enjoy majority status and vice-versa, in which the group may occupy either minority or majority status as a totality.

There exists a relationship of inequality between the majority and minority groups. The dominant group or the majority group enjoys numerical strength and control over economic and political resources. This group has all the privileges and advantages. The minority group on the other hand consists of people who are immigrants to the host society. Their numerical strength is low and they are in a subordinate position to the majority group, in relation to control over the limited resources.

The co-relation between numerical strength and control over economic and political resources is a point of argument. History provides many evidences of minority dominance over mass majority, for example; the British colonialism in India and the domination of a White minority on the Black majority in South Africa during the days of apartheid. These instances reveal that the myth surrounding the 'minority group' concept, as being a group, which is subjected to dominance and inferior status because of its low numerical strength, is not true. As it is obvious, a group having control over political and economic resources irrespective of its numerical strength becomes a 'majority minority'.

8.4 FEATURES OF TRIBES IN INDIA

In this section we will understand features of tribal society in terms of their physical, demographic, linguistic attributes and their interaction with others.

8.4.1 Geographical Distribution

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

8.4.2 Racial and Linguistic Affinities

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

8.4.2.1 Three Main Racial Divisions

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

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

a) **The Proto-Australoids**

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

b) **The Mongoloids**

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

c) **The Negrito**

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

8.4.2.2 Linguistic Affiliations

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

- 1) **Austro-Asiatic family:** There are two branches of this family, namely, Mon-Khmer branch and Munda branch. Languages of the first branch are spoken by Khasi and Nicobari tribals. Languages of Munda branch are Santhali, Gondi, Kharia, etc.
- 2) **Tibeto-Chinese family:** There are two sub-families of this type, namely Siamese-Chinese sub-family and Tibeto-Burman sub-family. In extreme North-Eastern frontier of India Khamti is one specimen of the Siamese-Chinese sub-family. The Tibeto-Burman sub-family is further sub-divided into several branches. Tribals of Nagaland and Lepcha of Darjeeling speak variants of Tibeto-Burman languages.
- 3) **Indo-European family:** Tribal languages such as Hajong and Bhili are included in this group.
- 4) **Dravidian family:** Languages of Dravidian family are, for example, spoken by Yeruva of Mysore, Oraon of Chotanagpur.

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

Let us now turn to the population-size of tribes in India.

8.4.3 Demographic Features

At one time, the Toda of the Nilgiri were facing biological and social crisis because their number had fallen to a mere 475 and there were not enough females in reproductive age. Biologically it was facing extinction, socially it could not maintain its various institutions. In the same predicament are, the Birjia in Bihar, the Sentinelese and the Great Andamanese in Andaman Islands. Their total population are just in two digits.

On the other side, there are tribes like the *Gond* of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, the Bhil of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and the Santal of Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal whose population runs into lakhs. There are a very large number of groups which fall in the intermediate category like the Dubla in Gujarat, the Chenchu, the Irula in South, the Boro-Kachari in the North-East. Then there are small tribes like the Toda and the Kota in the Nilgiris, the Birhor in Bihar, etc. The larger tribal groups are spread over into a number of states and, therefore, the same group is subjected to different policies and programmes, which ultimately influence their social structure. For example, the Kurumba, a small tribe in south are distributed in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka states. Not only are they called by different names in different states but also are exposed to different development programmes. In each state they are given education in the official language of the State. In Kurumba's case, it is Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada in respective states. Their own language has become less important. This has far reaching consequences for their society. Besides many other changes, they have become endogamous, that is, they marry within the Kurumba group of the State of their habitation. Clearly the factors of isolation and interaction are quite crucial in describing social structures of tribal populations.

8.4.4 Isolation From and Interaction with Other Groups

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

Some examples of Interaction

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

- iii) The Munda in the nineteenth century were socially and economically integrated with the neighbouring populations.

There are tribes, which are fully integrated with the wider social, economic, political and religious framework, and others are so integrated in varying degrees. Then, there are tribes playing the role of bridge and buffer to their neighbours. Let us see what this means.

The Role of Bridge and Buffer

In North-East India, the tribes played the role of bridge and buffer to their neighbours. That is some tribes allowed two powerful neighbours to interact through them, that was the role of a bridge. In some other cases they kept the two powerful groups separated, that was the role of buffer.

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Give geographical distribution of Indian tribes. Illustrate each zone with suitable examples
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- ii) Classify Indian tribes in terms of their physical features and languages spoken by them.
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8.5 ECONOMIC PURSUITS AMONG TRIBES

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

8.5.1 Food Gatherers and Hunters

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

8.5.2 Shifting Cultivators

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

8.5.3 Settled Agriculturists

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

8.5.4 Artisans

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

Box 1: Gond Art

Gond paintings are freehand drawings by the gond tribe of Madhya Pradesh. The art is known for its use of vibrant colours and geometrical lines and dots. They often depict trees, and animals, indicating their relationship with nature and animals. They were traditionally painted on walls and floors. They were typically drawn during significant events such as harvesting, sowing, or to indicate seasonal changes. They were also painted for important rituals such as marriage, birth, death etc. Now these paintings are also made for commercial purposes. And have found popularity among city dwellers. Famous Gond painter Janghar Singh Shyam's work was exhibited in places like New York, Tokyo and Paris.

8.5.5 The Pastoralists and Cattle Herders

The classical examples of the pastoralist tribe are the Toda in the Nilgiris and the Gujjar, the Bakarwal and Gaddi in Himachal Pradesh. Although the Toda have a fixed abode, in certain regions they move their buffaloes for pasture. The buffaloes are individually owned but certain tasks related to the buffaloes and their dairies are collectively done. Like artisans they too exchange the dairy products for other items of their use particularly agriculture products. In the past, the Toda had exchange relations with the Badaga.

8.5.6 The Folk Artists

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

Activity 1

Make a list of some notable visual tribal art forms in India. Share with the your list with fellow learners at the study centre.

8.5.7 Wage Labourers

At the turn of the present century large chunks of tribal territories came under plantations. Mining and industrial development also increased in tribal areas. Many of the tribal people had to leave their traditional occupations and seek

employment in these enterprises as wage labourers. The tribals of Chotanagpur were taken to North-East India to work on tea plantations. The Santhal have been employed in coal mines of Bihar. This was indeed a major change. From a subsistence economy they were pushed into cash-oriented industrial economy which had its impact on their society.

8.5.8 Recent Economic Changes

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

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

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

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Classify the tribes on the basis of their economic pursuits?

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8.6 MANIFESTATION OF ETHNICITY

Soon after Independence the most powerful manifestation of ethnicity in India was the demand for creation of state or province on linguistic basis. The State Reorganisation Committee was formed in 1956 and boundaries of the states were redrawn on the linguistic basis. This forming of linguistic states was a manifestation of ethnic identity. This process reinforced the regional and linguistic identity and ethnicity. Thus, the demand for separate state on various accounts

like ethnicity, language, etc. soon became a part of the political scenario. Various political parties were formed at the state level which were, by and large, identified with ethnic elements.

Jharkhand Movement as an Example

The tribal belt of Central India comprising the portion of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa has seen the rise of the Jharkhand Movement, which agitated for the formation of a separate state for tribals and which they succeed in achieving. The Jharkhand Movement is a good example of politics of ethnicity. The movement drew its sustenance mainly from the growing discontent among tribals on account of their land alienation, exploitation and political neglect of their problems at the national level.

The principal arguments given for the demand of separate state were: the physical characteristic of the area is such as there is a large concentration of the tribals. Their mental make-up, language, culture and values are totally different from those of non-tribals. Also, the tribals felt that the welfare and developmental works both provided and carried out for them are pittance in comparison to the mineral wealth and forest resources exploited from the region. The tribals had a strong fear of losing their identity as they were in minority surrounded by the non-tribals.

The tribals were marginalised at all levels. This had generated tremendous frustration among them. This harsh reality had provided the ground for effective propaganda which had facilitated the growth of an internal solidarity and out-group antagonism. There was an antipathy among them towards the non-tribals or Dikus. Interestingly, the definition of Dikus has changed with changing context. Originally Dikus were Zamindars and their non-tribal employees. Later non-tribals of upper castes background were identified as such. As a result of this movement Jharkhand state was created in 2000.

