

**BSW-122**  
**Society, Social Institutions and Social**  
**Problems**

**Block**

**2**

**SOCIAL SYSTEM AND SOCIAL SUB-SYSTEM**

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**UNIT 1**

**Marriage and Family**

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**UNIT 2**

**Society and Culture: Plurality of Culture in India**

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**UNIT 3**

**Social Stratification**

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**Unit 4**

**The State as a Social Institution: Its Role and Impact on other Institutions**

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## **BLOCK INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous block you studied the basic concepts related to society. In this block “Social system and Social Sub-system”, you will learn about some of the important components of the society such as family, class, caste, culture and the State. They play an important role in influencing the individual’s personality. They also determine the role of individuals in society, the value framework within which he or she makes decisions and the privileges and liabilities associated with status. Further, problems of individuals and groups are rooted in the ways these institutions function.

The first unit ‘Marriage and Family’, will deal with one of the most important institutions of society-the family. The second unit is ‘Society and Culture: Plurality of Culture in India’ which explains the mutually interacting components of social structure and culture. The third unit deals with ‘Social Stratification’ which explains the dynamics of caste and class to you. The fourth unit is ‘The State as a Social Institution: Its Role and Impact on other Institutions’. This unit deals with the state which play an important role in the promotion of welfare among people and protecting their rights. You should observe the social reality around you especially when you are doing your field work and relate your observations to the theoretical part described here. Some of you may not be interested in pursuing studies in Professional Social work. This block, as well as the entire course on ‘Society, Social Institutions and Social Problems’, will be highly useful to such learners since they deal with various behavioral aspects of individuals in a society.



THE PEOPLE'S  
UNIVERSITY

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# UNIT 1 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

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*\*Vanila Bhaskaran*

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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The aim of this unit is to provide you with an understanding of the institutions of marriage and family. It also aims to help you appreciate the significance and importance of these institutions for an individual as well as society.

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- identify, define and describe the various forms of marriage;
- define and describe the family, its types and function and identify the factors leading to unhealthy families;
- explain socialization and other functions.
- bring out the factors leading to unhealthy family situations.
- describe the functional approach to the study of family.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Marriage is an institution admitting men and women to family life, with the implied purpose of parenthood and establishment of a family. The institution has social approval and religious sanction. Though various religions have different views upon marriage the purpose remain the same. It is a socially sanctioned union between man and woman for the purpose of procreation and establishment of family. This view of marriage has an interesting and varied history.

Several forms of marriage are found universally. The most universally prevalent are monogamy and polygamy. Polygamy is the marriage between one male or one female with several females or males. When a woman has more than one husband at a time it is called polyandry. Polygamy is a form of marriage in which a male has two or more wives at a time. Polygamy existed and was accepted in different periods of time for reasons relevant to situations prevailing in societies at those times. Polyandry existed where conditions of social life were harsh and efforts of two or more men were needed for the support of a family. This is a rare phenomenon and exists only under peculiar and extreme conditions. Sociologists have identified such families in certain parts of Tibet and remote parts of Africa. Polygamy did not develop extensively until human groups had accumulated some degree of wealth and economic surplus to enable one man to support several families. It existed in part because of the lower impulses of the male sex and partly because of desire for that status which has been attached to the practice.

However, polygamy as a form of marriage is not as widely prevalent or accepted as monogamy. Monogamy, the marriage of one man to one woman at a time, has been and is the leading type of marriage. The advantages of monogamy are well recognized universally, as it is understood that it creates clearly defined and stronger family ties than any other form of marriage. It alone produces the highest type of affection tolerance and devotion and secures the superior care of children. The cohesive power of the family is greatest in monogamy. A monogamous family is more stable and lasts longer.

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## **1.2 MARRIAGE INSTITUTION**

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Marriage is a socially approved way of establishing a family by procreation. As an institution it involves certain reciprocal rights and duties. The specific patterns of rights and duties distinguish the marriage institution in one society from the other. There is some clearly acknowledged social ritual in recognition of the social significance of marriage in every society. Thus, marriage is the institution concerned with the reciprocal social relations and cultural behaviour of a man and a woman who publicly signify their union for the implied purpose, among other possible objectives. Of founding a family of procreation, the actual cultural components of the marriage institution, as is the case with all institutions, vary in detail from one society to another and to some degree also among sub-groups and classes in our own society. These variations arise out of the differences in the objectives of the marriage institution and the extent of emphasis laid on them.

Some universal characteristics that can be observed are as follows; sexual activity between husband and wife; trust and loyalty between the members; care and support for each other, procreation and rearing of children. Societies everywhere recognize the importance of marriage by the ceremonial rites they establish in this connection.

### **The Wedding**

A marriage actually begins with legal or religious ceremonies or both. The wedding is recognition of the public significance of marriage. Such a ceremony indicates society's control. The pageantry impresses and acknowledges upon the couple the importance of the commitment they are undertaking.

### **The Licensing and Ceremony**

The formal permission to marry usually required by societies is expressed through the issue of a license which then makes it mandatory for persons to meet age and health regulations. The wedding must occur before witnesses so that proper certification and registration are effected. A legally sanctioned and publicly admitted marriage is important because of property and other rights and obligations that are immediately effective when the marriage is a fact. Thus the permanence of the obligations of the contract is established beyond question and these obligations cannot be freely discarded. Public sanction and public acceptance make them binding.

The wedding also indicates that two persons are fused in a new life. The exchange of gold rings, drinking from the same vessel, garlanding each other or eating a common piece of food are all symbolic of the union. The ceremony also expresses the good wishes of relatives and friends. Presenting gifts, wedding greetings, participating in the ceremony and reception are the expression of marriage wishes.

### **Religious Rites**

The marriage ceremony is a religious rite in many societies which consider marriage a sacred institution.

Marriage is considered a sacred bond sanctioned by God and realized through religious institution. The possibility of dissolving a marriage was unthinkable in most of the societies until recently. Even though some societies are fairly liberal in this respect, they emphasize the sacred character of the relationship which is reinforced through the religious rites. These views when accepted serve as supportive social controls.

### **Mate Selection**

Mates for marriage are obtained through two methods generally through arrangement or through freedom of choice. The selection of mates must obviously precede marriage. Mating of course was carried on in the early associations of people long before ceremonial marriage appeared. Marriage developed in human societies in part as a means of controlling mating.

Arrangements for procuring mates in societies is done by parents or some other person of authority. Now, in this modern society, the assistance of matrimonial agencies also is sought. The professional matchmaker has long been a part of the marriage system among many societies. Two important factors are predominant where mate selection is done by arrangement. Firstly, the social and economic position of the families to be united is an important matter for consideration. They are usually marriages of social and economic convenience, binding families together as coalitions with a common interest. Secondly, the desires of the partners and their feelings of affection and future happiness may get completely ignored. However, it is believed that love develops after the marriage, when the couple gets to know each other. The fact is that so many successful marriages and families have begun by arrangement and they support the view that prior affection or love between the prospective partners is not necessary for a happy union.

The second method where freedom of choice is exercised and the selection of the mate is largely the result of personal choice and is based on association and the development of romantic love. Hasty decisions based on physiological and emotional reactions that supercede sound thinking are quite common especially where there is a strong desire for marriage accompanied by fear of losing the desired person. A common problem in a society that depends upon free choice and romantic love as the basis for marriage is the danger that the choice will result from temporary sentimental attraction rather than from a considered mature decision.

Several factors condition the actual selection of a mate. The sex drive operates as a strong force in human societies pressing people toward sexually attractive possible mates. Marriages would hardly take place without this drive. This is nature's way of securing the perpetuation of the species. The choice of a specific mate is also controlled or influenced by conditions. Some of the restrictions that societies set are the selection within the race, within definite age limits, within the same class, and the prohibition of incest. Propinquity or the nearness of residence is an influencing condition or situation. Those with similar characteristics live in similar areas and this proximity is favorable in meeting and choosing partners of same ideals and dream. Young men and women in large cities have opportunities in creating acquaintance which make them in having favorable setting in meeting people.

These factors of nearness, attraction of persons with similar personalities, construct of the ideal mate and personality needs, however, do not operate as discrete forces in the choice of a mate. All these aspects of an interwoven set of personal relationships constitute a pattern for the choice of a mate.

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### **1.3 FAMILY INSTITUTION**

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The institution of family is a consequence of marriage in several societies. A family is defined as a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption who form an economic unit are responsible for the care of children, and often live in the same household. It is considered as the primary unit of society which is responsible for



several functions of the individual as well as society. It is responsible for socialization of its members and for teaching cultural norms, for provision of the basic needs of its members as well as preparing them for their careers and future family lives. Its importance lies in the fact that no individual can exist without a family and no society can perpetuate itself without enlisting members into families. It aids societies in serving as a significant controlling agent to achieve orderly social relations and social control.

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## 1.4 RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE FAMILY

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The family is a procreative, child-bearing, child-rearing and a status-giving group. Its fundamental principle is the bond of kinship, which shows the network of social relationships among the family members. This relationship can be elaborated in many ways which differentiate families from each other in their form and structure in different societies. Basically, there are two types of relationships in the immediate family, which are quite apparent: these are the marriage relationship and the relationship of biological kinship. The relationship between the husband and wife is of the first type while the other interpersonal relations normally found in the immediate family are of the biological type. (like father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter and the relationship between the other members like brother-brother, sister-sister, and brother-sister).

If we examine the family structure of different societies we can see major emphasis on the marriage relationship in some place while others emphasize blood relationships. Thus we see two general types of families: the conjugal family in which the dominant relationship is that of the spouses and the consanguine family in which the dominant relationships are those of bloodie. , the bond between the blood kinsmen involves more obligations and activity than that between spouses. The conjugal family often gives the individual member more freedom in the sense that he or she can ,remove himself or herself from the group if the person finds it uncongenial, unlike the consanguine family in which he or she is bound for life.

During the course of a normal life, an individual belongs to two types of families, namely:

- a) the family of orientation which is the family into which he or she is born consisting of parents and siblings (brothers and sisters) , and
- b) the family of procreation consisting of the spouse and children.

In the societies, which place emphasis on conjugal families on the basis of social life, the sibling relationships of the family of orientation are loosened and importance is given to the relationship between the spouses. The consanguine family or household permits the perpetuation of sibling patterns learned in the family of orientation to be carried on in full function even after the person has set up a family of procreation.

The family group was the first human school and despite its weaknesses it has often been considered the best school. The informal education of an individual begins in the family, where the most effective teaching is done in and through it. It is in the

family that the children can be best educated to learn the basic lessons of personal health, sex hygiene, general manners etc. The institution of family is also considered the cradle of personality. The siblings in a family have special social relationships among themselves. They can be effective teachers of each other too, giving emotional satisfaction and helping each other in times of problems.

It is in the family that individuals acquire, early and effectively the ideas that marriages and the family have superior connotations as social institutions. Individuals also learn that the family needs to be considered not lightly, but as (socially necessary and sacred) institution, not as a temporary contract which can be assumed carelessly, but as involving human feelings and intimate relationships that have a lifelong effects upon personality.

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## **1.5 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILY**

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In their normal functioning, families everywhere show the following characteristics:

- 1) A family characterized by the existence of a marriage bond between a man and a woman or between more than one man and more than one woman.
- 2) It is characterized by a recognized actual or blood relationship bond between the offspring of the spouses and the other members of the group.
- 3) The family groups are distinguished by the possession of a residence or series of residences which are jointly occupied at least occasionally by the members.
- 4) The family as a group has specific functions to perform. These differ to some extent from society to society. Some of them which are most commonly found are the following:
  - a) Protection to family members from bodily harm and illness and care of the invalid and ill members of the family.
  - b) Training and practice in eating, elimination, reaction to pain, speech, cleanliness, wearing of clothes, and respect for self and others.
  - c) Socialization of the child and making him/her a member of society
  - d) Division of labour according to gender, age and other specific circumstances.
  - e) The family is vested with the possession and control of certain property. The control of property usually involves inheritance.
  - f) Lastly it is through affiliation with a specific family that persons in society first learn to identify one's place in society. Their family becomes one of the main status giving agents of society. The use of a family name is not universal but where it is prevalent, it serves to symbolise family status and helps in identification of individuals from their point of view. It is widely prevalent in India where the individuals identity is very often solely based on the family name.

- g) Another important function of social care is the protection of its members.

### **Dimensions of Family**

Sociologists and anthropologists have developed a set of dimensions on which the family structures are based.

- 1) Within the general framework of kinship, two main types of family structure are Prevalent; the nuclear family and the extended family. The nuclear family consists of adult parents and their dependents like children. This type seems to be common in many societies. The extended family includes the nuclear family and many of its relatives such as grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, and cousins. In the Indian context such families are also called as joint families, as they consist basically of the nuclear family and its relatives.
- 2) Forms of Marriage - In a majority of societies, a common form of marriage is monogamy, the marriage of one man to one woman. However, several other forms have also been observed. Polygamy is the marriage of one person to several others. Where the marriage of one man to several women is called polygamy marriage of one woman to many men is called polyandry. Due to the shortage of women, sharing a common wife among several men became a necessity and where brothers took one common wife it was known as fraternal polyandry.