8.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to understand several terms associated with tribe and ethnicity. In trying to understand tribal society and ethnic formations and interrelationship among them it is important to first get a sense various features that define tribal communities. Tribes in India can be classified by their geographic distribution, racial and linguistic affinities, demographic features, isolation from and interaction with other groups and their economic pursuits. These features act like boundary markers and give them identity. They are also elements in giving shape to their social structure.

The tribal scene has been changing. They have lost control over their resources such as forest and land. There has been change in their economy. All round development efforts too have made their impact on their institutions. Lastly, we discussed the manifestation of ethnicity e.g. Jharkhand movements.

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8.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) To provide resources for their industries, the British administration began to reach different parts of Indian territory. In the process they faced rebellious protests on the part of tribal populations. In order to protect such groups, in 1833, they declared certain areas outside the limits of normal rules and regulations. In 1874, the British passed Scheduled Area Regulation to administer such areas. By 1919, people of these areas began to be recognised as different from the Hindu, the Muslim and other religious groups. The Act of 1935 provided a policy of reservation for the people notified as Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution of Independent India also maintains a list of Scheduled Tribes.

Check Your Progress 2

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

Languages spoken by Indian tribes can be classified into four major families of language, namely, Austro-Asiatic family, Tibeto Chinese family, Indo European family and Dravidian. Examples of the speakers of the first type

are the Khasi, Santal and Nicobari, of the second type are Kha Bhotiya, Kachari, Dimasa, Angami and Singhpho. The examples of the third type are Hajong and Bhili and of the fourth type are Yeruva, Toda, and Oraon.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) On the basis of economic pursuits, Indian tribes can be classified into the following groups: (a) Food gatherers and hunters, (b) shifting cultivators, (c) settled agriculturists, (d) artisans, (e) the pastoralists and cattle herders, (f) the folk-artists and (g) wage labourers.



UNIT 9 FAMILY AND MARRIAGE*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 The Institution of Family
 - 9.2.1 Types of Family
- 9.3 The Institution of Marriage
 - 9.3.1 Age at Marriage in India
 - 9.3.2 Forms of Marriage
 - 9.3.2.1 Monogamy, Polygyny, Polyandry
 - 9.3.2.2 Prevailing Patterns
- 9.4 Patterns of Selection of Spouse
 - 9.4.1 Endogamy
 - 9.4.2 Exogamy
 - 9.4.3 Arranged Marriages
- 9.5 Marriage Rites
 - 9.5.1 Basic Rites of Marriage in Different Communities
- 9.6 Changes in the Family and the Marriage
 - 9.6.1 Factors Responsible for These Change
 - 9.6.2 Emerging Patterns of Family and Marriage
 - 9.6.3 Recent Trends in the Marriage
- 9.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.8 References
- 9.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- define the institution of family and the institution of marriage;
- give a description of the types of family and the forms of marriage; and
- identify the major forces responsible for change in the institutions of family and marriage.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Family and marriage are the fundamental institutions of human society as they are primarily responsible for reproducing social relationships that give rise to other institutions and identities. These in turn produce groups, social networks and very importantly help people identify who are like them and who are not. Family is the place where children are socialised into becoming social persons, learning all that will further help reproduce the society that they are born in. Marriage makes the family possible. Marriage is also organised in a way that reproduces the very society of which it is a part.

* adapted from ESO 12, Unit 6 & 7 by Prof. Rabindra Kumar, Discipline of Sociology, SOSS, IGNOU

9.2 THE INSTITUTION OF FAMILY

Let us first define the nature of the institution of family. Broadly speaking, it refers to the group comprising parents and children. It may also refer, in some places, to a patri-or matrilineage or to a group of cognates, that is, persons descended from the same ancestor. In some other cases, it may refer to a group of relatives and their dependants forming one household. All this refers to the compositional aspect of this institution. Another aspect is that of the residence of its members. They usually share a common residence, at least for some part of their lives. Thirdly, we can also speak of the relational aspect of the family. Members have reciprocal rights and duties towards each other. Finally, the family is also an agent of socialisation. All these aspects make this institution different from other units of social structure.

9.2.1 The Types of Family

Normally the basic unit of social structure contains the two primary links of kinship. These are of parenthood and siblingship. In simple terms, a family usually comprises various combinations and permutations of these relationships. In the Indian context, we generally speak of the contrast between nuclear and joint family types. A classification of families into joint and nuclear types is usually based on the way in which families are organised. For instance, the most popular definition of a nuclear family is to refer to it as a group consisting of a man, his wife and their unmarried, children. The joint family refers to a combination of nuclear families and other relatives. The term 'extended' family is used to denote extension of the parent-child relationship. Thus, the patrilineally extended family is based on an extension of the father-son relationship, while the matrilineally extended family is based on the mother-daughter relationship. The extended family may also be extended horizontally to include a group consisting of two or more brothers, their wives and children. This horizontally extended family is called as the fraternal or collateral family.

In India, the joint family, is also a property-sharing unit. The Hindu Undivided Family under the guardianship of the Karta is a legal unit.

The Hindu Joint Family: Much has been written about the joint family system, especially the Hindu joint family system. The patrilineal, patrilocal (residence of the couple after marriage in the husband's father's home), property owning, co-residential and commensal joint family, comprising three or more generations has been depicted as the ideal family unit of Hindu society. M.S. Gore (1968: 4-5) points out that ideally, the joint family consists of a man and his wife and their adult sons, their wives and children, and younger children of the paternal couple. In this ideal type the oldest male is the head of the family. The rights and duties in this type of family are laid down to a great extent by the hierarchical order of power and authority. Age and sex are the main ordering principles of family hierarchy. The frequency and the nature of contact/communication between members vary on the basis of sex. A married woman, for instance works in the kitchen with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. Younger members are required to show respect to the older members and can hardly question the authority or decision taken by elders even when it directly concerns them.

Emphasis on conjugal ties (i.e. between husband and wife) is supposed to weaken the stability of the joint family. The father-son relationship (filial relationship)

and the relationship between brothers (fraternal relationship) are more crucial for the joint family system than the husband-wife or conjugal relationship. Now let us discuss the institution of the marriage.

9.3 THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is an important social institution. It is a relationship, which is socially approved and this fact of legitimacy is the defining criteria of marriage, setting it apart from mating. The relationship is defined and sanctioned by custom and law. The definition of the relationship includes not only guidelines for behaviour relating to sex but also regarding things like the particular way labour is to be divided and other duties and privileges. All marriages are guided by the principles of endogamy and exogamy. The universal dictate of incest taboo, creates a fundamental division between consanguines and affines; namely those considered as blood relatives and hence prohibited for marriage and those who are in the potentially marriageable category. It must be noted that these categories are socially created and therefore vary from society to society. But their existence is universal and seen as a defining criteria of being human.

Children born of marriage are considered the legitimate offspring of the married couple. This legitimacy is important in the matter of inheritance and succession. Thus marriage is not only a means of sexual gratification but also a set of cultural mechanisms to ensure the continuation of the family. The religious texts of many communities in India have outlined the purpose, rights and duties involved in marriage. Among the Hindus, for instance, marriage is regarded as a socio-religious duty. Ancient Hindu texts point out three main aims of marriage. These are *dharma* (duty), *praja* (progeny) and *rati* (sensual pleasure). That is to say that marriage is significant from both the societal as well as the individual's point of view.

Even among other communities in India, marriage is regarded as an essential obligation. Islam looks upon marriage as "*sunnah*" (an obligation) which must be fulfilled by every Muslim. Christianity holds marriage as crucial to life and lays emphasis on the establishment of a mutual relationship between husband and wife and on their duty to each other.

9.3.1 Age at Marriage in India

Apart from marriage being universal, early marriage is also common in India. Though there are differences between various religious groups, classes and castes in the matter of age at marriage, the median age at marriage is low in India. In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed (popularly known as the Sarda Act) and the minimum age for marriage for girls and boys was fixed at 14 years and 17 years respectively. The Act was made applicable to all Indians. The latest amendment (in 1978) has raised the minimum age for marriage for boys and girls to 18 years and 21 years, respectively. Though the age at marriage of females in India has been rising slowly since around the middle of the twentieth century; the level at the end of the twentieth century was low in comparison to the most of the low fertility countries (Das and Dey 1998: 92).

9.3.2 Forms of Marriage

All the commonly listed forms of marriage, namely, monogamy (marriage of a man to a woman at a time), and polygamy (marriage of a man or woman to more than one spouse) are found in India. The latter, that is polygamy, has two forms, namely, polygyny (marriage of a man to several women at a time) and polyandry (marriage of a woman to several men at a time).

9.3.2.1 Monogamy, Polygyny, Polyandry

In this section, we shall focus only on monogamy, and both forms of polygamy. With regard to the prevalence of these three forms, one has to distinguish between what is permitted and what is practised by different sections of the population through time.

- i) **Monogamy:** Among the Hindus, until the passing of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, a Hindu man was permitted to marry more than one woman at a time. Although permitted, polygyny has not been common among the Hindus. Only limited sections of the population like kings, chieftains, headmen of villages, members of the landed aristocracy actually practiced polygyny. After Independence, the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 established monogamy for all Hindus and others who came to be governed by this Act. Some of the 'other' communities covered by this Act are the Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. Strict monogamy is prescribed in Christian and Parsi communities.
- ii) **Polygyny:** Islam, on the other hand, has allowed polygyny. A Muslim man can have as many as four wives at a time, provided all are treated as equals. However, it seems that polygynous unions have been restricted to a small percentage of Muslims, namely the rich and the powerful.
- iii) **Polyandry:** Polyandry is even less common than polygyny. The Toda of the Nilgiris in Tamilnadu, the Khasa of Jaunsar Bawar in Dehradun district of Uttaranchal and some North Indian castes practice polyandry.

9.3.2.2 Prevailing Patterns

Today some changes are taking place, both in the family and in patterns of marriage. Because of migration and people leaving for work to other cities and parts of the world, the actual residential pattern of the family is changing. For example many old couples or even single elderly persons live alone because their children have gone elsewhere for work. Yet, as pointed out by many sociologists like Shah, the sentiments of the family remain. Children look after parents even from a distance, sending money and visiting regularly and whenever required.

Marriages by and large still follow the principle of being arranged by parents and elders although quite a few people prefer to look for their own spouses.

Instead of traditional caste norms alone, the principles of class, that is education, occupation and social status have become important criteria for arranging a marriage. There is also a trend for persons preferring to marry within the same rank and occupational category, like doctors marrying doctors and IAS officers doing the same.

With new reproductive techniques and acceptance of varying sexual preferences the nature of family and marriage may change further.

Activity 1

Go through matrimonial columns in your newspaper and analyse the marriage patterns you observe there. Share your observations with your friends or other learners at the study centre.

Check Your Progress 1

i) What is the legally prescribed age at marriage for boys and girls in India?

.....

ii) What are the three forms of marriage found in India?

.....

9.4 PATTERNS OF SELECTION OF SPOUSE

There are three striking features regarding selection of spouse in India where the marriages are based on prescription more than on preference. The prescriptive rules of marriage are usually the characteristic of relatively closed societies. The rules of endogamy, including those of hypergamy and hypogamy, indicate the groups into which a person is expected to find a spouse and in India, these are closely associated with the concept of caste or *jati*. . Secondly, rules of exogamy prohibit a person from marrying into certain groups. These include the rules of incest that we have already mentioned.

9.4.1 Endogamy

The rule of endogamy requires an individual to marry within aspecified or defined group of which he or she is a member. The group may be a caste, clan, racial, ethnic or religious group. Marriages within the group help to reproduce the group. Religious and caste endogamy are two of the most pervasive forms of endogamy in India. Though legally permitted, inter-religious marriages are not commonly arranged or popular. In India there are innumerable castes which are divided into innumerable sub-castes which are further divided into subsections and each one of them is endogamous. The endogamous unit, for many Hindu sub-castes, consists of a series of kin clusters living in a fairly restricted geographical area. The operation of the rule of endogamy shows interesting variation by region and religion.

In South India, for instance, among many castes marriage with some relatives is preferred. In the Marathi, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada speaking areas, marriages with the cross-cousins (children of father's sisters or mother's brothers) are preferred. In North India, neither the parallel nor the cross-cousins can intermarry. In North India, on the other hand, there is a tendency to marry into villages that are not farther than twelve or thirteen kilometres from one's village. Social and economic links are restricted to a few kin groups residing in certain areas. There are spatial as well as social boundaries which limit the field of marriage and these boundaries vary from region to region.

Endogamous rules are operative in non-Hindu sections of the population too. Among the Muslims, the 'Syeds', recognised as an aristocratic class, are divided into various endogamous groups. Sometimes the endogamous group is so small that it includes only the extended families of a man's parents. Muslims permit marriages between both cross (mother's brother's children and father's sister's children) and parallel (mother's sister's children and father's brother's children) cousins. In fact, the father's brother's daughter is a preferred mate. Among Muslims the concept of purity of blood seems to be mainly responsible for preference of marriage between close relatives particularly between children of siblings. Many Muslim groups in North and Western India consider marriage between children of two brothers as most desirable. It is held that the desire to keep the family property within the family has been another important reason for close kin marriages. It is generally believed that marriage of the near kin helps to mitigate the conflict between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and this helps to strengthen the intra-as well as inter-familial ties.

Hypergamy: According to the rule of hypergamy, the status of the husband is always higher than that of the wife. Those who follow this rule always seek for their daughters those men who have social status higher than their own. It is a rule whereby marriage takes place or is generally arranged within a sub caste between a girl of a lower social status and a boy of a higher social status. This practice has occurred mainly among different subsections of a caste or sub caste rather than between castes. This practice known as *asanuloma* was the preferred form of marriage according to Hindu scriptures. Its opposite, *pratiloma* or **hypogamy**, where a woman marries into a group of lower rank was frowned upon

Practice of hypergamy has been found most Indian jati groups. It also shows interesting regional variations. For instance, among the Rajput of Uttar Pradesh, traditionally girls were given in marriage from east to the west direction within a sub-caste. This is so because the Rajput clans were associated with a geographic region and a corresponding rating by region. Prestige of regions increased towards the westerly direction (Karve 1965: 165-171).

9.4.2 Exogamy

Exogamous rules are complementary to endogamous rules. Starting from the practice of incest one can see many variations of this rule. In North India, a girl born within a village is considered the daughter of the village and hence cannot marry a boy from her own village. Thus, the village becomes the exogamous unit here. In South India, the exogamous unit in one's own generation is defined by one's own sisters/brothers and real and classificatory parallel cousins.

Two other kinds of exogamy, which have been prevalent among several Hindu communities in North and South India, are *sagotra* and *sapinda* exogamy.

- i) **Sagotra exogamy:** In the context of the 'twice born' castes (belonging to the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya *varna* across) India *sagotra* exogamy applies to those who trace descent from a common ancestor, usually a *rishi* or a sage. All these people cannot intermarry. The term *gotra* is commonly used to mean an exogamous category within a *jati*. One of its principal uses is to regulate marriage alliance. All members of a *gotra* are supposed to be descendants of or associated with the same ancestral figure.

A four-clan rule or four *gotra* exogamous rule prevails among Hindu castes in North India. In accordance with this four clan (*gotra*) rule, a man cannot marry a girl from (i) his father's *gotra* or clan, (ii) his mother's *gotra* or clan, (iii) his *dadi*'s, i.e. his father's mother's *gotra* or clan, and (iv) his *nani*'s, i.e., his mother's mother's *gotra* or clan. In almost all castes in the northern zone, according to Karve (1953), the marriage between cousins is prohibited. We can show the four-clan rule in a diagram in the following manner.