Certain factors encourage one form of marriage rather than the other. Economic forces, which are usually prominent in specific societies, explain the need for polygamy or polyandry. For instance, in Tibet, the family's land holdings descend jointly to all sons in the family. It is not divided among them individually as it may not be sufficient to support the family. Therefore, brothers share the land and the wife.

### **Patterns of Authority**

In most of the societies in which extended families are a norm, patriarchal pattern of authority exists. In patriarchal families, males are dominant over other family members. A matriarchal pattern of authority exists, when authority is vested in the males, or the wife and the mother. The common pattern of authority is patriarchal. Sometimes in patriarchal societies women may informally dominate in many families, but this does not become the universal norm. As more women have joined the workforce, we find a shift in the pattern of authority. Such changes have changed the character of the family system, in which power and authority is shared among the male and female members of the family.

### **Norms for Selection of a Partner**

Societies prescribe rules that pertain to the selection of a marriage partner. A system where people marry outside their family or clan is called exogamy. Parallel to this, is

endogamy, where marriage within the group is permitted.

The most common rule of exogamy is the incest taboo, where marriage or sexual relations between individuals having a close biological relationship is not permitted. The choice of partner often is restricted by the rules of exogamy and endogamy people.

The rule of incest taboo is universal. This rule prohibits sexual relations between two close relatives like between child and parent and brother and sister. Some societies extend this rule to first cousins and close blood relations too. However, incest was not a taboo in the royal family of ancient Egypt. There are several reasons for the practice of 'incest taboo. For instance, some have suggested that humans have an innate aversion to incest while others say that people in the distant past were aware of the genetic dangers of inter-seeding, still others have pointed out that rules against incest reduce jealousy and conflict in families.

### **Patterns of Matrimonial Residence**

Residential patterns of married couples are varied in different societies. In societies where newly married couples live with the husband's family the pattern is called patrilocal residence. In societies in which matrilocal residence is the norm, the newly married couple is expected to live with the bride's family.

In recent years we see more and more couples set up their own houses, which is called neo-local residence. This pattern is very common in western societies which gives more importance to the independence of the individual and his/her personal interests resulting in the rise of individualism.

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## **1.6 SOCIALIZATION**

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The process by which an individual develops through interaction with other people, his specific patterns of socially relevant behaviour and experience is called 'socialization'. It is the family's primary responsibility to socialize children into the norms of the society.

Every society is faced with the necessity of making a responsible member out of each child born into it. The child must learn the expectations of the society so that his behaviour can be relied upon. He must acquire the group norms. The society must socialise each member so that his behaviour will be meaningful in terms of the group norms. In the process of socialisation the individual learns the reciprocal responses of the society. Socialisation is a process with the help of which a living organism is changed into a social being. It is a process through which the younger generation learns the adult role which it has to play subsequently. It is a continuous process in the life of an individual and it continues from generation to generation.

In all human groups, the family is an important agent of socialization. It has a flexible human relationships in which family members interact informally and deal with common concerns in mutual respect and love. The family teaches the child his or her

first lessons in social living and helps him or her to form basic attitude patterns, ideals and style of life. It creates feelings of social responsibility social understanding and teaches the importance of cooperation and mutual respect.

The human child possesses a tendency towards imitation and the family provides informal conditions where customs and traditions can be learnt through imitation. Accordingly, the child's personality is formed and a social identity develops. Socialization develops the child's ability to control himself or herself and realizes his or her responsibility towards the family, community and the society at large.

### **Socialization in the Family**

The family plays the most important role in the individual's socialization. The child finds much to learn in the behaviour of his family members, parents, relatives, and friends. He imitates them in their mannerisms, behaviour, cliches, etc. He tries to avoid such activities which result in punishment or which are considered bad in the family. It is the family environment that forms his good habits and it is in the family that he acquires criminal tendencies.

### **Need for Socialization**

The question why is socialization necessary for the development of an individual is best answered by the example of the human beings who were for some reasons, nurtured outside society. Human beings of this kind are described by Gessell in his work "Wolf children and Human Children" and by Davis in his essays. In 1920, in India two children were found in a wolf den, of which one was eight years old and the other a couple of years younger. The second died after the lapse of only a few months while the first continued to live for six years.

She was named Kamla, this girl was completely innocent of the modes and behaviour of human. She walked on all fours, legs and hands, growled like a wolf and could not speak. She became nervous at the sight of human beings as any undomesticated animals are bound to be. In this way, due to the absence of socialization she possessed none of the characteristics of human beings save for her bodily structure. She was taught to speak, wear clothes and eat. In this way, she could learn some human behaviour due to the influence of socialization after a period of some years.

The self of the individual develops primarily because of socialization. Every social relationship of the individual contributes to this process of socialization. The problem of man's socialization is very complex and it has not yet been completely solved in any human society. In the words of Davis, "The improvement of socialization offers one of the greatest possibilities for the future alteration of human nature and human society".

### **Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Define marriage and its various forms.

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2) Why is family an important social institution?

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## 1.7 STABILITY IN FAMILY PATTERNS

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The institution of family is a stable system and this makes the Indian society well integrated. However a number of factors have contributed in making the family unstable. The effects of modernization have shaken the family and made it unstable. This leads to several problems of maladjustment, misunderstanding and infidelity, which make the family unstable. People enter marriage with considerations other than for starting a family and sharing each other's lives. Individuals marry for personal convenience, forgetting that married life requires preparation and training.

A successful married life requires a lot of sacrifice and adjustment as two distinctly different individuals are sharing their life. Other important factors which support a

good married life include a satisfactory family income, sound household management skills, a high level of commitment of the partners toward preserving the marriage and partners having those value and ethical considerations that support married life.

The attitudes and actions of both partner and the other members may produce an environment which is highly favorable for the proper functioning of the family. The creation of a pleasant atmosphere is a responsibility of both partners. Such an atmosphere fosters adjustment and whenever the atmosphere is destroyed by any one, adjustments become difficult. An exaggerated spirit of individualism leads a person to find the guide to his actions in his own wishes and whims. This produces an attitude of carelessness towards the family. This attitude which is often expressed in irresponsibility tends to make the family unstable, as the family thrives on attitudes of personal responsibility.

A sound family life depends to a large extent on a single or the same standard of behaviour and responsibility for both men and women. Double standards, or one standard for men and one for women, destroys personal happiness and social values in the family.

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## **1.8 ADJUSTMENTS IN MARRIAGE**

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Adjustment in marriage relates to the following areas - sex relations, managing family income, social activities, rearing children and mutual friends and families. It is important to distinguish marital adjustment from two other terms which are sometimes used more or less interchangeably with it, that is, marital success and marital happiness. Marital success refers to the achievement of one or more goals of marriage. Marital success can be determined by the emotional response of a spouse. It is at least conceivable that one marital partner could be very happy while the other may be at the nadir of despair. Marital happiness refers to the tone of the subjective response of the individual spouse to his or her marriage.

The family today is in a transitional stage. The institutionalized family has been ignored sometimes giving room for tandem marriages and free love. The growth of individualism has given more freedom to everyone in the family. The trend is undoubtedly in the direction of families as a form across of companionship. The patriarchal family of the past had been too rigid. It did not allow individualistic attitudes in the family. Over decades, the changes occurring in the family have led to a democratic family which is built on respect for each other's opinions, for age, on consideration for the personalities, and on cooperation all around. In order to change the family from one in which autocracy and ignorance predominate to one in which rational and mutual give and take rule applies, requires education in democratic relationships, sexual relationships, parent-child relationships, and in an appreciation of the family group as a training center for social life.

According to Bogardus, " A democratic family is one in which the husband and wife

share the authority more or less equally and according to a pre-arranged division of labour “. It is a group whose life is based not primarily on the fear and force of authority but on the drawing power of mutual respect and affection. Rational love rules in the family. The democratic family rests on the principle of mutual self-sacrifice. A home cannot be a home for one, if a child cannot find it in the attitudes of a cooperative and companionable father and mother. It should exist as a distinct and strongly functional group in every known form of society.

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## **1.9 CHANGE IN FAMILY PATTERNS**

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The structure and functions of families today remain no longer the same as in the past. The forces of development have affected changes in every aspect of society and family, as an institution does not exist in isolation. The consequences of changes in non-domestic institutions have had repercussions on the domestic front. An analysis of some of the factors that have changed over the last few decades will help us understand the changes occurring in the family in its present form.

Economic changes and their effects on the family are significant. In the primitive and early medieval times, the family or the home was an economic center. With the advent of new and highly specialized division of labor and mass production of goods, changes in economic life have affected family life. The growth of education and economic opportunities have offered women a chance to make their own living. This has, to an extent, impaired the economic unity of the family as a group, because each member of the family maintains his or her own share of the expenses and lives an independent economic life.

Moreover, even as affecting the men of the family, have been affected by modern industry with serious results for the family and the home. It has often taken them away where they can no longer help to rear the family. The husband is no longer an important social factor in the family once children also contribute to the support of the family by working with the parents. Now if they share in the economic burden of the family they have to leave home and its care and engage in occupations outside the home. Thus, the extent to which economic activities have been taken out of the home and are taken over by other institutions has had a significant role to play in the changing patterns of the family.

The effect of other social changes on the family has also been significant. The growth of liberal thought has its effect upon family ideals. Individual freedom and expression of thought have far reaching effects on the family. Certain other factors, like decreasing size of family and the propagation of a small family, late marriages, rising socioeconomic aspirations and unwillingness to procreate, single parent families, are also responsible for bringing about a change in the family patterns.

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## **1.10 FAMILY DISORGANIZATION AND DIVORCE**

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Divorce is an indicator of the extent of family disorganization. Disorganization in the family refers to a breakdown in the conjugal family life. The problems in the family arise from circumstances frequently associated with such a breakdown. William J.



Goode points out that families become disorganized due to different reasons. The 'Empty Shell' is a term used by him to denote a marriage that simply is no longer a real relationship, although the partners remain together for anyone of a number of reasons. The number of people living in such empty shells may be quite large in society. Sometimes these marriages can lead to divorce and desertion. Another reason which may bring about family disorganization is a catastrophe, either as a result of internal factors like an illness or disability or external factors such as floods, wars etc. These tendencies could affect families in such a way that the members are scattered or are in emotional and mental turmoil.

Some of important reasons of family disorganization according to Robert Weirs are:

- 1) The changing social context, which emphasizes the right and obligation of the individual to maximize capabilities, to be mobile and adaptive to stress, self-devotion and self-determination.
- 2) The lowering of legal barriers. Laws have been changed to shorten the time necessary to acquire a divorce. The current laws provide several different grounds for divorce and even sustain no fault divorces.
- 3) Greater social tolerance for divorced people.
- 4) Liberalized attitudes on the part of organized religion.
- 5) Increased financial independence of women.

In the West one of the most telling causes is the extreme cultural freedom of choice. Freedom to choose a partner means freedom to continue to choose and freedom to replace the choice with another. Divorce results in the creation of single parent families.

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## **1.11 SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES**

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There is a distinction between family households and non-family households. A family household consists of people related by birth, marriage or adoption and a non-family household includes two or more unrelated people of either sex as well as people who live alone. Although the family household is still the dominant form, it appears to be giving ground to other forms. They indicate that changes in family structure, parent-child relations, and intimate relations in general, are taking place universally in every society. Single parent households are an offshoot of unstable families, desertion, and divorce while single parent families are those families with children where men and women who are divorced do not remarry and of women who bear children out of wedlock. For both divorced and never married women with children, the most serious problem appears to be economic. Most of the divorced or single parents must seek work to support their families, and this often turns out to be low paying work.

However, money worries are not the only problems of single parent households. Single parents often feel stigmatized in a society that places a high value on marriage. In the absence of another parent in the home to raise children many single parents feel isolated and unequal to the task. There is however no solid evidence that children who grow up in single parent families are damaged as a result though it happens to be. A number of studies have concluded that whether or not both parents are present makes little difference in the quality of child rearing or the socialization of children. The children's sense of gender identity, their health, their social achievements, and their attitude towards marriage and the family are not affected. Some studies have found that delinquency is more frequent in unhappy two parent homes than in single parent homes.

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## **1.12 FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO THE FAMILY**

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Sociologists have used several approaches to the study of the family. The functional approach gives emphasis to the functions of the family in society. The contribution made by the family to the maintenance of the social system forms the core of analysis by the functionalists. It is assumed that society has certain functional prerequisites or basic needs that must be met if it is to survive and operate efficiently. The family is one of the agencies to meet those functional prerequisites. Secondly analysis is done of the functional relationships between the family and other sub systems of the social system. It is assumed that there must be a certain degree of integration, and harmony between the parts of the social system if society is going to function efficiently. Apart from these functions performed by the subsystem for larger society, its functions for the individual are analyzed. In the case of the family the functions of the family for its individual members are to be considered.

Murdock states that the family performs four basic functions- sexual, reproductive, economic, and educational. They are essential for social life since without sexual and reproductive life there would be no members of society, without the economic functions like provision and preparation of food life cannot exist and without education, which forms a major part of socialization, there would be no culture. Human society without culture will not function. The family cannot perform these functions exclusively. It makes important contributions to all of them and no other institution can match its efficiency in this aspect. The family's functions for society are inseparable from its functions for its individual members, It serves both at one and the same time in much the same way.