- a) **Sapinda:** *Sapinda* exogamy indicates the prohibition placed on the intermarriage between certain sets of relatives. *Sapinda* represents the relationship between the living member and their dead ancestors. The term *sapinda* means
- i) those who share the particles of the same body (ii) people who are united by offering '*pinda*' or balls of cooked rice to the same dead ancestor. Hindu lawgivers do not give a uniform definition regarding the kinship groups within which marriage cannot take place. Some prohibit marriage of members within seven generations on the father's side and five generations of members from mother's side. Some others have restricted the prohibited generations to five on the father's and three on the mother's side. Several others have permitted the marriage of cross-cousins (marriage of a person with his father's sister's children or mother's brother's children).

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 does not allow marriage within five generations on the father's side and three on the mother's side. However, it permits the marriage of cross-cousins where this is customary. Such rules are not confined to Hindus.

Among Christians and Muslims, the elementary or nuclear family is the exogamous unit. Moplah Muslims of North Malabar in Kerala live in matrilineal units and among them matrilineage is the exogamous unit. Lineage exogamy also exists among the Muslim Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir (Srinivas 1969: 56). Among the Nayars, who are a matrilineal group, a girl can never marry her mother's brother.

9.4.3 Arranged Marriages

Though the measure of participation in choosing one's life partner has shown variations between different groups, by and large, marriage arranged by parents/elders is the most prevalent form of selection of spouse. For majority of the high

caste Hindus, matching of horoscope (charts relating to one's birth under certain astrological calculations) constitutes an important element in the final choice of the marriage partner. Today apart from astrologers matching the horoscopes of a boy and a girl, computers are also used to match horoscopes. Among the Muslims, the parents, elders or *wali* (guardian) arrange a marriage (Gazetteer of India 1965: 547 and CSWI 1974: 62).

9.5 MARRIAGE RITES

Rites constitute an important part of marriage in India. We find variations in rites not only in terms of religion but also in terms of caste, sect and rural or urban residence. Let us look at some of the basic rites in a few communities in India.

9.5.1 Basic Rites of Marriage in Different Communities

For the Hindus, marriage is a **sacrament**. This means that a Hindu marriage cannot be dissolved. It is a union for life. This is also reflected in the marital rites. Some of the essential rites are *kanyadan* (the giving off of the bride to the groom by the father), *panigrahana* (the clasp of the bride's hand by the groom), *agniparinaya* (going around the sacred fire by the bride and the groom), *lajahoma* (offering of the parched grain to the sacrificial fire) and *saptapadi* (walking seven steps by the bride and the groom). These basic rituals are not confined to the twice born castes (the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya) only, but these are also performed with some variations among other castes too. Some invite a Brahmin priest to recite the *mantra* which are religious invocations. The ritual of *kanyadan* is the most popular of all the basic rituals.

Certain sections of the Jain community (like the Digambara and Svetambara) and the Sikh community have marriage customs and rituals which are similar to those of the Hindus. The core ceremony of the Sikhs however is different. It is called "*anandkaraj*" and is solemnised in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs. The main ceremony consists of the bridal couple going four times around the holy book. Appropriate verses, known as '*shabad*' are recited by the officiating priest. Unlike Hindus, Sikhs do not have any particular period or season for marriages.

Muslim marriage is not a sacrament. Rather, it is a contract, which can be terminated. Among the Muslims, the marriage rituals show variation by sect and region. Some rites of the Shia sect of the Muslims differ from the Sunni, a sect among the Muslims. However, the essential ceremony of Muslim marriage is known as the *nikah*. The ceremony is performed by the priest or the *kazi*. The *nikah* is considered to be complete only when the consent of both the groom and the bride has been obtained. A formal document known as *nikahnama* bears the signatures of the couple. Among certain sections, the signatures of two witnesses are also included in the document and the document may also contain details of the payment to be made to the bride by the groom. This payment is called the *mehr* which is a stipulated sum of money or other assets paid to the wife either immediately after the wedding or postponed till some future date.

Among the Christians, the wedding takes place in a church. The exchange of the ring is an important ritual among them. Some sections of the Christians, like the

Syrian Christians of Kerala, have the Hindu rite of the groom tying a '*tali*' on the bride's neck. *Tali* is a symbol of the married state of Hindu women in South India.

A marriage is a life cycle ceremony or a rite of passage (Van Gennep) that basically makes a social announcement of the union that is also its legitimacy.

Check Your Progress 2

i) Define the following:

a) endogamy

.....

b) exogamy

.....

c) hypergamy

.....

9.6 CHANGES IN THE FAMILY AND THE MARRIAGE

A host of interrelated factors, economic, educational, legal, demographic, have affected the family and the marriage in India. The impact has been differentially felt by different groups through time. Let us look at each factor separately keeping in mind that all these factors had a cumulative effect on different aspects of family living.

9.6.1 Factors Influencing Change in Family and Marriage in the Indian Context

We will discuss these factors in the context of social changes occurring since the British rule in India.

- i) **Economic Factors:** The spread and intensification of market economy, diversification of occupational opportunities for employment in varied spheres, technological advancements (in communication and transport) are some of the major economic factors, which have affected the joint family system in India.

The British encouraged cash transactions for purposes of revenue collection. They also introduced a range of new job opportunities that incentivized people to leave their traditional occupations and move to cities or towns where these occupations were available. This meant residential separation from their ancestral home. If they were married, they sometimes took their wives and children (and even one or two relatives) along with them.

Since Independence, opportunities for and diversification of occupations have increased. With a constitutional commitment to promote equality between the sexes and to integrate women into the development process, a further impetus has emerged to draw women into varied kinds of occupations. In families where both the men and women go out to work, role relationships between different members of the family are affected.

- ii) **Educational Factors:** Again it was during the British rule that opportunities for higher education emerged in a significant way. All castes and communities had access to the facilities provided by the British with regard to education. Some of those who were able to gain access and exposure to English-medium education (exposure specially to the individualistic, liberal and humanitarian ideas) began to question some of the Hindu customs and practices relating to child marriage, denial of rights of education to women, property rights of women and ill-treatment of widows. Educated young men not only desired to postpone their marriage to a much later age than what was prescribed by family tradition, but also wanted to marry women with some educational background. Educated women (especially college educated) were expected to have a different kind of influence on family matters than uneducated or less educated women.
- iii) **Legal Factors:** Legislations regarding employment, education, marriage, and property, has affected the family system in many ways. Labour laws passed for the benefit of employees like the Indian Workmen Compensation Act (1923), the Minimum Wages Act 1948, helped to reduce the economic reliance of members on the joint family for economic support. In 1930 the Hindu Gains of Learning Act was passed whereby it was declared that the property acquired by a Hindu out of his education was his personal property though his education was paid for by the joint family. The distinction between self-acquired property and joint family property was drawn. In 1937, during the British rule a law was passed by which a woman acquired a limited right to her husband's property. She could hold the property of her husband after his death as a limited owner during her lifetime. But after she died the property devolved to the heirs (usually the sons) of the husband.

With regard to marriage, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1929, to curb infant marriages. It prescribed the minimum age (18 and 14 years respectively) at marriage for boys and girls. This Act also aimed to give women an opportunity for education. Now in India the prescribed minimum age at marriage is 21 for boys and 18 for girls.

After Independence the Hindu Succession Act (1956) was passed which gave a daughter and a son equal rights to the father's property. These legislations challenged the inheritance patterns that prevailed in joint families prior to the passing of this Act and the dependent position of women within the family.

- iv) **Urbanisation:** The process of urbanisation has also affected the pattern of family life in India. It denotes the movement of people from rural to urban areas and a shift from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations. It also implies the adoption of an urban way of life. Urban life reflects increased density of population, heterogeneity of population, diversification and increased specialisation of occupations, complex division of labour. It also

includes increased availability of educational and health facilities. Limited availability of living space, impersonality and anonymity also characterise urban life.

Partly as a result of population pressure on land, there has been a continuous influx of people into cities seeking education, jobs, medical care etc. What impact does migration to cities have on the families in villages? Residential separation due to mobility of members from one place to another affects the size and composition of the family. A man may take his wife and children along with him to establish a nuclear family in the city. There have been many studies, which show that migration to cities from villages and small towns has contributed to the rapid disintegration of large size family units. These observations have been mainly based on census data, which show a high percentage of nuclear families in cities (Mies 1980: 74). In the city, with problems of finding accommodation and limited space available for living, it becomes difficult for an average urbanite to maintain and support a large family.