This analysis of the family, from the functionalist approach, "provides a conception of the family's many sided utility and thus of its inevitability" (Murdock, 1949). The family is seen as a multi-functional institution, which is indispensable to society. Murdock, however, does not consider whether these functions could be performed by other social institutions. Other functionalists like Talcott Parsons (1955) and Vogel and Bell (1968) argue that Murdock's description of the family is almost too good to be true. Parsons (1955) analysis of the family relate to two basic and irreducible

functions which are common in all societies. These are, the primary socialization of children and the stabilization of adult personalities of the population of society. He argues that families are factories which produce human personalities and believes they are essential for the purpose of primary socialization and provides warmth, security, and mutual support. The family acts as a counterweight to the stresses and strains of everyday life, which tend to make the personalities unstable. Parsons' analysis has also been criticized as he has been accused of idealizing the family with his picture of well-adjusted children and sympathetic spouses caring for each other needs. Like Murdock, Parsons also fails to explore functional alternatives to the family.

Vogel and Bell present a functional analysis of certain families that avoids the tendency of many functionalists to concentrate solely on the positive aspects of the family. They examined the functions and dysfunctions of the family and indicated that what is dysfunctional for children can be seen as functional for the parents, for the family unit, and for the society as a whole. They argue that the cost to the child is low relative to the functional gains of the whole family. While dealing with the family both its positive and negative aspects should be considered. It should also be kept in mind that what is good for a member may be at the cost of another member.

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answers.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Elaborate the various dimensions of the family.

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2) Define divorce. Explain the reasons for divorce.

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### 1.13 LET US SUM UP

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This unit has dealt with the concepts of marriage and family and aspects relating to individuals and societies. You have learnt about the importance of marriage as an institution, its forms and its functions. You have also learnt about the institution of family, its structure; its forms, its characteristics, and its dimensions.

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### 1.14 KEY WORDS

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- Marriage** : Marriage is an institution admitting men and women to family life.
- Family** : A family is a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adoption, and constituting a single household.
- Socialization** : The process by which the individual develops into a functioning member of the group and learns the accepted norms of behaviour of the society through the family.
- Divorce** : Divorce is an institutionalized pattern for breaking up the relationship between husband and wife under certain conditions.
- Single Parent** : Single parent families are those families with children where men and women who are divorced do not remarry. Women who bear children out of wedlock and raise them without their father are also called single parents.

Unmarried men who adopt children and raise them without their mother are also called single parents.

**Functional analysis :** Functional analysis of various institutions studies the functions which it performs for the society and for the individual members.

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### 1.15 SUGGESTED READINGS

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### 1.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Check Your Progress I

- 1 Marriage is an institution admitting men and women to family life, with the implied purpose of parenthood and establishment of a family. Several forms of marriage are found universally, especially monogamy and polygamy. Monogamy is the marriage of one man to one woman at a time and polygamy is the marriage of one man to several women.
- 2 Family is considered as the primary unit of the society, which is responsible for several functions for the individual, as well as the society. These functions include reproduction and caring for new members in the society; socialization of younger members of the society; providing an orderly outlet for sexual feelings; economic functions, etc.

#### Check Your Progress II

- 1) Sociologists and anthropologists have developed a set of dimensions on which the family structures are based.  
Family form-Nuclear family and Extended family.  
Marriage form-Monogamy and Polygamy  
Authority structure-patriarchy and Matriarchy  
Lineage-Patrilinear and Matrilineal and Matrilineal

- 2) Divorce is a total and final breakdown of relationship between husband and wife. It had a legal implication and the courts have to declare that the marriage is dissolved. Some of the important reasons for divorce is the growing individualism in society, economic independence of women, availability of legal options and growing acceptance of divorce in Society.



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**UNIT 2      SOCIETY AND CULTURE:  
PLURALITY OF CULTURE IN INDIA**

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\*Dr. R.K. Chaudhury

**Contents**

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Concept of Society
- 2.3 Concept of Culture
- 2.4 Relationship of Culture and Society
- 2.5 Relationship of Culture, Society and Individual
- 2.6 Plurality of Culture
- 2.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.8 Key Words
- 2.9 Suggested Readings
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

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**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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Man is the only animal who lives in a society and is considered to have culture. He is the only animal who laughs and weeps. He alone makes a distinction between what things are and what things ought to be in the society in which he resides.

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- Understand the concept of culture and society;
- Understand the relationship between society, culture and the individual; and
- Describe the concept of plurality of culture.

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**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Human species is considered to have existed on earth for about 1.5 million years. Evidence of humans leading a social and cultural life is available from this period. Thus, human beings were the first of species in the animal kingdom, capable of producing culture. Once this capacity for building culture was attained, its exercise led to a secure adaptation to their environment. This exercise generated a need and prompted man to live in the company of others. Man not only started experimenting with his environment, he also started sharing his experiences with fellow human beings, sometimes in their original form and at other times in an improvised and improved form. The beginning of human beings living in aggregates gave rise to the concept of society. Then man started organizing his experiences and behaviour in an ordered form which gave rise to a systematized form of life. This constituted his culture. Both the rise and formation of society and culture went hand in hand. Biological evolution in man a process of struggle for survival (accompanied cultural evolution). In the initial stages human beings grouped and organised themselves in

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the form of small, simple and nomadic bands. This was the beginning of organised society, though it was quite different from today's advanced and complex society. The activities of human beings, their behaviour and living together, and moving in groups from one place to another in search of food and shelter helped them to develop a common way of life.

Some sociologists try to distinguish between 'social' and 'cultural' aspects of human life. They employ 'social' to refer to the relationships among the groups within in society. For them, 'culture' consists of the ways of life of the members' of the society.' The relationship of group to another is regarded as an aspect of culture. The family, e.g., is a social group; the way they act, interact and behave is their culture. A society is considered to be a group of people who share a common habitat and who are dependent upon one another for their survival and well-being. Large societies of today are made up of classes, castes, ethnic groups etc.

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## **2.2 CONCEPT OF SOCIETY**

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Socrates said, man is a social animal and being social for man is both natural as well as necessary. There are other animals, who also have an organised life, but the social life of man is different from, them. Behaviour among animals is instinctive and dies with the animal but among men, behaviour is learned and passed on from one generation to another. This aspect is distinctive of man and distinguishes him from other animals. This characteristic binds all men together to behave in a similar manner. They form an aggregate of people who lead a similar way of life and there is also a similarity in their behaviour and other activities. It is from this aspect that Herskovits has defined society: "Society is an organised, interacting aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life." In simple words it can be said that society is composed of people. Man studies himself as a member of this aggregate of people that we call society.

Comte characterizes society in terms of "social statics" and "social dynamics". referring to social stability as well as social change. 'Social statics' deals with relatively stable and orderly aspects of social life, e.g., family life, marriage and kinship and social institutions. Similarly 'social dynamics' focuses on the changing aspects of social life, e.g., social changes, social processes etc. In the context of social dynamics and the changes that took place in society, Comte emphasized that evolution of society passed through three stages, i.e. savagery, barbarism and civilization; evolution of marriage and-family has passed through promiscuity, group marriage, polygamy and finally monogamy. Likewise the evolution of religion has passed through the stages of animism, polytheism and monotheism.

The question may arise why it is necessary for a man to live in society or why is society necessary for man? The answer to these queries can briefly be given as under:

- 1) Man has his needs and he chooses to meet or fulfill these needs by himself; He can meet them while being a member of society or while living in society. The meeting of those needs is conditioned by the patterns of requirements and behaviour that we can call culture. There is a wide variety of variation in



meeting human needs from one society to another. This variation makes one society different and unique from other societies.

- 2) From the very beginning, i.e., from birth itself, man needs the support of others. Initially he is dependent upon others who provide him help in social and physical upbringing. His overall growth and development is provided within and by the organised social life. This is where the society has its basic relevance. Though the society extends and plays this role throughout the life of man, in the initial phase of his life he needs it the most.
- 3) The society provides the understanding knowledge and exposure to a man about his milieu and environment. It is in society that man learn to behave, to act, to respond and to play his requisite role for his environment and for the society of which he is a member.

All these factors do not work independent of each other. They have a cumulative effect. However, each factor has its own significance. Further, there are some basic elements of social organisation and ideology. These elements contribute towards continuity, change and proper functioning of the society.

### Check Your Progress I

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) What do you mean by society?

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2) Why is society necessary for human beings?

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## 2.3 CONCEPT OF CULTURE

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We can begin by saying that man is the only organism capable of building culture and transmitting it from one generation to another. Some other animals and insects too are

considered to have their culture, but it dies with them but the culture created by man distinguishes man from other animals.

There are a number of definitions of culture:

One of the best, and most acceptable, early definitions of culture was given by E.B. Tylor (1871) in his book “Primitive culture”, wherein he described culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.

The definition indicates that culture is not simple and it is not constituted by one or two elements. Rather it is a complex one and is constituted by a large number of aspects of life which range, as shown in the definition, from knowledge to law and customs. This also includes habits acquired by man while living and interacting in society with other members. Though constituted by a large number of units, called traits, culture has to be understood in totality, the whole. All the traits are so well integrated that each one gets almost assimilated into the other. Culture, when seen holistically, is understood as a complex whole. The following are some of the characteristics of culture:

- 1) **Culture is a complex whole:** All the elements and traits of culture are to be understood in relationship to one another. All of them, in this respect, constitute a whole, called culture, and is complex in nature.
- 2) **Culture is learned:** Culture of mankind is not instinctive, or innate, or transmitted biologically. It is composed of habits, i.e., learned tendencies to react, acquired by each individual through his/her own life experiences after birth.
- 3) **Culture is inculcated:** All animals are capable of learning but man alone seems to be capable, to a large extent, of passing on his acquired habits and behaviour to his offspring. A dog can be trained to learn many tricks, but it cannot pass them on to its puppies. However, man is capable of transmitting all his learning and habits to his offspring.
- 4) **Culture is social:** Habits of cultural order are not only inculcated and transmitted overtime; they are all social, i.e., shared by all human beings living together in the society. The habits shared together by the members of the society constitute their culture.
- 5) **Culture is commercial:** The habits that constitute culture of a group form the ideal norms or patterns of behaviour.
- 6) **Culture is gratifying:** Culture always, and necessarily, satisfies biological needs and secondary needs derived from it. It also helps in gratifying human interaction with the external world of nature and fellowmen.

- 7) **Culture is adaptive:** Culture changes. The process of change appears to be an adaptive one, comparable to evolution in the organic realm but is of a different order. Over a period of time culture adjusts to the geographical environment and to the biological and socio-psychological demands of the human organism. It adjusts through borrowing and organisation.
- 8) **Culture is integrative:** In the process of adaptation, all the elements of culture tend to form a consistent and integrated whole. Some anthropologists consider that culture is actually an integrated system which has most of its elements in perfect equilibrium with one another.
- 9) **Language as a vehicle of culture:** All elements of culture are transmitted from one generation to another through language in verbal or written form. Without language man cannot transmit the culture from one period of time to another and from one place to another.
- 10) **Culture is cumulative:** Any knowledge, or skill or any other form of culture is acquired by one generation from the preceding one. The acquired culture is added or modified and in a cumulative form transmitted to the next generation. This helps man in acquiring knowledge, skills and other aspects of culture from the remote past and hand them over to the future generations.

Out of a huge number of definitions, some which clearly and closely express human behaviour and environment, are given below:

“Culture is the man made part of the environment” (Herskovits, MJ. 1955).

“The sum total of the knowledge, attitudes and habitual behaviour patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society” (Linton, 1940).

“(All the) historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behaviour of man” (Kluckhohn and Kelly, 1945).

The concept of culture also includes tools, techniques, ideas, values and all life (Kroeber, 1948). All such aspects, arts and artifacts and the patterns of human behavior acquired a transmitted, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including-their embodiments in artifacts (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952).

It becomes clear that culture is more than a biological phenomenon. In brief the notion of culture is inclusive of man’s mature behaviour acquired from his group by conscious learning or by a conditioning process, techniques of various kinds, social and other institutions, beliefs, and patterned modes of conduct. Thus man becomes the only “culture building”- animal.

As stated culture has two aspects:

1) Material culture

2) Non-material culture.

1) **Material Culture:** It includes all those artifacts or things that have been created by man himself for his use, e.g., houses, furniture, clothes, tools, etc. It is that aspect that can be seen, touched and observed. The elements of material culture can be created, built, destroyed and rebuilt, and improved deliberately according to the needs and desires of man. Some creations are to protect man from the environment, and help man in the process of survival and to fight the inclement weather and hostile climate. Certain aspects, like medicines, are invented, discovered and put to use to fight diseases, improve health and quality of life. Some aspects of material culture are created and built to fulfill the desires and needs arising out of changes in non-material culture, i.e., ideational aspects of culture. Variations in material culture are wider and more wide spread as compared to non-material culture.

2) **Non-material Culture:** It includes all non-material and spiritual aspects of culture. Ellenwood defined culture in terms of the whole of man’s material civilization like tools, weapons, clothing, shelter, machines, and even systems of industry’, and on the other hand as man’s non-material or spiritual civilization, such as, language, literature, art, religion, ritual, morality, law and government. The definition clearly identifies the areas that fall under material and nonmaterial culture.

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) How will you define culture and what are the characteristics of culture?

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**2.4 RELATIONSHIP OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

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In simple terms this relationship can be understood when we say that culture refers to the ideas, values and norms in the minds of the people whereas society refers to the people themselves. Therefore, ideas constitute culture and people constitute society.

Herskovits has made this clear when he observed that “a culture is the way of life of

the people; while a society is an organised and interacting aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life". Further "a society is composed of people the way they behave is their culture".

To begin with we may study man's ideas, institutions, and material objects. In reality we study man himself. Thus, it is difficult to separate man as a social being from man as a creature who has culture. The two aspects are so well integrated that one can't be understood and explained in the absence of the other. It can be said that both society and culture are not mutually exclusive. One needs to comprehend social realities with society and culture.

In society, comprising of individuals, the individual members may die and be replaced by others. Therefore, society has a structural aspect. Its structure and continuation is based on the birth, death and replacement by other members. Culture, on the other is an independent of individual members. Birth, death or replacement of individual members is not of much consequence to the culture. Society falls in the realm of classical structure and social organisation whereas culture falls in the realm of normative order:

On the social level there is a continuous process of interactive behaviour, whose persistent form of social relationship refers to what we call social structure; whereas on the cultural level there are beliefs, values, norms etc. in terms of which individuals define their world, expressing their feelings and judgments. Therefore, culture is the fabric in which human beings interpret their experience; social structure is the form that action takes. Thus culture and social structure are different aspects of the same phenomenon.

S.F. Nadel (1951) has made a distinction between society and culture in this way:

"Society means the totality of social facts projected on to the dimensions of relationships and groupings; cultures, the same totality in the dimensions of action". In this respect, some scholars have even raised the question "are not people -' society - the reality rather than their way of life". Some consider ways of life as the intangibles and as the inferences drawn from the behavior of people. Therefore, to study society is important for us because it essentially allows us to understand' how the life lived by man in aggregates affects his behaviour.

Relations between individuals, in all societies, change with age, with strength, with obligations assumed, and with status achieved. Among all societies, social life of an individual begins by identification with a group. It is the cultural training by the group that makes an individual fit to live according to the expectations of the group, or society. It is through the learning experience that a man achieves competence in his culture.

The necessity of society for human beings has been explained by many scholars. This necessity is explained partly in terms of physical and mental make-up of man and partly in terms of his cultural conditioning.

Why should man live in society? Some of the reasons are given below:

Primarily a man needs to fulfill and satisfy his biological, social and other needs in society. But he adopts cultural means to satisfy them and thus culture becomes a means to the end. As a member of society, man can express his choices to satisfy his needs and the process of this satisfaction takes the form of cultural expressions. To meet his requirements of shelter and food, man uses his cultural capabilities.

It is a fact that at the time of birth the child is most helpless physically and mentally, to face the environment around him to meet his needs. It takes a lot of time for him to gain maturity and self-reliance. He needs the sustained support of others in the process of his upbringing. The whole process of his growth and development takes place under the care of other members of society or members of his group. This is carried on in the organised life of the group. It is during this process that a child inculcates values and norms to develop his personality. He develops skills and capabilities and equips himself to face the world around him.

It is for the above reasons to be self-reliant and competent to respond to the expectations of others on him, he must live in society, and live as a member of it in continuous interaction with other members.

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## **2.5 RELATIONSHIP OF CULTURE, SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUAL**

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The social and cultural aspects of life are interrelated. The behaviour of members of a society is altogether a matter of social relationships. Membership to this relationship is constituted by individuals who are units of a society. At least two individuals constitute a social relationship. The significance of an individual in society lies in the promotion of his culture. All the three aspects culture, society and individuals are related in a network called the social fabric. Individuals also interact with their environment, construct ideas, and build their culture - both material and non-material. To build adequate and positive relationships, individuals must adjust to other individuals.

The constructive interplay between social, cultural factors and individuals makes society a civilised place to live in. All these factors jointly work and reinforce each other. The absence of any one could mean the non-existence of others. It is also in the face-to-face interaction that the individual's that their behaviour is influenced by others.

The behaviour of a single individual can be called his personality, the behaviour of a group of individuals is also called culture. Culture can also be termed as the total behaviour of individuals.

In society, individuals learn the forms of conduct or behaviour which is acceptable to group. This process of learning acceptable behaviour is called acculturation. Thus, this process works as a bridge between culture as it exists and culture as presented by the individuals in their behaviour. It is during this process of acculturation that individuals are moulded into persons as desired by society. This process shapes the

individuals socially viable.

While individuals have a small life span, culture persists from one generation to another. It is more than any individual who lives in it. Similarly, no society is made up of all smile people for a long time. Births and deaths constantly change its members. When a whole generation of individuals in society has passed away, it is the pattern of behaviour (culture) that links the members to the past. This pattern of behaviour is passed to the individuals in society who comprise it now. This also helps us to understand how culture helps individuals to get integrated to his society.

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## **2.6 PLURALITY OF CULTURE**

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It is observed that in any country we find people having different religions, castes, creeds, races, and above all, following different ways of life, having their own cultures and ethnic identities. Such a country is culturally plural. Cultural pluralism is a pattern or a system in which people of different faiths, religions, castes, creeds can all work and live together, retaining proudly their own faith and identity and sharing the common bond of being, either by birth or choice. Plural culture means the co-existence of several sub-cultures within a given society on equal terms. In such a pluralistic culture, the validity of various sub-cultures is recognized.

The people living in different sub-cultures follow different ways of life, live differently and think according to cultural patterns adopted by them. Thus cultural pluralism also gives rise to the concept of cultural diversity. Cultural differences set apart one group of people with one culture from another. Each group may be characterized by their own language, history or ancestry, religion, style of dress or adornment. The cultural characteristics of plural groups are socially inherited (socially transmitted) from one generation to another rather than being learnt in one generation alone.

Structurally, plural groups presenting one culture may be small or large in size, but all of them display a sense of solidarity among themselves. Generally, the membership to such plural groups is closed, i.e., it can be acquired through birth and only its members can use its resources but all the groups live on equal terms and none are considered to be supreme in a moral sense. Also no group can force anyone to follow or adopt its way of life.

Each group falling under a plural sub-culture has a collective opinion and shares a responsibility which is distinct and separate from the desires and intentions of other groups. Members of each group have common beliefs, common rights and common duties towards the group and they make efforts to maintain and integrate it.

Rural and urban areas of India present a plurality of cultures. It has tribal, rural and urban populations. It presents a diversity of culture and people in terms of language, religion, caste, race, food, dress and way of life. Our country is renowned for its unity in diversity. This diversity is carried to urban areas as well, but it is not as clearly defined and demarcated and apparent as it is in tribal and rural areas. Urban areas present a complex and variety of sub-cultures.

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) What is cultural pluralism?

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## 2.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have attempted to learn what is culture and what is society. Culture is the way of life we live and society is the interacting aggregate of people. Culture has been defined in a number of ways. The definition by E.B. Tylor is the most acceptable. However other definitions present different aspects of culture and society. All of them lead us to think about ourselves as social being as well as cultural being, i.e., what kind of social life we had and how we can define it and what are the different types of cultures and how different cultures interact with each other.

In this unit we have also tried to establish a relationship between society, culture and the individual. We find that how they are inter-related and inter-twined. One has no meaning in the absence of the other. Culture has been classified into material and non-material culture. Both social and cultural factors guide and determine social growth and development of an individual and help him to integrate into his group according to its (group) desires and expectations. The individual in turn enriches culture by extending the inter-personal relationships.

The concept of cultural pluralism has been shown to present different sub-cultures living together on equal terms and maintaining their identities.

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## 2.8 KEY WORDS

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**Society** : An organized, interacting aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life.

**Culture** : A complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other



capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society

**Acculturation** : The process of learning the acceptable behaviour by individuals relevant to the group or the society to which they belong is called acculturation.

**Cultural pluralism** : It is the co-existence of several sub-cultures within a given society on equal terms.

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## 2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress I

- 1) Society can be defined as “an organized, interacting aggregate of individuals who follow a given way of life. “There is a need for similarity in the behaviour of human being. This similarity binds them together and they live a life in the company of one another at a given time and space.
- 2) Society is necessary for man because it fulfills all his needs as a member. The meeting of these need is conditioned by the pattern of requirements and behaviour that we call culture. A child needs sustained support to grow up and learn appropriate behaviour in society. Parents and other members of the society extend this support. In the absence of such a support, and individual may not acquire the abilities to adjust to his social and physical environment. It is society that provides the requisite exposure to its member about his milieu, behave, to act, to respond, and to learn his roles, rights and duties.

## **Check Your Progress II**

1) The most acceptable definition of culture has been given by E.B.Taylor: “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”. The main characteristics of culture are that it is learned and social. It is passed from one generation to another. Further, it has developed over a long period of time and has experienced number of changes. Culture unites the members of the society by giving them common meanings and a sense of common identity.

## **Check Your Progress III**

1) It is the co-existence of several sub-cultures within a given society on equal terms. The validity of such sub-cultures is recognized by the larger society.

In a society, people belonging to different subcultures have different ways of life, but they form a part of the whole. Each sub-culture has distinctive features expressed in the form of the separate language, food, dress, norms, values and other cultural patterns. Plural cultures have their own identity and are generally spread over loosely defined territorial areas. Sometimes, the boundaries of one sub-culture may touch the boundaries of other sub-culture. It may not be possible to clearly say where one sub-culture ends and the other sub-culture begins, but after traveling a little distance within that area, the distinctive features of the sub-culture appear and make it apparent.

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## UNIT 3 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit will introduce to you the concept and consequences of social stratification, specially in the Indian context. We will be specially focusing on Indian society. Differences in wealth and prestige in Indian society has been a major concern of social reformers political leaders and policy makers.

After studying this unit, you should be able to understand:

- the concept of social stratification, class, caste and its various dimensions;
- changes in the caste system and factors responsible for that; and
- impact of caste on Indian society.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Man has always desired an egalitarian society where all human beings have equality but this noble ideal has never been fully achieved in recorded history and certainly not in modern societies which are more concerned about equality than any other societies. The indicators of development devised by national and international organisations show that inequalities have, in fact, increased within countries and between the countries during the last century.

A number of agencies at different levels are engaged in reducing economic and social equalities. The modem state has taken the major responsibility for reducing social inequalities. International organisations like UNDP, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank also plays major role in policy formulation and mobilization of resources to reduce poverty. Voluntary

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organizations are increasingly involved in the implementation of development programmes whose major purpose is to reduce poverty and empower people. Needless to say these efforts have been only partially successful. There are number of Government sponsored programmes like MGNREGA, NRLM, Social Security Schemes etc. for the development of people and through it the development of the community.

Social workers have a special interest in social stratification. Social work aims at improving social functioning of individuals, groups and communities. The type and pattern of social stratification in a society greatly influences individual and group behaviour. For example, a caseworker will have to deal with an individual who fears loss of status after a series of business losses. Information on the class and caste status is this important to understand the social background of the individual. Similarly groups for doing group work are often formed on the basis of these criteria. In community organisation the need is even more as opportunities for development in Indian society depend on the class and caste position of the respective community. Bringing together all the communities to the forefront is an unavoidable responsibility of social workers who are working in the field of community organization and community development.

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### **3.2 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING**

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Social stratification refers to a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy. In the United States, it is perfectly clear that some groups have greater status, power, and wealth than other groups. These differences are what lead to social stratification. Social stratification can be defined as the arrangement of groups of individuals in hierarchical positions on the basis of criteria like wealth, prestige, ethnicity, gender and power. Because of the similarity of their positions in the social structure they develop a common consciousness of whom they are, what their common problems are and what should be done to remove these problems. Social stratification is a major form of social inequality. Sociologists point out that in complex industrial countries like U.S.A. the main type of social inequality is individual based inequality and profession based inequality. Lists have been prepared to show the public perceptions of the relative prestige attached to various occupations. One such list shows the medical doctor on the top with the sweeper the bottom. The social worker has a middle rank.

The quick mobility of individuals disturbs the arrangement of status in the hierarchy and this prevents the development of group consciousness. For the development of group consciousness, it is important that there is stability in the social structure and that individuals remain in a group for a considerable amount of time and that the avenues for social mobility are limited. In India class and caste are the main factors of social stratification, about which we will now learn.

There are two prominent social thinkers who have enriched our understanding of the nature, types and consequences of social stratification: Karl Marx and Max Weber.