The other factors which have been held responsible for encouraging smaller units are i) opportunities for higher education ii) heightened ambitions iii) increased occupational mobility iv) growing sense of individuality (i.e., thinking in terms of individual needs and ambitions rather than in terms of kinship needs and larger familial requirements).

9.6.2 Emerging Patterns of Family and Marriage

Today there are varied patterns of family living. In urban areas both male and female members of the family may go for gainful employment outside the home. In some families the parents of the husband may live with his wife and children. While in some others, members of the wife's family may be living with the couple and their children. With both the husband and the wife going outside the home for gainful employment and with the absence or limited availability of child care facilities, presence of kin members to look after the home and children comes handy for the smooth functioning of the household. Those working couples who prefer to live in nuclear families and who fear or resist interference from kin members, try to organise their household with professional help from outside the family (like cooks, maid servants, crèches).

Aged parents, who formerly used to look towards their eldest son or other sons for support in old age, are now adjusting themselves to the new demands of family life by making economic provisions for their old age. Even within a city parents and married sons may reside separately. Another trend in family life in India is that girls are prepared to support their parent or parents in old age, and it is not impossible to find a widowed mother or parents staying with a married daughter (mainly, in the absence of sons) to help her to manage the household. Measures have been provided at the legal level to ensure that dependant old parents are looked after by a daughter if she is self-reliant even after her marriage. Bilateral kinship relations are more and more recognised and accepted today in many nuclear households in the cities.

9.6.3 Recent Trends in the Marriage

To what extent are the rules of endogamy, hypergamy, exogamy and arranged marriages operative today? Intercaste marriages are now recognised by law and take place on a larger scale than before. These intercaste marriages constitute only a very small proportion of the total number of marriages taking place. They are increasing at a slow rate. Caste endogamy is still highly relevant in the context of the patterns of selection of spouse. Though majority of marriages continue to be arranged by parents/elders/*wali*, the pattern of choosing one's spouse has undergone some modifications today. We find the following patterns i) marriage by parents'/elders' choice without consulting either the boy or girl, ii) marriage by self-choice, iii) marriage by self-choice but with parents' consent, iv) marriage by parents' choice but with the consent of both the boy and the girl involved in the marriage, v) marriage by parents' choice but with the consent of only one of the two partners involved.

9.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit has discussed the social institution of family and marriage in India. It has described the types of family and forms of marriage, age at marriage, patterns of selection of spouse in India. Then it looked at factors of the changes in the family and the marriage. Finally, it outlined some of the emerging patterns of family life and marriage in contemporary India.

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9.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) 21 years for boys and 18 years for girls.
- ii) The three forms are monogamy, polygyny and polyandry.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) *Endogamy*: A rule of marriage whereby an individual is required to marry within a specified group of which he/she is a member.
- b) *Exogamy*: A rule of marriage whereby an individual is required to marry outside the group of which he/she is a member.
- c) *Hypergamy*: A rule of marriage whereby a girl is married to a boy whose social status is higher than her own. It occurs mainly among different subsections of a caste/subcaste rather than between castes.



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UNIT 10 KINSHIP*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Definition of Kinship System
- 10.3 Dimensions of Kinship System
- 10.4 Kinship System in North India
 - 10.4.1 Kinship Groups
 - 10.4.2 Kinship Terminology
 - 10.4.3 Marriage Rules
 - 10.4.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin
- 10.5 Kinship System in South India
 - 10.5.1 Kinship Groups
 - 10.5.2 Kinship Terminology
 - 10.5.3 Marriage Rules
 - 10.5.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin
- 10.6 Kinship System in North East and South Western India
 - 10.6.2 Matrilineal Groups in North-east India
 - 10.6.2 Matrilineal Groups in South-west India
- 10.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.8 References
- 10.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- define the kinship system;
- describe the dimensions of the kinship system in India;
- discuss major aspects of North Indian kinship system and ;
- discuss major aspects of South Indian kinship system; and
- discuss kinship system of North East and South Western India.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

So far you have learnt about the social institutions of family and marriage in India. As family takes its form with the help of kinship rules, norms and patterns, it is necessary that we learn about the different forms of kinship in India. This will then provide you with a holistic understanding of social relationships involved in family and marriage.

Since India is a land of immense diversity, its different regions reflect different systems of kinship. In the limited scope of two units, it is not possible to even

outline all the various types of kinship systems found in India. As the country's two major geographical divisions, the north and the south, present two distinct forms and have been described in sociological literature as such, we introduce you to the North Indian and South Indian systems of kinship. You must remember that this does not mean that there are no further varieties of kinship systems in certain pockets of both North and South India. Indeed, India's north eastern parts, as well as, other regions in its west and south provide many other types.

10.2 DEFINITION OF KINSHIP SYSTEM

Kinship system refers to a set of persons recognised as relatives either by virtue of a blood relationship or by virtue of a marriage relationship. In sociology, all blood relationships are known by a technical term, consanguinity. However consanguinity does not refer to any genetic relationship but only to what is socially recognized as such. Who is a blood relative is defined by society and not by actual biological relationship. All relationships through marriage are given the term affinity. For example, the relationships between mother and son/daughter, sister and brother/sister, father and son/daughter are consanguinal, while relationships between father/mother-in-law and daughter-/son-in-law are affinal.

10.3 DIMENSIONS OF KINSHIP SYSTEM

The following are four basic definitions useful for study of kinship.

- i) **Kinship Groups:** Kin relationships form social groups for purposes of cooperation and inheritance of property and identity. A group boundary is provided by the principle of descent. Groups thus include persons of one line of descent, patrilineal or matrilineal and exclude those not so related. Groups based on bilateral descent are known as sibs. Descent groups are known as lineage, clan and moiety depending upon the depth and nature of the descent group.
- ii) **Kinship Terminology:** A kin term refers to the label we give to a particular kin relation. A kinship terminology refers to the system of kin terms that have a logical relationship to each other. Based on the logic of these relationships anthropologists have identified several kinds of kinship terminologies that follow a pattern of arrangement of kin terms. Almost all the world's kinship terminologies can be fitted into basically four or five types.
- iii) **Marriage Rules:** There are basically two kinds of marriage rules broadly speaking. The prescriptive terms define exact category of persons (also relatives) who are preferred in marriage and those who are not. For example in South India a person is expected to and often obliged to marry one's cross cousin but prohibited from marrying a parallel cousin.

Preferential marriage system are more open and generally identify those who one cannot marry (that is those prohibited by incest) but leaves open the choice to marry anyone else.

- iv) **Exchange of Gifts:** Marriages involve the transactions of gifts known as marriage prestations. Two broad types of prestations are recognised all over the world. Bride Price or Bride Wealth and Dowry. The former is far more prevalent than the latter. Bride price represents the exchange of wealth with

a woman. Dowry is more of a matter of status and takes place only in hierarchical society to recognize the higher status of the bride receiving group and is also an indicator of patriarchy. Some authors also call dowry as inheritance by women in a patrilineal system of inheritance. In India upper castes in both North and South have practice of dowry and bride price is found among lower castes and tribes.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Define, in six lines, with examples, consanguine and affinal categories of kin.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

10.4 KINSHIP SYSTEM IN NORTH INDIA

Irawati Karve (1953: 93) identified the northern zone as the region that lies between the Himalayas to the north and the Vindhya ranges to the south. We can describe the basic structure and process of kinship system in this area in terms of four features that is i) kinship groups, ii) kinship terminology iii) marriage rules, and iv) ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin.

Irawati Karve (1905 – August 11, 1970) was born to wealthy Brahmin family. She studied at Fergusson College, Pune, from where she obtained a degree in philosophy. She later went to Bombay University where she studied under the renowned sociologist G. S. Ghurye. She is the first female anthropologist/sociologist in India. She was known for her wide ranging interests and influences such as: anthropology, anthropometry, serology, Indology and palaeontology as well as collecting folk songs and translating feminist poetry. She believed in the importance of mapping social groups like sub castes and believed that fieldwork essential to undertake such mapping. She founded the department of anthropology at what was then Poona University (now the University of Pune). Karve served for many years as the head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Deccan College, Pune (University of Pune). She presided over the Anthropology Division of the National Science Congress held in New Delhi in 1947. She wrote in both Marathi and English



10.4.1 Kinship Groups

Sociological studies in various parts of North India show the predominance of social groups based on the principles of co-operation and kinship between men.