Marx's analysis of society gives an important role to the economic factor. According to his theory of class, a class consists of a group of people who have similar relations to the forces of production. For example, in modern societies, all individuals who own factories are capitalists and all individuals who work in these factories for wages are workers. Similarly in an agrarian society individuals who own land can be called feudal lords and those who work for them are serfs or labourers. He also believed that the interests of these different groups were irreconcilable, which means that one gains at the expense of others. The result was that the workers, laborers or slaves were always exploited by the capitalists, feudal lords or slave owners in their respective societies. All other institutions in society, religious, political or educational, helped the process of exploitation through various means. For example, religion preaches fatalism, which convinces people that their suffering cannot be prevented and that passive suffering can bring them heavenly rewards after their deaths. Similarly the government puts down with coercion, attempts by the poorer sections to demand justice in economic opportunities by calling it a law and order problem or rebellion. In the Indian context, a Marxist analysis would interpret caste and the kanna theory associated with it as justifying the exploitative relations between the landlord and serfs. They prevent the serfs from understanding that the landlord is exploiting him and this prevents him from fighting the exploitative system. Thus Marx places before us the theory of economic basis of social inequality.

Max Weber, another prominent thinker, agreed with many ideas of Marx but differed on others issues. He agreed with Marx that the most important dimension of stratification is economic which results in formation of the hierarchical system of class but he points out that there are other factors which determine social stratification. According to him there are three dimensions of stratification: wealth, status and power. Weber also asserted that class formation did not depend solely on ownership of productive forces. It depended on the market situation by which an individual could realize his potential in competition with others. For example, a reputed lawyer or a doctor may not own a field or an industry but he has specialized skills, which not many others have. That is why these professionals are paid lucrative salaries. Weber points out that if the market situation of the individual is good then the person can become wealthy and consequently gains membership into the upper class. Status is the second dimension of stratification and it is a measure of prestige the society gives to an individual and that depends on the lifestyle of the person. A person who occupies a high office would be respected because of his status and not because of his economic position. The third dimension is power which is the ability of the individual to influence the actions of others against their own will. For example a village community leader may neither be rich nor occupying a high office but his position as leader of the community gives him power. Weber agrees that in most cases, all three dimensions, wealth, status and power are interrelated. A person who enjoys wealth and power is likely to enjoy high status. This is however true of most cases but not in all cases. For example-a dalit may be skilled and well to do but may not be given the respect he deserves because of his caste background. Weber by adding these dimensions of stratification has enabled a broader understanding of

social stratification.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) What are the dimensions of social stratification according to weber?

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### 3.3 CONCEPT OF CLASS

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A social class is a group of individuals who have more or less similar wealth.

The possession of wealth enables the individual to obtain those goods and services that are scarce and are valued by others. These goods and services differ from society to society. In traditional society, the wealthy person may buy land and gold while in modern society he may invest in the stock market or buy luxurious cars or go aboard for vacations. Wealth allows the person to create more wealth if he/she invests it prudently.

#### Concept of Class and its Characteristics

Most modern societies have class-based stratification. However many features of traditional stratification may be observed in modern societies such as elements of caste system and feudalism found in India. But with economic development, class based stratification is becoming increasingly important. Some of the major characteristics of the class system are as follows-

#### Class is a Relatively Open Stratification System

Any society is said to be relatively open or closed depending on the number of opportunities available to its members for upward social mobility. Equally important, is attitude of the society towards the mobility of its members. If the society offers a large number of opportunities and encourages members to achieve higher positions then the society can be called as an open stratification society. On the other hand, if the society has a limited number of opportunities for upward mobility and its normative values prohibit its members from achieving higher positions, that society is called a closed stratification society. Along with development the system of stratification becomes open and achievement oriented.

The class system is a form of open stratification system. An individual with his achievements can gain entry to a higher class and acquire prestige. There are examples of individuals who by their hard work and achievements rose from poverty and became millionaires. Modern society appreciates such individuals as they are seen as models for others.

Social mobility in modern societies is based on intelligence, merit, competence and achievement of individuals. However, in every society, in spite of the openness, factors like socio-economic background, parental status and resources, social networks and various ascribed factors play an important role in determining individual motivation, achievement and the availability of opportunities. Since these factors are not in control of the individual and cannot be easily modified to his advantage it cannot be said that modern societies are fully achievement oriented and open. That is why we have said class based societies are relatively open, that is, in relation to other societies. We will shortly study the caste system, which is a relatively closed stratification system.

Social hierarchy in traditional societies is formed by ascription while in class based societies achievement plays an important role. In other words, the difference between traditional and modern social hierarchies, lies in the difference between (status ascribed and status achieved ) being the bases social stratification. Traditional social hierarchies are based on ascribed states, while modern social hierarchies are based on achieved status.

The level of competition in modern society is high and only the fittest can survive. Social workers have to remember two consequences of an achievement based society. Since achievement is stressed, failures of an individual are look down upon by others and they lose their self-esteem. You may have read in newspapers about school children committing suicide after failing in school exams. It is the desire for high achievement and fulfilling the high expectations of others that pressurize vulnerable students to take this extreme step. Secondly, an achievement based society should provide the minimum facilities of health, education and housing to individuals to make them fit for the competition. In countries like India, we find that these essential facilities are not provided to all and many people are unable to compete with others on an equal basis. This makes the social situation unfair to these people. The government and voluntary organisations implement welfare and development programmes to enable disadvantaged people to enter the mainstream of society.

### **Impact of Class System in India**

Membership of particular class groups influences the behaviour of its members. It makes them conscious about their position in society. But in the Indian context more importance is given to caste and related issues rather than class factors. The class character in India is quite different from Western societies. Here class and caste categories co-exist in India and class categories like upper, middle and lower are parallel to caste categories. They jointly determine the class status, power and prestige of the individual in the society. Studies have shown that the upper classes predominantly belong to the upper castes which are an ascribed status. There have

been significant changes in the last decades but the pattern still continues.

The accumulation and distribution of resources including education is determined by the social position of the individual. Those who are higher in terms of the class and caste terms control available resources to a great extent, leaving behind a section of Indian population below and around the poverty line. The forces of globalization and liberalization seem to have widened the gap between the haves and have-nots, between the rich and the poor, between urban people and rural people and the upper caste and the lower class and lower caste.

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### 3.4 CONCEPT OF CASTE AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

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Caste is a much debated topic in India. The word 'cast' refers to the Spanish word 'Casta' which means 'breed' in Spanish. In the Indian context it represents caste and its related social practice. The caste system influences the social life of the Indian in a number of ways, as it assigns ascribed status to its members.

According to the Rig Veda the oldest and most important of all the four Vedas, there are four Varnas which are placed in a hierarchical order—the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. The profession of Brahmins is that of priests and teachers. The Kshatriyas are warriors and rulers. The Vaishyas (Vis) are traders and other common people. The Shudras occupy the lowest position in the hierarchy and perform the menial tasks. According to some historians there is a fifth Varna, the untouchables, and they are not considered as a part of the society. The tribes and people of other religions are also considered outside the Varna system.

Individuals are born into a caste and membership of a caste is determined by birth. An individual cannot change his or her caste. But there are instances where castes as a whole, after an improvement in economic status and changes in lifestyles have claimed a higher status in society. Such claims may or may not be accepted. The dominant castes might react adversely to the claim. But even if the claim is accepted the caste system remains intact. However the process of Sanskritization, inter caste marriage and advancement of education has changed the degree of the rigidity of the caste system in India.

According to G.S. Ghurye, a noted anthropologist, caste has six characteristics:

**Hierarchy:** Hierarchy is superior-subordinate relationship between various individuals and groups. Hierarchy in one form or another exists in every society but the principle of determining the hierarchy differs from society to society. In India caste is the main bases of social hierarchy. The degree of ritual purity and impurity associated with a particular caste determines its position in the hierarchy. Wealth and power are not the determining factors. For example a Brahmin whose economic status is lower than a Rajput is accorded a superior position because of his higher ritual status.

In reality, however, political and economic factors do play a significant role in



determining the position of the caste. Sociologists have pointed out that high ritual status does not actually translate into higher social status. For example, while a Rajput may not have as important a role in ritual matters as the Brahmins, it is unlikely that he will give a higher status to the Brahmin in other matters.

According to sociologist, M. N. Srinivasan a dominant caste is that caste in the community that has a sufficiently high ritual status, numerical strength, and material resources like land, wealth and access to power. It is the combination of these factors which keeps a caste high in the hierarchy. The dominant caste often has a major role to play in the village politics and in its social life.

***Segmented Division of Society:*** Castes are well-developed groups with membership based on birth and not by selection. The rights and duties of the individuals are controlled by caste councils, which exist in every caste. These councils have large powers to regulate the social life of its members. They can enforce order by punishing offenders for a variety of offences. Offences include adultery, causing injury to others; killing and punishments can include the imposition of fines, ordering corporal punishment and even the death sentence. Many castes have their own gods and goddesses that are not a part of the larger religious tradition. Thus caste has a sufficient degree of autonomy in dealing with the issues related to its members, and is independent of the controls by the government.

***Restrictions on Feeding and Social Intercourse:*** The exchange of cooked food between various castes is based on specific rules and conditions. Certain castes accept only certain kind of foods from members of other castes. Food items are divided into *pakka* and *kacha*. *Pakka* is cooked in ghee and are considered superior to *kacha* food which is cooked in water. A Brahmin can take only *pakka* food from Kshatriys and Vaishyas but not from Shudras and untouchables. On the other hand, Kshatriyas will take *kacha* food from Brahmin but only accept *pakka* food from the Vaishyas who are lower than them. The distinctions in the offering and taking of food are based on the positions of the caste involved. Similar differences are seen in the occupation also. Occupations also have been divided among the castes based on their status.

Such kinds of differences are seen in the maintenance of social distance between different castes. The physical distance between castes reflects the caste positions. For example in traditional Kerala society, a Nayar may approach a Nambudri but cannot touch him whereas a member of the Tiya caste (lower than the Nayar caste) has to maintain a distance of 36 steps from the Nambudri.

***Civil and Religious Disabilities and Privileges of Different Castes:*** Different castes in the hierarchy have different rights and privileges. The result is that social life is segregated on the basis of caste. In north Indian villages impure castes are segregated while pure castes live together. In South India all castes tend to be segregated. In Tamil Nadu for example, we find that the place where caste Hindus live are called *Ur* and where dalits live are called *Cheri*. The *Cheri* is situated at a distance from the village.

Ghurye gives a number of instances from the late nineteenth century and early

twentieth century to show to how these disabilities were enforced. For instance in Viakom, a town in the princely state of Travancore, Shudras were disallowed from walking on the temple streets. A nationwide agitation by prominent leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Periyar against these discriminatory practices changed the situation. Similarly in Pune, a Shudra could not enter the city during the morning and evening as their long shadows would pollute high caste members. We also find differential treatment in the punishments for committing similar crimes. For example if caught stealing a Brahmin had to pay only a fine but for the same crime, a Shudra had to undergo corporal punishment.

The religious practices reinforced this hierarchy and Shudras had liabilities that were attached to his caste status. They could not enter the most part of the temple, the sanctum sanctorum. Only Brahmins were allowed this privilege. In rural areas, even now, there is discrimination against lower caste members. We often hear of caste violence after lower caste members were disallowed by higher caste members to take out a marriage procession or funeral procession on the main street

### ***Lack of Unrestricted Choice of Occupation:***

Membership of the caste is hereditary and each caste had a traditionally assigned occupation. Regardless of the individual's aptitudes and skills he had to adopt the occupation of his caste. In the same way every occupation was linked to a specific caste. So each caste has one occupation and that occupation was the presence of that caste only. For example, only a Brahmin could become a priest because of his birth in a Brahmin family. Education was given on the basis of caste. Young members would be attached to older members to train them in the occupation skills of the caste. There was no universal and common education. However, sociologists have pointed out that in spite of such restrictions on occupations there were certain occupations like weaving, agriculture and military that were open to all castes.

In pre-modern times the economic relations between the various castes was in the form of the *jajmani* system. Each service caste performed a particular function for the landlords. They used to receive payment in kind and commonly on an annual basis. The service castes and the higher castes had a client-patron relationship. In modern times their relation has undergone a change.

***Endogamy:*** Endogamy refers to the marriage practice in which the members of a group marry from within the group members. Endogamy is an important characteristic of the caste system. In many castes there is endogamy at the subcaste level. For example, Iyers and Iyengars may not marry between each other even though both are Tamil Brahmins.

There are however exceptions to the rule. These exceptions pertain to hypergamy and hypogamy. When a higher caste man marries a low caste woman it is called hypergamy and when a lower caste man marries a higher caste woman it is called hypogamy. Hypergamy is allowed whereas hypogamy is strictly forbidden. It is a matter of prestige for the lower caste family if their daughter had been accepted by a higher caste's man and family. An example of this practice is marriage between a male Nambudri and a Nair woman.

### Caste in other Religions

Among the major religions of the world caste exists only in Hinduism. But in India adherents of virtually all religions seem to have caste-like divisions. The Muslims, the Christians, the Buddhists and Sikhs, seems to follow the principle of inclusion and hierarchy in different ways. Islam and Christianity believe in radical equality between its members. However, the existence of caste-like practices shows that in some aspects the social milieu in which a religion is practiced influences it more than its theology. Similar is the case in Sikhism and Buddhism also.

Caste-like differences may be observed in religions other than Hinduism. In Sikhism, there are groups like Jat Sikhs and Mazhabi Sikhs. They do not intermarry. In Islam four groups were identified that can be compared to castes: Syeds, Sheikhs, Pathans and Mughals. Syeds claim that they are descendants of Prophet Muhammad while Sheikhs claim that they are descendants of the tribe of Prophet Muhammad. Pathans and Mughals are considered to be the warrior class comparable to Kshatriyas in Hinduism. Other groups in Islam are based on professions they pursue like weavers butchers, water carriers, etc. These groups are considered lower in status than Syeds, Sheikhs, Pathans and Mughals. Most of these groups are endogamous. There is limited social intercourse between these members. However anyone from any social group, if competent in religious knowledge, can become a priest or *moulvi*.

Christianity is also an egalitarian religion and has encouraged conversions of people from all castes during different periods of history. Many of these castes have retained their caste identities even after their conversion to Christianity and this has influenced their social behaviour. However, Islam and Christianity have no concept of pollution and purity, which is central to Hinduism. Hence these religions were less influenced by caste than Hinduism.

#### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) What are the characteristics of the caste system in India?

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### 3.5 CASTE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Though caste is considered a static system, it has undergone changes because of the forces of modernisation, as discussed below.

### **Caste and Industrialization**

The process of industrialization has affected traditional Indian society in a number of ways. It has particularly affected the caste system. The most significant change has been the gradual 'shift from caste categories to class categories, particularly in the urban areas. The traditional form of exchange of goods in Indian society was by the *jajmani* system. The *Jajmani* system was based on client-patron relations in which the lower castes provided services to the upper caste members in exchange for annual payment in form of goods.

Industrial development has increased the use of inanimate sources of energy and increased the size of the market. The growth of industries increased the employed workers who exchanged their labour for wages. The site of production of goods changed from houses of the manufacturer to that of the factories which were owned by the capitalists. As industrialisation spread, the movement of workers from the primary and household sector to the secondary and formal sectors increased.

Industrial development changed the social and economic relations between the various castes. The services castes often found employment which changed their status and their incomes. Industries also brought individuals from different castes together at the site of work and social distance between castes was not maintained here. Further workers in the industry were selected and promoted on the basis of skill and hard work, and not based on ascriptive factors like caste etc. Gradually employment in industries changed the relationship between caste, education and occupations. In spite of these changes, caste networks continue to affect the recruitment into industries and other modern organisations. As a result the modern economic system is not totally free from the effects of caste.

### **Caste System and Urbanisation**

Closely related to industrialisation is the social phenomenon of urbanisation which is the movement of people from rural areas to urban areas. Urban living promoted anonymity and formal relations between individuals. Major occupations in urban areas are related to the secondary and tertiary sectors. Employment opportunities in these sectors are based on the skills, hard work, education and training of the person and not on his/ her caste.

Social life in urban areas is also different from that in rural areas. Ritual purity and social distance cannot be maintained. For example no one can ask the person sitting next to her or him in the bus what her caste is. Similarly, no one knows the cook's caste in a hotel and therefore rules regarding cooking could not be followed. All these factors have weakened the caste system in urban areas.

### **Caste and the Political System**

The Indian Constitution is based on liberal values such as equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and citizenship. The basic unit for political participation is the individual.

Caste system is based on values totally antithetical to these values. Inequality, segmentation, restricted choice of occupation are the values of the caste system. The Indian Constitution gives every individual the right to vote; right to participate in elections. Some of the important articles that deal with equality and prevention of discrimination are Articles 14, 15, 16, and 17. All jobs are open to all members of society provided they are qualified and compete with others on an equal basis.

These factors had a large impact on the caste system and traditional roles and leaders. For some years after independence, the elite men mainly, belonging to the upper caste dominated politics, but by 1980s backward castes and dalits made their presence felt in the political arena. Democracy is a representative form of government and therefore increasing inclusion of these groups in the power structure has made Indian democracy stronger and at the same time democracy has weakened the caste system in its traditional form.

### **Caste System and Social Movements**

Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, Periyar, Narayana Guru and others have lead a number of social movements to remove the oppressive caste system.

There are reformist and revolutionary types social movements. Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Narayana Guru belonged to the first category who believed that the caste system can be changed slowly and from within the system. The reformist suggests that for reform in the caste system a change of heart among the high castes and provision of educational facilities for the lower castes is necessary. On the other hand, radicals like Ambedkar, Phule and Periyar believed that the caste system had to be abolished completely and its continuation in any form will lead to exploitation and oppression. They suggested the organisation of social movements, agitation and use of law to fight oppression of the caste system. These two types of movements influence the approach of many voluntary organisations even now when they have to decide how to deal with problems related to the caste system.

### **Caste and Ideology**

The Western enlightened ideas based on rationality and reason reached India during colonial period. Liberalism, Socialism, Marxism and Nationalism were the more prominent of these ideologies. During colonial era the British managed the education system. Most Indian intellectual elite were educated by this system and internalized these values. Many of them, through a variety of ways, tried to modernize the traditional Indian society.

### **Caste and Modern Education**

Traditional education was ascriptive based while modern education is achievement oriented. Various castes provided training to the younger members mainly by making them apprentices to master craftsmen of the same caste.

Modern education, on the other hand, gives universal and scientific education so that

they can have access to diverse occupational opportunities.

The modern education system inculcates values of equality, fraternity, liberty and social justice in the students. Further; students come together in modern schools for studying and interact freely with each other. The values imparted by the education system and their experience of interaction with students from different castes have weakened the hold of caste values on the minds of the students.

In modern times education has become open but expensive. High quality education is not available to all, particularly the poorer sections of the society, including most of the SC/ ST population. Since they are educationally deprived, they are not empowered by education. There is a need for the provision of quality education for all so that these sections are empowered. There is a reservation for SC/ST children in educational institutions and for courses. Special grants and scholarships are also provided to these sections for their educational empowerment by the State and Central Governments. Besides these exclusive schools, hostels etc. are also granted for them. So we can't find a huge deprivation and discrimination in this area as on now. The avenue of foreign education is also open for them who can avail it. There is an independent commission constituted for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes by the Central Government to ensure the rights, welfare and wellbeing of these sections.

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### **3.6 IMPACT OF CASTE SYSTEM ON INDIAN SOCIETY**

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The caste system has weakened but it has certainly not vanished. It has been transformed and found new functions for itself in modern society. Now we shall see how the caste system has changed and adapted itself to modern society.

#### **Compartmentalization of Individual Life**

The influence of caste is reduced in certain areas of the individual's life. Eating, habits and social interactions are areas where the influence of the caste system was high but is now minimal. But in other areas, like choice of bride or bridegroom for marriage and social networking caste still plays an important role. This is true mainly of the urban areas while in rural areas the situation is different. Many of the traditional aspects of the caste system are prevalent there. The way caste influences social life differs from region to region.

#### **Decline of Caste in the Ritual Sphere**

Ideas of impurity and purity are not given much importance by people today. Not many people believe that touching a low caste person or eating with him will pollute them. Therefore it can be said that the religious justification for caste system has reduced if not totally ended.

#### **Caste as a Social Network**

Castes have become a basis for forming a network to gain resources. Caste associations are frequently used to get jobs, get promotions, access to goods and services, to develop business networks and influence decision-making in government and elsewhere. The mobilization of people takes place on the basis of caste to further

caste interests. Sociologists have pointed out that even movements related to farmers' demands which do not overtly seem to be caste related are based on the caste networks.

Earlier caste councils, which were recognized by the government and the people, used to have vast judicial power to control individual behaviour. But now these councils use informal power and informal enforcement to settle disputes.

### **Caste Consciousness and Community Consciousness**

Caste is still the basis for defining and maintaining the identity of the person. Caste identity of the individual comes in conflict with the individual's identification with the larger community. The caste-based identities adversely affect the unity of the people and at times hinder the people from taking collective action. Further caste has played a role in adversely affecting the distribution of rewards of the community development programme. The dominant castes have benefited from the various development programmes at the cost of other castes. Social movements which had positive aims have also been affected. Bhoodhan movement meant to resolve community conflicts peacefully could not succeed because of struggle among various castes on the issue of resources distribution.

These experiences have led many to conclude that a common community consciousness does not exist in Indian villages. What does exist is caste consciousness and caste identities. The concept of 'community' is a myth. As a social worker you must be able to find ways in which the development programmes you implement benefit the target populations.

### **Caste Consciousness Leads to Violence**

Castes based social formations are conflict prone. This is a natural consequence of the intense caste consciousness and strong identification of caste members with each other. A lower caste member is not allowed to sit on a horse during a marriage procession, the low caste members are disallowed to vote; lower caste members are not allowed entry into the village or to travel on certain roads; low caste members are disallowed from participating in temple festivals; a girl is teased by men of other castes. These unjust practices in the past were passively accepted by the lower castes. However, now-a-days there is resistance to these practices by the lower castes due to the rising class-consciousness among them that leads to violence.

These violent incidents have their roots in the unequal conditions prevalent in the area such as unequal distribution of resources, the need for the dominant castes to keep lower castes in their place, the growing consciousness of the lower caste; about their low status and the need to respond to the situation, the apathy of the state machinery towards these sentiments.

### **Caste has also led to Structural Violence**

Structural violence refers to violence in which pain is not directly inflicted on other but laws and rules are so formed that it hurts the dignity of the person and causes mental pain. Untouchability is the most virulent form of structural violence, which

hurts the dignity of the person against whom it is practiced. It also makes everyday life hard for the person. Lower caste members are not allowed entry into certain common facilities like schools and temples and not allowed to use common resources. Lower caste women are not allowed to draw water from the village well and they have to travel long distances to get water. Certain jobs like cooks in mid day scheme of the government are not given to dalits as it is believed that they are polluting the food. As mentioned earlier, the religious aspect of caste has declined but some people seem to justify untouchability by saying that the lower castes are physically unclean.

### **Caste has Caused Problems in Modern Organisation**

Caste loyalties cause problems in modern organisations. Very often people are selected on the basis of caste rather than merit. This has had an adverse impact on the performance and productivity of the organisation. The presence of caste interferes in creating an esprit de corps in organizations. Just like the village communities that are divided on the basis of caste, modern organisations are also divided on the basis of caste. At present there is a community consolidation for vote bank and some particular groups have come up with their own political parties. Caste organisations have very crucial influence during elections in determining the victory.

### **Caste has interfered in Uniform Application of Laws and Rules**

Modern rules and laws are rationally formulated and apply to all citizens regardless of his or her social background except when exceptions are allowed by it. Such a universalistic application of laws is a major requirement in modern democracy. But caste considerations are not in conformity with universalism.

There are differences in the viewpoints of the upper castes and lower castes, on how the caste system is affecting them. According to the upper caste view point, reservations and the rise of the lower castes' in different fields has put them in a disadvantageous position. On the other hand the lower castes viewpoint is that as upper castes occupy strategic positions in the society they are victimized. There is a continuous conflict between the top and the bottom views of castes. The politicians make use of this to further their own interests. However in every caste category a dominant section has emerged which enjoys the available opportunities at the cost of others. Sociologists have identified some of the positive impact caste has had on Indian society.

It has promoted plurality in India and at the same time provided the social structure to integrate the society. Castes have different value system, different life styles, different occupations and subsequently different interests and this has led to political and cultural pluralism. Different value systems give rise to different opinions, which can encourage a diversity of opinions. No single group can dominate the political and cultural field. Every group has to negotiate with other groups so that their objectives are attained. Political scientists have said this condition contributes significantly in making Indian democracy active and vibrant.

It is also claimed that the caste system in its traditional form leads to stability in



society. Kings and dynasties have come and gone but the village communities did not experience any major change. It is debatable whether the absence of change is a positive aspect. In any case historians have disputed the view that there has been no major change in Indian society down the centuries. Another advantage mentioned is that the caste system provided a person with social security as his occupation was fixed and in case of distress his fellow caste members would come to his rescue. But these advantages are mainly those that are found in a traditional society, not in a modern one.

**Check Your Progress III**

- Note:** a) Use the Space Provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) Name two factors which influenced the caste system in the modern period.

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**3.7 LET SUM UP**

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In this unit, we have studied the different aspects related to social stratification which is the division of society into groups, which are hierarchically placed, based on one or more criteria. In modern societies stratification is based on wealth, status and power. The amount of wealth individual possesses determines which class he/ she belongs to; the prestige given to him/her, position in society, his/her position in organizations will determine how much power he/she has.

The two bases of stratification in India are that of class and caste. The changes in the caste system and its impact on Indian society have been discussed. The social worker’s own personality may be influenced by these ideas and his/ her practice is influenced by his/ her position in the society. The social worker’s prejudices should not come in the way of his/ her practice. Secondly, in all his programmes he/she should keep in mind the caste and class factor and its influence on the clients.

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**3.8 KEY WORDS**

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**Social role** : the expected patterned behaviour of an individual occupying a particular status

position.

- Status** : A social position within a society.
- Capitalism** : A group of people, with similar interests or concerns who interact and remain in informal contact for mutual assistance or support.
- Bhoodan movement** : Movement started by Vinoba Bhave to convince landlord to give excess land to the landless. This movement was an attempt to solve the problem of landless in rural areas without violence.

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### 3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Ghurye (1986), Caste and Race in Modern India, Popular Prakashan, Bombay.