- i) *Patrilineage*: We can say that broadly speaking kinship organisation in North India is based on unilineal descent groups based on male descent. Members of patrilineages form land holding cooperate groups that may also engage in conflict with similar but rival groups.
- ii) *Clan and Lineage groups*: They are both based on the principle of descent from a common ancestor or ancestress, depending upon whether the group is patrilineal or matrilineal. When the ancestor can be actually traced, the group is a lineage but when it goes so far back as the ancestor becomes a mythical figure then it is known as a clan. In North India, there is both lineage and clan exogamy. In the *jati* based society, we also have *gotra* exogamy where a *gotra* refers to an ancient ancestor, a mythological sage.
- iii) *Caste and Subcaste*: A Caste usually refers to a *jati* or a local group but many units known as castes refer to a community that has a name and occupation but may be sub-divided into smaller units based on some criteria that separates them out for marriage. For example the name of the overall caste may be Aggarwal, but there may exist sub-castes within this community based on some character like relative purity of past marriage, a slightly different occupation or some other marker. For example one sub-caste may compose of dealers in grain while another to dealers in gold and silver.
- iv) *Fictive Kin*: We should also mention, the recognition of fictive kinship in Indian society. Often, people, who are not related either by descent or marriage, form the bonds of fictive kinship with each other. For example a woman may tie a *rakhi* on a man and he becomes her fictive brother. Among Christians the practice of naming a person as Godfather or Godmother at the time of baptism of the child is an institutionalized form of fictive kinship.

10.4.2 Kinship Terminology

- i) **Descriptive Nature of North Indian Kinship Terms**: The kinship terminology is the expression of kinship relations in linguistic terms. In the case of North India, we can call the system of terminology as **bifurcate collateral** where each kinship term is descriptive. A descriptive kin term is unique and used for only one relationship. Unlike the English terms, uncle, aunty, cousin, which do not reveal age, patrilineal/matrilateral ties, the North Indian kinship terms are very clear. For example, when we say *chachera bhai*, it can be easily translated as father's younger brother's (*chacha's*) son, who stands in the relationship of a brother (*bhai*) to the speaker. Similarly, *mamera bhai* means mother's brother's (*mama's*) son. We find a clear-cut distinction made between parallel and cross-cousins. The children of one's brother are *bhatija* (for male child) and *bhatiji* (for female child). The children of one's sister are *bhanja* (for male child) and *bhanji* (for female child).
- ii) **Kinship Terms Signifying Social Behaviour**: The concept of kinship behavior was given by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. He identified three kinds of kinship rules that inform kinship behaviour.
 - 1) Unity of the Sibling Group
 - 2) Distance of adjacent generations
 - 3) Merging of alternate generations

Both kinship terms and behaviour reflect these principles. Two major forms of kinship behaviour are joking relationships and avoidance relationships. Both serve the same function, to reduce tension and act as a cathartic mechanism in case of relationships that are precarious. These are relationships that have an ambiguous character and the norms tend to be liable to infraction.

For example, Oscar Lewis (1958: 189), in his study of a North Indian village, has described the pattern and relationship between a person and his elder brother's wife. This is popularly known as *Devar-Bhabhi* relationship, which is characteristically a joking relationship. By the rules of Hindu marriage a man can possibly marry his elder brother's widow but not his younger brother's wife. The latter should be seen as a daughter-in-law. However in most cases there is no actual possibility of such a union occurring yet the potential sexuality of the relationship remains. Thus the tension is masked through joking.

As a contrast to the joking relationship is the behaviour of avoidance between a woman and her husband's father. Similarly, she has to avoid her husband's elder brother. The term for husband's father is *shvasur* and for husband's elder brother is *bhasur*. *Bhasur* is a combination of the Sanskrit word *bhratr* (brother) and *shvasur* (father-in-law), and is, therefore, like father-in-law.

Activity 1

Name some popular movies where the joking relationship between *Devar-bhabhi* is highlighted? How was the joking aspect of relationship depicted? Write your answer and discuss with your friends or learners at the study centre.

10.4.3 Marriage Rules

In the context of North India, we find that people know whom not to marry. In sociological terms, the same thing can be expressed by saying that there are negative rules of marriage in North India. We can also say that marriage is allowed only outside a defined limit. Let us see what this limit or the rule of exogamy is in North India.

- i) **Clan Exogamy:** Belonging to one's natal descent line is best expressed in matters of marriage. No man is allowed to marry a daughter of his patriline. In North India lineage ties upto five or six generations are generally remembered and marriage alliances are not allowed within this range. In such a situation the lineage turns into the clan and we speak of gotra (clan) and gotra bhai (clan mates).
- ii) **The Four Clan Rule :** In Irawati Karve's (1953: 118) words, according to this rule, a man must not marry a woman from (i) his father's gotra, (ii) his mother's gotra, (iii) his father's mother's gotra, and (iv) his mother's mother's gotra. Another related kind of exogamy, which exists in North India, is village exogamy. A village usually has members of one or two lineages living in it. Members belonging to the same lineage are not permitted to intermarry. This principle extends even to the villages, which have more than two lineages. In other words, a boy and a girl in a village in North India are like a brother and sister and hence cannot intermarry.
- iii) **Marriages within the Sub Caste:** Associated with local terms is the idea of the status of various units within the sub-caste. Taking the example of

the Sarjupari Brahmin of Mirzapur district in Uttar Pradesh, studied by Louis Dumont (1966: 107), we find that each of the three sub-castes of Sarjupari Brahmins of this area is divided into three houses (kin groups or lineages) which range hierarchically in status. The marriages are always arranged from lower to higher house. This means that women are always given to the family, which is placed in the house above her own. In this context, we can also refer to the popular saying in North India that 'the creeper must not go back'. The same idea is reflected by another North Indian saying that 'pao pujke, ladki nahin le jainge' (i.e., once we have washed the feet of the bride groom during the wedding ceremony, we cannot accept a girl from his family, because this will mean that we allow that side to wash our feet or allow the reversal of relationships). In North India, such a reversal is not allowed and thus, we find the rule of prohibition on marriage with patrilateral cross-cousins.

Another principle should also be mentioned here. It is rule of no repetition. This means that if the father's sister has been married in a family (khandan), one's own sister cannot be given in marriage to that same family (Dumont 1966: 104-7).

A prohibition on repetition shows that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is barred in North India. Thus, we find that both patrilateral and matrilateral cross-cousin marriages are not allowed in North India.

10.4.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin

Ceremonial exchange of gifts on the occasions of life cycle rituals provides us with the understanding of a patterned behaviour among various categories of kin. Generally, the bride-givers, in correspondence with their inferior status vis-a-vis bride-takers, initiate the process of gift-giving during marriage and continue to give greater amounts of gifts. In other words, you can say that gift-giving and receiving is a well-defined social activity (see Jain 1996 b). Let us take example of this behaviour.

A.C. Mayer (1960: 232) has described in his study of kinship in a village in Malwa that all gifts given by one's mother's brother are called mamere. In contrast to the gifts given by the mother's brother, there are gifts known as ban, given by one's agnates. Ban is the term used also for the gift, which is given by other relatives such as the groom's sister's husband to the groom's wife's brother. This shows that the groom's sister's husband (or father's sister's husband in the context of the ascending generation) is viewed to be a part of agnatic kin vis-a-vis the groom's wife's brother (or mother's brother for the ascending generation).

10.5 KINSHIP SYSTEM IN SOUTH INDIA

Let us first define the area that we will include in our discussion of South Indian Kinship System. The states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are generally considered as South India. In the region occupied by these four states, we find a fairly common pattern of kinship organisation. Like in the North, we find diversity in the kinship pattern in the South too. We must not forget that in this region, the state of Kerala is distinct because of its matrilineal system of descent and the practice of inter-caste hypergamy. Secondly despite common

elements, each of these four linguistic regions may have its distinct socio-cultural patterns of kinship. Having defined the area, let us now begin with a discussion of kinship groups.