Gupta, Dipankar (1993), Social Stratification, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Haralamboss, Michael (1989), Sociology, Themes and Perspectives, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Kolenda, Pauline (1997), Caste in Contemporary India, Beyond organic Solidarity, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

Stern, Robert (1998), Changing India, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

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### 3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Check Your Progress I

- 1) The dimensions of social stratification according to Weber were wealth, status and power. The amount wealth an individual possesses determines his class and his life chances. The status of the person depends on the lifestyle of the individual person's ability to control other people's behaviour and in modern societies it can be derived from the position held in an organization.

#### Check Your Progress II

- 1) The characteristics of the caste system are a hierarchical relationship between various groups, ascriptive status, endogamy, fixed occupations, restrictions on social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections and segmented divisions

of society.

### **Check Your Progress III**

- 1) Industrialization and the introduction of universal adult franchise (voting rights) are two factors which influenced the caste system.



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## **UNIT 4 THE STATE AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION: ITS ROLE AND IMPACT ON THE INSTITUTIONS**

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\*Mr. Sundara Babu & Mr. Gauthama Prabu

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- 4.1 Introduction
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- 4.3 Constitution and Law
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- 4.7 Welfare State: Liberty, Equality, Justice
- 4.8 Nationalism: Religion, Caste and Class
- 4.9 Civil society, Community Organisations, Social Capital
- 4.10 Local Governance and Public Opinion
- 4.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.12 Key Words
- 4.13 Suggested Readings
- 1.14 Answers to Check Your Progress.

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### **4.0 OBJECTIVES**

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The objective of this unit is to make you familiar with the concept of state as an institution and its impact on other institutions of society.

After going through the unit, you will be able to understand:

- The role and importance of the state in modern society;
- The various wings of the government;
- The importance of constitution and law; and
- The concepts of civil society, social capital, elite and public opinion.

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\* Mr. Sundara Babu, JNU, New Delhi & Mr. Gauthama Prabu, Young Professional, CAPART

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit deals with the concept of the state as an institution, its impact on other societal institutions. It also provides basic information on many other concepts associated with the state and politics.

The modern state is a complex set of institutions, which are highly integrated and structured. The persons comprising the state are not treated as individuals but as citizens or voters. Since the laws provide them equality, all citizens are ideally speaking (and this is provided in our constitution as well) treated equally with rights and privileges. The state has built up a web of institutions to administer and govern. The government is composed of individuals and officials occupying these institutions who derive their authority from their office.

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## 4.2 STATE

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A community or society politically organised under one independent government within a definite territory can be called a State. The state is a special institution, which serves the interest of the whole community, or a class of society. The state emerges at a definite stage of social development, and in order to understand the state, social evolution, in general, must be understood first. Without understanding the general laws of social development, the state and politics cannot be studied objectively.

### **Population**

All states must have a population. No explicit or fixed figure can be considered as the ideal size of population. There is no rule or political practice governing the number of persons necessary to entitle a community to recognition as a State. Some writers in the past have, however, undertaken to lay down within broad lines certain principles, which should determine the size of the population, necessary for the existence of a State, and some have even assumed to fix exactly the minimum and the maximum number of inhabitants, but manifestly any such rule would be arbitrary.

### **Territory**

Territory is another essential physical constituent of the State. Territory of the State consists not only of a definite portion of land, but also includes water and air space within its boundary. It also extends in addition to a distance of three miles into the sea from its coast, an area called 'the territorial waters'. The state boundaries may be natural that is, they may be bodies of water, mountain ranges, and deserts, or artificial like stones, trenches, walls etc. There is no rule or practice concerning the extent of territory necessary to constitute the home of a State, more than there is, regarding the amount of population.

### **Government**

A mere mass of people occupying a practical portion of territory does not constitute a State until the people have organised themselves politically, and established a civil government. There must be some political agency that commands and regulates the governed who obeys. The government exercises the authority of the State. Government is a narrower term than the State, being only part of it. The State includes both the government and the governed. The government is the established form of political administration of a State.

### **Sovereignty**

It means the supreme and ultimate power of the State by virtue of which it may command and enforce obedience. It is this, which distinguishes the State from all other associations and organisations. Sovereignty is characteristic of the State, not of the government, though the government on behalf of the State may exercise it. There can be no State without sovereignty.

### **International Recognition**

In reality, international recognition is the outcome of the sovereignty of the State, not the condition of its existence. States are sometimes defined as those entities recognized by other States. A State recognizes another State when its government is convinced that the other State has the characteristic of a State. Recognition is the voluntary action of one State for another.

Recognition can be of two types: *de facto* and *de jure*.

*De facto* recognition means the State is recognized as existing in fact, but not necessarily in law. *De jure* recognition implies that the State is a rightful one, of legitimate origin and existence.

### **Role of the State and Impact on other Institutions**

The State takes the responsibility to provide all the public goods such as education, health care, drinking water, basic infrastructure in both rural and urban settings, and provide social security, etc.

In India, the Tenth Plan, in this emerging scenario, makes a distinct shift from an investment-oriented approach to setting a reform agenda designed to achieve the social targets through effective governance.

It relies on the mobilization of the energies of Central and State Governments, Panchayat Raj institutions and Non-Governmental Organisations for the accomplishment of the clearly spelt out tasks of social development. Programs intended for the poor or the targeted groups must be delivered to them effectively. There are many radical changes in the style of functioning of Government and its agencies have been asked to bring about greater efficiency, transparency and accountability.

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## **4.3 CONSTITUTION AND LAW**

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The term “*law*” is applied to rules for the guidance of human conduct.

No group of people can live longer in peace and tranquility without such rules of conduct. Rules need not essentially require to have been written. These can be in the form of traditions and conventions as well.

The word law has been derived from the term ‘*lag*’ which means something which lies fixed. So it follows that the ‘law’ in principle which is fixed or uniform or “generally followed”. Gettell has classified the laws that govern the conduct of human beings under three categories: (i) moral laws (ii) social laws, and (iii) political laws.

The people generally obey the law because of (a) the force of the State, (b) the promotion of common good, or (c) rule conforming habit. However, if we genuinely feel that a particular law is unjust, we should create public opinion against that law. Mahatma Gandhi has shown how the techniques of non-cooperation and civil disobedience can be used effectively against autocratic regimes.

<b>Check Your Progress I</b>
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**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) What is a state and what are its basic elements?

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## 4.4 LEGISLATURE, EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIARY

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### Legislature

The legislature is the most important of the three organs of the government because it represents the people and tries to represent their hopes and aspirations in the shape of laws. Legislature is the official rule making body of a political system.

The Indian Constitution has adopted the parliamentary system of government, a system in which the executive is responsible to the legislatures constituted by the election.

The primary function of the legislature is to legislate both in the sense of scrutinizing the details of laws and in the sense of authorizing or legitimizing the passage of laws.

Being a federal polity, legislative organs have been provided in our Constitution at the Union as well as the State.

### Executive

The executive is that part of the organisation of the government, which is concerned with the enforcement of the laws enacted by the legislature as well as general administration.

With the conversion of the modern state into welfare state, the functions of the executive have enormously expanded.

The functions which are performed by the executive in different parts of the world are the following:

a) Maintenance of law and order

Protection of country and maintenance of diplomatic relations

b) The enactment of the laws.

c) The chief executive enjoys the right to grant pardon, amnesty, reprieve, etc., to the persons punished by the law courts.

- d) Miscellaneous functions like formulation of national plans for greater prosperity of the country, distribution of honours and titles to the persons who are distinguished in their respective fields or render meritorious services to the state.

**Judiciary**

The judiciary is the most important organ of the government because it is through the judiciary that justice is realized as defined by law, both as between one private citizen and another and as between private citizens and members of government.

The term judiciary is generally applied to designate those officers of the government whose function is to apply the existing law to individual cases.

It is the responsibility of these officers to discover the relevant facts in any case and protect the innocent from injury by either the legislature or the executive branch of government.

The main functions of judiciary are: (a) administration of justice (b) protection of the rights and liberties (c) protection and interpretation of the constitution (d) protection of federation, (e) the advisory role to the executive, etc.

**Check Your Progress II**

- Note:** a) Use space provided for your answer.  
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

- 1) What are the functions of the Executive?  
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**4.5 CITIZENSHIP, RIGHTS AND DUTIES**

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**Citizenship**

In traditional States, most of the population ruled by the King or Emperor showed little awareness of, or interest in, those who governed them. Neither did they have any political rights nor influence. Normally only the dominant classes or more affluent groups felt a sense of belonging to an overall political community.

In modern societies, by contrast, most people living within the borders of the political system are citizens, having common rights and duties and knowing themselves to be part of a Nation. While there are some people who are political refugees or are 'state less' almost everyone in the world today is a member of a definite national political order.

**Rights**



Rights are the social requirements of a social man or woman for the development of his/her personality and society at large. There are two aspects of rights: personal and social. Rights have a social character and are given only to the people living in society and working in the overall interest of society.

According to Green 'a right is a power of acting for his/her own ends ... secured to an individual by the community on the supposition that it contributes to the good of the community'.

### **Duties**

There are no duties without rights and no rights without duties. A duty means 'an obligation imposed by law on an officer or a private person. As such duty presupposes that one is capable of knowing the rules. Infants, idiots and animals are not supposed to know the rules and to act in accordance with them. However we attribute rights to infants, idiots and even animals.

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## **4.6 DEMOCRACY, ELITE THEORY AND POWER**

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### **Democracy**

The term democracy is derived from two Greek words '*demos*' which means people and '*kratta*' meaning the government. The boundaries of democracy have been widened, so as to add social and economic justice to the principle of political equality. Abraham Lincoln projected democracy as "*government of the people, for the people and by the people.*" Democracy is not a mere form of government. It is also a form or condition of society as well as an order in which the ownership of property is widely and rather evenly distributed.

### **Elite Theory**

The elite theory was first developed by two Italian sociologists, namely, Vilfredo Pareto and G. Mosca.

Elite theory claims that the personal qualities of individuals separate the rulers from the ruled. The elite owe their position to the superiority of their personal characteristics or attributes. For example, they may possess considerable organisational ability, a talent that Mosca believed to be basis for leadership. On the other hand, they may possess a high degree of cunning and intelligence, qualities that Pareto saw as one of the prerequisites of power.

Later versions of elite theory place less emphasis on the personal qualities of the powerful and more on the institutional framework of the society. They argue that the hierarchical organisation of social institutions allows a minority to monopolize power.

Elite theory rejected the idea of communism as utopia and argues that an egalitarian society was an illusion. It saw Marxism as ideology rather than an objective analysis of society. Elite theory argues that all societies are divided into two main groups, a ruling minority, and the ruled and this situation is inevitable. According to elite theory, if the proletarian revolution occurs, it would merely result in the replacement of one ruling elite by another.

The economic infrastructure, be it capitalist or communist, will not alter the inevitability of elite rule. Apart from the personal qualities of its members, an elite owes its power to its internal organisation. In Mosca's words, 'the power of the minority is irresistible as against each single individual in the majority'.

The elite takes major decisions, which affect society. Even in so called democratic societies, these decisions will usually reflect the concerns of the elite rather than the wishes of the people. Elite theorists picture the majority as apathetic and unconcerned with the major issues of the day. The mass of the population is largely controlled and manipulated by the elite, passively accepting the propaganda, which justifies elite rule.

### **Power**

Power means strength or the capacity to control. It is described as the ability of an individual or group to fulfill its desires and implement its decisions and ideas. It involves the ability to influence as well as control the behaviour of others even against their will. Power is a multifaceted concept admitting various definitions. Some emphasize different bases of power (for e.g.: wealth, status, knowledge, charisma, force, authority); some others talk of different forms of power such as, influence, coercion or control; yet others discuss power from the point of view of its uses such as individual or community ends, political ends, economic ends etc.

In sum the concept of power involves a

- a) Relational situation where power is exercised by one or other(s).
- b) It is concerned with bringing about a consequence.

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## **4.7 WELFARE STATE: LIBERTY, EQUALITY, JUSTICE**

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### **Welfare State**

The term welfare state was originally applied to Britain during the Second World War. After the war the term came into popular usage, as a convenient way of referring to the social and economic policy changes taking place, which according to those sponsoring them, would transform British society.

There were these main services provided by the Welfare State:

- 1) The direction and extension of a range of social services, including social security, National Health Services, Education, Housing, Employment service and welfare services for elderly and disabled people and for deprived children.
- 2) The maintenance of full employment as the paramount aim and policy. ‘
- 3) A Program of Nationalization.

As a response to mass democracy, the welfare state can be viewed as stemming from demands for greater equality and recognition of social rights to welfare services and socio-economic security.

As in India, the picture of a ‘democratic republic’ which the preamble envisages is the democratic system not only from the political but also from the social standpoint. In other words, it envisages not only a democratic form of Government but also a democratic society, infused with the spirit of ‘justice, liberty, equality and fraternity’.

This democratic republic which stands for the good of all the people is embodied in the concept of a ‘Welfare State’ which inspires the Directive Principles of State Policy.

## **Liberty**

The idea of liberty has been the most powerful weapon in the hands of the unarmed and it has defeated the strong enemies of dictators and imperialists. The term liberty is derived from the Latin word *liber* that means free. Sometimes it is identified with the absence of restraint-a negative meaning. Sometimes it is identified with the availability of certain socio-economic conditions in which man/woman may develop their personality-a positive meaning.