10.5.1 Kinship Groups

Kin relatives in South India are mainly categorised in two groups namely, the patrilineage and the affines.

- i) **Patrilineage:** In South India, just as in North India, relating to various categories of kin beyond one’s immediate family implies a close interaction with members of one’s patrilineage. The **patrilocal** residence amongst the lineage members provides the chances for frequent interaction and cooperation. Thus, the ties of descent and residence help in the formation of a kin group. Such a group is recognised in both South and North India. For example, K.Gough (1955) in her study of the Brahmins of Tanjore district describes patrilineal descent groups, which are distributed in small communities. Each caste within the village contains one to twelve exogamous patrilineal groups.
- ii) **Affinal Relatives:** Opposed to the members of a patrilineage, we have the kin group of affinal relatives (those related through marriage). Beyond the patrilineage are the relatives who belong to the group in which one’s mother was born, as well as one’s wife. They are a person’s uterine (from mothers side) and affinal (from wife’s side) kin, commonly known as *mama-machchinan*. In this set of relatives are also included the groups in which a person’s sister and father’s sister are married. The nature of interaction between a patrilineage and its affines, as described by Dumont (1986) is always cordial and friendly.

From this discussion of kinship groups, we now move on to the description of kinship terminology.

Check Your Progress 2

i) What are the two kinship groups in South India?

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10.5.2 Kinship Terminology

The expression of kin relationships follows a clear-cut structure with a great deal of precision. Main features of this system, according to Louis Dumont (1986: 301), are that (i) it distinguishes between parallel and cross-cousins and (ii) it is classificatory. Let us discuss these two features. This is also referred to as **bifurcate-merging**.

- i) **Parallel and Cross-cousins:** Parallel cousins are those who are the children of the siblings of same sex. This means that children of two brothers, or, of two sisters are parallel cousins to each other. Cross-cousins are those, who are the children of the siblings of the oppositesex. This means that children of a brother and a sister are cross-cousins.

The kin terminology in South India clearly separates the two categories of cousins. There are very good reasons for doing so because in South India, parallel cousins cannot marry each other while cross-cousins can. The parallel cousins are referred as brothers/sisters. For example, in Tamil, all parallel cousins are addressed as *annan* (elder brother) or *tambi* (younger brother) and *akka* (elder sister) or *tangachi* (younger sister). Cross-cousins are never brothers/sisters. They are referred, for example in Tamil, as *mama magal/magan* (mother's brother's daughter/son) or *attai magal/magan* (father's sister's daughter/son)

- ii) **Classificatory Nature of Kinship Terminology;** The distinction between parallel and cross-cousins combined with the classificatory nature of terminology makes the Dravidian kinship terms a mirror image of the kinship system in South India. The terminology becomes classificatory in the following manner. The person's own generation is terminologically divided into two groups:
- a) One group (known as *Pangali* in Tamil) consists of all the brothers and sisters, including one's parallel cousins and the children of the father's parallel cousins.
 - b) The other group comprises cross-cousins and affinal relatives such as wife/ husband of the category (a) relatives. In Tamil, this category is called by the term of *mama-machchinan*.

10.5.3 Marriage Rules

Kinship system in South India is characterised by positive rules of marriage. This means that preference for a particular type of alliance in marriage is clearly stated and practised.

- i) **Three Types of Preferential Marriage Rules:** The preferential marriage rules are of the following three types.
- i) In several castes in South India, the first preference is given to the marriage between a man and his elder sister's daughter. Among the matrilineal societies like the Nayars, this is not allowed.
 - ii) Next category of preferred marriage is the marriage of a man with his father's sister's daughter (fzd). In other words, we can also say that a woman marries her mother's brother's son (mbs). In this kind of marriage, the principle of return is quite evident. The family, which gives a daughter, expects to receive a daughter in return in marriage.
 - iii) The third type of preferential marriage is between a man and his mother's brother's daughter (mbd). In a way, this is the reverse of (ii) above. Some castes, such as the Kallar of Tamil Nadu, Havik Brahmin of Karnataka, some Reddy castes of Andhra Pradesh, allow only this type of cross-cousin

- ii) **Restrictions regarding Marital Alliances:** In this context it is necessary to see what are the restrictions imposed with regard to marriage between certain relatives. For example, in certain castes a man can marry his elder sister's daughter but not younger sister's daughter. Also a widow cannot marry her deceased husband's elder or younger brother or even his classificatory brother. Here we find that for each individual, the prohibited persons for marriage differ. Then there is, of course, the rule that a person cannot marry in one's own immediate family and one's lineage. The lineage in the case of the Kallar sub-caste is known as *Kuttam* (Dumont 1986: 184). All individuals in the lineage are forbidden to marry persons of the lineage.

10.5.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin

The process of gift-giving and taking reflects the principles governing the separation/ assimilation of various categories of kin relationships. This is the reason why we look at this aspect of kinship behaviour. Gifts and counter-gifts in South India from certain persons to other persons or from certain groups to other groups can be distinguished in two categories.

- i) Gifts passing from the bride's family to the groom's family or the reverse can be seen as a series of exchanges between affines. This is one category of gift-exchange.
- ii) The other category of gift-giving and taking occurs within each of the two groups. We can call it internal exchange of gifts. It is sometimes possible for a person to make/receive gifts from both sides. Because of the positive rules of marriage between relatives, often certain individuals are placed in the positions of receivers and givers at the same time. In other words, there is a process of merging of relationships.

Element of Reciprocity in Gift-giving: In conclusion, we may say that in the context of kinship behaviour at ceremonial exchanges of gifts in South India, the element of reciprocity is present, though the bride-givers have to pay more gifts than they receive. In comparative terms, we may say that in North India, the gifts travel from the bride-givers to bride-takers in a unidirectional manner. As a result, the bride-givers, in turn, receive the enhanced prestige and status in their own community. In South India, the positive rule of marriage means that gifts are exchanged among close relatives. There is always the difference in the amount of gifts both sides exchange but their flow has to remain both-sided. It cannot be as unidirectional as it is in North India.

10.6 KINSHIP ORGANISATION IN MATRILINEAL COMMUNITIES IN NORTH-EAST AND SOUTH-WEST INDIA

Having outlined broad patterns of kinship organisation in patrilineal societies we now give a brief account of the less common types of matrilineal descent system in India. These are in contrast to patrilineal descent system and provide us with examples of quite different patterns of kinship.

Matrilineal communities in India are confined to south-western and north-eastern regions only. In North-east India, the matrilineal social organisation is found among the Garo and Khasi tribes of Meghalaya and Assam. In South India,

matriliny is found in Kerala, in parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep. Among the matrilineal groups of both the Hindus and the Muslims in these regions property is inherited by daughters from their mothers. Let us, in brief, discuss what a matrilineal system is. Then we will look at the patterns of kinship organisation in the above mentioned societies.

10.6.1 Matrilineal Groups in North-east India

The matriliney is represented, in the North-east, mainly by the Garo and the Khasi in the states of Meghalaya and Assam. We will now discuss in brief the broad features of the kinship organisation in each of these two groups.

- i) **The Garo:** Among the Garo tribals who are found mainly in the state of Meghalaya, a matrilineage is represented by the households of daughters. These households come out of the original household (consisting of a woman, her daughter and her son-in-law) which is continued by retaining one daughter within its fold. A matrilineage is understood by the term *machong*, which refers to an extended group of kin, living in a locality. All members of a matrilineage or *machong* trace descent from a common mother. The children take the name of their mother's clan. In the matter of tracing descent and passing on property, mother is the pivot around which the Garo society revolves. But decision-making regarding land and other property and management of the affairs of the household (*nok*), lie with men. The Garo are divided into two phratries (*katchi*). A phratry is a kinship unit of the tribe. The two kinship units among the Garo are named the *Marak* and the *Sangma*, respectively. There are no inter-marriages between the two phratries. After marriage the pattern of residence is matrilocal. This means that after marriage the son-in-law lives in his wife's parents' house. He becomes the *nokrom* of his father-in-law. After the death of the father-in-law, a *nokrom* marries his wife's mother and becomes the husband of both the mother and the daughter is only an economic arrangement to enable the son-in-law to succeed his father-in-law as the head of the *nok*.