## **Equality**

Equality does not mean identical treatment to all. It means proportional equality equal among equals and inequality among unequals. The basis of treating equals and unequals should be rational and just.

Explaining the meaning of equality, Laski maintains that equality means the following.

- 1) The end of special privileges in the society
- 2) Adequate opportunities are laid open to all and each may develop his/ her personality.
- 3) All must have access to social benefits and no one should be restricted on the ground. The inequalities by birth or because of parent and hereditary causes are unreasonable.

## **Justice**

In different social systems, there are different conceptions of justice. The main difficulty in defining justice is that it is not an independent concept. Justice is closely associated with the system of values and the behaviour of social systems. Every system is governed by certain norms and values and these in turn determine justice. With the change of time and circumstances values undergo change that brings a change in the concept of justice also.

## **Welfare State-The Indian Scenario**

During independence, active participation of people in the national democratic process has articulated itself through mobilization of a plurality of political structures or political parties, which emerge as new forms of macro structures of social change and modernization in India.

The significance is directly socio-structural since their commitment is primarily to a legitimate access to sources of power.

A unique feature of political macro-structure in India has been the continuity of a single party (Congress) dominance in the sphere of political power, which was only partially broken in general elections of 1967.

This provides the historical setting for any analysis of political structure of India in relation to the process of modernization.

The political framework of modernization is essentially rooted in the changing sources of legitimation of authority and process of its diffusion and centrality in the social structure.

In a society having a traditional polity, source of power is in the traditionally established and institutionalized offices of king, chieftains, or priest-rulers who have had access to this office by virtue of

qualities ascribed to them.

The norms, which form the basis of allocation of these political offices, are inequitably distributed on the hierarchical principle of caste or other similar status groups. The incumbents to political office have an authoritarian character and conformity to political norms is arbitrary. In the sense that, the sphere of action, which may be truly be called 'political' or which has to do with policy formulation for the nation or the community as a whole is limited to a selected few, is also traditionally closed. In such a system authority has a hierarchical character and not consensual. It is undifferentiated from other roles of incumbencies vis-a-vis their role in power structure.

### **Education**

The state provides the largest number of educational institutions in our country. The state in India, through its Constitution had laid "permanent provisions" of education for minorities, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Under the permanent provisions of the Indian constitution, no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving State aid, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them [Article 29(2)].

Further, all minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the fundamental right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice [Art. 30(1)] and the state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language [Art. 30(2)].

Finally, it is the duty of the state to provide free and compulsory education (Art. 45.). The state shall endeavour to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living and to improve public health and to prohibit consumption of liquor and intoxicating drugs except for medical purposes [Article 47]. Besides the Government run educational institutions non-Governmental institutions also provide service to all without discrimination.

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## **4.8 NATIONALISM: RELIGION, CASTE AND CLASS**

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### **Nationalism**

Nation-States are associated with the rise of Nationalism, which can be defined as a set of symbols and beliefs providing the sense of being part of a simple political community. Thus, individuals feel a sense of pride and belonging in being Indian, British, American, Canadian, or Russian.

Probably people have always felt some kind of identity with social groups of one form or another: their family, village, or religious community. Nationalism, however, made its appearance only with the development of the modern state.

### **Culture and Religion**

The Indian state plays a significant role in safeguarding the religions. The unity and fraternity of the people of India, professing numerous faiths has been sought to be achieved by enshrining the ideals of a 'secular state' which means that the state protects all religions equally and does not itself impose a state religion.

This itself is one of the glowing achievement of Indian democracy when her neighbours such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Burma, uphold a particular religions as the state religion. In India on the other hand the state will neither establish a religion of its own nor confer any special patronage upon any particular religion. The state shall not compel any citizen to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious institutions.

No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly provided by state funds. Every person is guaranteed the freedom of conscience and the freedom to profess, practice, and propagate his/her own religion. Where a religious community is in the minority, the constitution goes further to enable it to preserve its culture and religious interest.

According to Article 29 of the Indian constitution, the state shall not impose upon it any culture other than the community's own culture.

Such community shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of its choice and the state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against such an educational institution maintained by a minority community on the ground that it is under the management of a religious community [Art. 30].

### **Caste and Politics**

Caste is gradually taking up new forms and functions, leaving its traditional ones. It has specially become more influential in the field of public life and politics. It is playing an important role in India in political matters. A brief discussion follows as to why and how these two institutions have come closer to each other and with what consequences.

The first and foremost cause of each entering the fields of the other is that social life is the root for both. Political relationships are essentially social relationships. It is a system of seeking and attaining social and economic dominance. The political and administrative structures of a country are merely the projections of the social system and social relationships existing in a particular phase of time. In a society where interactional pattern and institutional arrangements are dominantly caste ridden, politics cannot but be influenced by caste.

According to Rajini Kothari 'those in India who complain of casteism in politics are merely looking for sort of politics which has no basis in society. They probably lack any clear conception of either the nature of politics or the nature of the caste system'. The nature of political democracy has brought caste and politics closer to each other. Politics is a competitive enterprise. Its purpose is the acquisition of power for the realization of certain goals, and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing allegiance in order to mobilize and consolidate positions. Therefore, the core of politics is the organisation and mobilization of the masses towards some issues by a leader or a party.

Such mobilizations are done based on group considerations and group allegiances, for all the groups cannot be mobilized on one issue in one direction due to the difference in the fundamental nature and interest.

Thus, caste, which has divided a society for centuries, serves as the best technique of group mobilization. The politicians find caste an extremely well articulated and flexible basis for organisation. Since power and prestige are no more being offered based on caste the lower caste people have naturally been prompted to accept political involvement as the other means out.

The people of all categories have tried to mobilize public support in their favor by taking caste as a basis for propaganda since it gives a readymade ground for such mobilization in Indian society. Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar provide good examples of a rapid succession of various caste groups into factional network of politics, which provide the best channels of mobility.

### **Class and Society**

Classes are those social groups, which occupies specific high and low position in a given society. Social classes arise from the consequence of a division of labor. They are made up of people of similar social status who regard one another as social equals. Each class is a sub-culture, with a set of attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour norms, which differ from those of other classes.

Social classes are based on total social and economic position in the community, including wealth, income, occupation, education, self-identification, hereditary prestige, group participation, and recognition by others.

Class lines are not clearly drawn but represent points along a continuum of social status.

The exact size and membership of a given class is difficult to establish. Class sub-cultures prepare children to retain the status of their parents. The idea of Marx and Weber regarding class are discussed below.

### **Karl Marx**

For Marx, the term class has a number of different applications, but the essential aspects of Marx's general model of social class are clear:

- a) Every society has to produce a surplus to feed, house and clothe dependent children, the sick and the elderly. Class differences begin when one group of people claim resources that are not consumed for immediate survival as their private property.
- b) Classes, therefore, are defined in terms of ownership (or non-ownership) of productive property, which makes the taking of surplus possible. At different times in human history different forms of property (e.g.: slaves, water, land, capital) have been crucial in shaping social relationships, but all class systems are characterized by two major classes. The most important class relationship according to Marx was that found in capitalism, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

### **Max Weber**

Weber's analytical conception of class is regarded as the best and most influential alternative theory of class. Unlike Marx, Weber emphasized other factors, which prompted inequality. In particular, he considered status or honour and prestige as a distinct variable.

He has emphasized the link between class status and power. He argues that a class is a category or a group of people who share similar 'life chances'. Status achieved is an important factor in determining the class position. With Marx, he saw ownership and non-ownership as basic criterion, but Weber gives more importance to noneconomic factors.

Weber also differs from Marx in viewing bureaucracy as a rational and achieved system of power in

modern societies. Weber's stress on a variety of actors influencing opportunities and rewards has made his approach to the analysis of class and social stratification very influential in sociological theory.

**Check Your Progress III**

**Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1) Mention briefly how weber differs from Marx.

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**4.9 CIVIL SOCIETY, COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS, SOCIAL CAPITAL**

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**Civil Society**

Broadly, civil society can be conceived as including all public political non-state activity occurring between government and family. Civil Society comprises all independent voluntary and private sector activities that include individuals and households, the media, business and civic institutions and organisations, etc. Civil society organisations have been responsible for advancing political freedom, safeguarding basic rights, enhancing civil institutions and furthering social development at a much lower cost than the government. These responsibilities are reflected in the activities of non-governmental organisations, social movements, community-based people's organisations, religious groups, peasants associations, consumer groups and trade unions. The civil society has a special role for those who are excluded from the formal structures of governance, such as women, the poor, and minorities (ethnic, religious, racial), civil society institutions often welcome alternatives.

The stronger or more dense and vibrant the civil Society, the better the democracy functions. Civil Society is a precondition for democracy.

**Community Organisations**

The community based people's organisations are also important contributors to good civic governance. These organisations are defined as democratic organisations that represent the interest of their members and are accountable to them. The tradition to organize collectively the community based organisations to deal with community issues has a long history. It is the people themselves who initiate these organisations and formulate their programmes. Non-governmental organisations are commanding greater attention within civil society as vehicles for social service delivery, advocacy and empowerment.

## **Social Capital**

Social capital promotes democratization in general, and democratic performance in particular. Social capital is the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations. Social capital can be defined simply as the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of the group that permit cooperation among them. Social capital involves features of social organisations such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate cooperation and coordination for mutual benefit.

Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence. If one wishes to promote democratic governance, one should support networks and for instance, cooperative community development schemes.

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## **4.10 LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC OPINION**

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### **Local Self-Governance: Panchayati Raj**

Panchayati Raj in the rural self-government system in India. Panchayati Raj system becomes very important in the Indian context where almost 80 percent of the people reside in rural areas. Panchayati Raj in India was inaugurated as a consequence of the recommendations of Balwanth Rai Mehta committee set up in 1957, to study the community development programme and national extension service launched in 1952 and 1953 respectively.

In 1992, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was enacted, which gave Constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions. It also makes it obligatory on all the States to have the three-tier system at (a) the village level, (b) the intermediate level and (c) the district level.

### **Public Opinion**

Public opinion is said to be the basis of democracy. It is the link between the government and the people. The term public opinion is commonly used to denote the aggregate of views the people hold regarding matters that affect or interest them, their community and society. The people's conceptions of political personalities, institutions and ideologies matter in the formulation of opinion. In democracy the continuance and the fall of the governments depend upon public opinion.

Public opinion is created through means/agents like mass media, political parties, pressure groups, elections, debates in the legislature, educational institutions, public meetings etc. The press, radio, television and cinema are some of the several means of carrying political, social and religious ideas to the people. That is why a lot of emphasis is laid on freedom of press in a democracy.

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## **4.11 LET US SUM UP**

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The political trends in India since independence have largely been a series of reconciliations like (a) the demands articulated by regional interest groups, (b) linguistic formation of states in the political realm, (c) emphasis on mixed economy in the sphere of economic policy, (d) ideology of secularism in religion and culture, and (e) neutrality in international relationship etc. These are all reflections of predominantly reconciliatory pattern of political modernization in India.



The reconciliatory approach is also reflected in the adjustment between 'traditional institutions' in politics, caste associations, kinship groups and ethnic solidarities. They have adapted themselves to the needs of modern democratic political culture in large measure quite successfully and with fewer distortions.

Some maladjustment is however, natural in the process. However, so far, the reconciliatory orientation of Indian politics has succeeded in absorbing their shocks because of the natural elasticity of the Indian institutions and built-in tendency of tolerance in the cultural tradition of India. We may speculate that in future among the political protest movements threatening the political structure, reconciliatory orientation will triumph again and again. This might render the place of political modernization of India slow but it will certainly minimize the cost of social transformation.

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#### 4.12 KEY WORDS

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**Civil Society** : It consists of groups, organizations and institutions, both formal and informal, which act independently of the State and the market to promote diverse interests in the society.

**Social Capital** : The capital which is obtained from networks of relationships, trust, reciprocity and norms that facilitate collective and coordinated action, thereby increasing the efficiency of the community and benefiting the participating members and the community at large.

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#### 4.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Arora, Prem (1981), *Political Science - Comparative Politics*, Cosmos Bookhive Private Limited, New Delhi.

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#### 4.14 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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##### Check Your Progress I

1) A society politically organized under one independent government within a definite territorial boundary can be called a State. The main elements of a state are population, territory, government, sovereignty and international recognition.

### **Check Your Progress II**

1) The main functions of the executive are:

- a) Maintenance of law and order
- b) Protection of country and maintenance of diplomatic relations
- c) The executive also plays a significant role in enactment of the laws.
- d) The chief executive enjoys the right to grant pardon, amnesty, reprieve, etc., to the persons punished by the law courts.
- e) Miscellaneous functions like formulation of national plans for greater prosperity of the country, distribution of honours and titles to the persons who distinguish themselves in their respective fields or render meritorious services to the state.

### **Check Your Progress III**

1) Weber, unlike Marx, emphasized other factors that prompted inequality, particularly he considered status and prestige as a distinct variable. Weber stressed divisions within classes and empirical changes in class boundaries to much greater extent than Marx.

Weber also differs from Marx in viewing bureaucracy as a fundamental nexus of power in modern societies.

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