The rules of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage (a man's marriage with his mother's brother's daughter) and mother-in-law marriage (a man's marriage with his mother-in-law) are the two mechanisms to end the problems which arise out of the contradiction between the above mentioned two lines. Secondly, among the Garo, divorce is a rarity. However, incidence of adultery does lead to divorce. So also does the refusal of work.

- ii) **The Khasi:** The Khasi are a matrilineal tribe, who live in the hills of Meghalaya. These tribals are matrilineal in descent. This means that they trace their descent through the mother. Inheritance and succession are also through the mother. Residence after marriage is matrilocal. This means that a man after his marriage lives with his wife's parents. The Khasi have exogamous clans, that is, two persons belonging to one clan cannot marry each other.

They have a classificatory kinship terminology. This means that they address their lineal relatives (father, son etc.) by terms, which are also applied to certain collateral relatives.

The Khasi rules of marriage allow the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. But levirate (marriage of a widow with her husband's brother) or sororate

(marriage of a widower with his wife's sister) marriages are not allowed. They do not also practice hypergamy, i.e. woman's marriage into a group higher in status than her own group. Polygyny (a man's marriage to more than one spouse at a time) as well as polyandry (a woman's marriage to more than one spouse, at a time) are unknown among the Khasi. A man may have a mistress. Among some sections of the Khasi, children from his mistress equally share inheritance rights to the father's property, if any is acquired by him, with other children in the family.

The Khasi say that all members of a clan descend from a woman ancestor. They are called 'one clan'. The 'one clan' is divided into sub-clans, which originate from those who descend from one great grandmother. The next division is the family, which comprises the grandmother, her daughters, and the daughters' children, living under one roof. The male child is generally lost to the family he marries into. As a husband, the man is looked upon as a begetter. All property acquired by a man before marriage belongs to his mother. After marriage the property acquired by a man goes to his wife. The wife and children inherit such property. The youngest daughter receives the major share upon the death of a man's wife. If there is no daughter, only then the acquired property of a man is equally divided among the sons.

10.6.2 Matrilineal Groups in South-west India

The state of Kerala in the south-western region of India has been the main seat of matrilineal communities. Here we will discuss in brief the case of the Nayar community. We will also look at the features of the matrilineal Muslim community in the Union Territory of Lakshadweep.

- i) **The Nayar example :** It was K. Gough (1952) who first pointed out that the Nayar are a named category of castes and they have three different systems of kinship. Here we will discuss in some details the kinship systems of the Nayar castes of Central Kerala. The Nayar of Central Kerala follow the practice of visiting husbands. Thus, they do not have the institution of the elementary family in which husband, wife and children live together under one roof.

In this system the Nayar women were allowed to marry the Nambudiri Brahmins of South-west Kerala. They could also marry in some other higher castes of the Nayar group/s and of course, in their own groups. This clearly shows that the Nayars practised hypergamy, i.e., married their women in the groups, which had social status higher than their own group. This provided an example of inter-caste hypergamy between the Nayar women and Nambudiri Brahmins of South-west Kerala.

The emphasis being on the solidarity of the lineage group, marriage was the weakest institution among the Nayar. For example, Gough has shown that among the retainer Nayar castes, a woman had a number of husbands at a time. She was also visited by men of appropriate groups. The same was true for a Nayar man who visited a number of women of appropriate groups. In this situation, 'marriage', or better referred as *sambandham* (the term used by the Nayar communities) involved very few obligations. There was no ceremony at any point to mark the event. The procedure to legitimise the birth of children was quite simple. A legally obligatory payment to the midwife attending the delivery and gift of cloth to the mother were made by

some man/men of appropriate rank, having *sambandham* ('marriage') relationship with her. This was all that legitimised children. As a mark of married status a woman wore *tali* or the marriage badge throughout her life. The woman and her children observed pollution at the death of her ritual husband. They did nothing when any particular visiting husband died. Here we have mentioned the term 'ritual husband'. Let us see what it refers to in the context of the Nayar marriage.

In terms of the management of land and other property, the matrilineage was not the important unit. Instead we find that property groups were the main legal units. These operated within the local caste group. The oldest male member, known as *karanavan*, was responsible for the economic activities of the property group (*taravad*). Among the Nayar, the term *taravad* was applied for the clan, and the lineage. It also referred to the property group. Members of a *taravad* or a lineage were involved in activities of cooperation at the pre-puberty and marriage rites of girls and at the funeral of a member of the *taravad*. The lineages were linked through hereditary ties of mutual cooperation at these ceremonies.

Gough has described the interpersonal kin relationships within the matrilineal group and has shown the closeness between mother and son. There was, on the other hand, the relationship of avoidance and constraint between a man and his sister's son. A man was to avoid his sister's daughter and behave formally towards his younger sister. These are some of the significant features of kinship among the Nayar. In a *taravad* a male observed the incest prohibitions between himself and the junior women. These prohibitions helped in maintaining the solidarity of the descent group. Within the matrilineage sex relations were not allowed. So also they were forbidden within a certain range of affines and with men of lower castes.

On the basis of recent changes in the practice of matrilineal kinship organisation among the Nayars, it is said that the Nayars of Central Kerala are increasingly accepting the idea of elementary family. K.R. Unni (1956) has studied the changes in the pattern of residence among the Nayar of Central Kerala. He has concluded that these Nayars were changing from a matrilineal to bilateral kinship system. This means that they have begun to emphasise the relationships on the sides of both the mother and the father.

- ii) **Matrilineal Muslims of Lakshadweep:** Now we shift to a discussion of the matrilineal Muslim community of Lakshadweep. These matrilineal Muslims are descendants of Hindu immigrants from Kerala. Later, they were converted to Islam. They follow duolocal residence. Duolocal residence implies that the husband and the wife reside separately. In this context it means that the husband visits his wife's home at night. The common unit of matrilineality on the island is the *taravad*. A *taravad* here is a group of both the males and the females with common ancestress in the female line. Name of a *taravad* is used by its members as prefix to their own names. By the fact of taking birth in a *taravad* each person gets the right to share the *taravad* property. This right passes through the female members. A male member has the same right of using the property of his *taravad*. The *taravad* is an exogamous unit, i.e., a member cannot marry another member of the same *taravad*. The *taravad* may comprise one domestic group or a number of domestic groups.

In this community, the father has a special role, which is associated with these people's conversion to Islam. He has to substantially spend money on ceremonies linked with his children's life cycle rituals. Leela Dube (1969) has shown how the influence of Islam has affected the patterns of kinship and marriage in this community. The Islamic practices of a patrilineal social structure have affected the form of kinship relationships, operating in a matrilineal framework. Regarding the inheritance of property on the island, Leela Dube (1969) has shown that marriage is quite fragile on the island. It incorporates few rights and responsibilities. People manipulate the inheritance of property on the basis of both the matrilineal and Islamic (patrilineal) principles. Islam provides procedure for easy divorce and islanders use it frequently. The institution of *taravad* as a unit of production and consumption, however, remains basically matrilineal.

These accounts of matrilineal communities give us a picture of contrast from the commonly found patterns of patriliney in India. In the limited scope of unit, we have attempted to look at both the most common pattern of patrilineal kinship systems and the less-common systems of matrilineal kinship organisations in some parts of India.

10.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about the definition of kinship system and then about the dimension of kinship system in India. The unit has focused on major aspects of kinship patterns found in North India and South India. These aspects have been discussed in terms of kinship groups, kinship terminology, marriage rules and ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin. Finally we also gave an account of matrilineal kinship system in North-east and South-west India.

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10.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Persons related by blood are called consanguinal relatives. Persons related through marriage are known as affinal relatives. Relationship between father and son/daughter or between brother and brother/sister is an example of consanguine relationship while the relationship between a person and his wife's brother can be given as an example of affinal relationship.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) In South India, we find two types of kinship groups, namely the patrilineages and the affinal relatives.



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