MA(Sociology)   Paper Code: MASY 1004

PAPER - IV -SOCIOLOGY OF INDIA

UNIT - I

INDIAN SOCIETY : Features of Indian Society – Composition of Indian Society.

UNIT II

HINDU WORLD VIEW: Hinduism – Meaning and Characteristics. Purusharthas, Ashrama s, Varnashrama and Karma.

UNIT III

CASTE SYSTEM: Meaning and features. Origin of Caste System – Racial Theory, Political Theory, Occupational Theory, Traditional Theory, Guild Theory and Evolutionary Theory. Changes in Caste System – Factors responsible for the changes.

UNIT IV

MARRIAGE : Traditional Forms of Marriage – Changing trends in Marriage – Child Marriage – Widow Remarriage – Dissolution of Marriage. Marriage among other religious communities of India .

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FAMILY: The Nature and characteristics of Indian Family.
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UNIT VII INDIAN ECONOMIC ORGANISATION : Peasant Society – Industrialisation – Production relation – Transport and Communication – Human Resources - Development. Educatin Organisation – Primary Secondary and Higher Education in India – Problems in Education..

UNIT VIII   BACKWARD CLASSES, SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES : Characteristics of Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes – Their Problems – Constitutional and Statutory Provisions for their protection and upliftment – Changing conditions and factors responsible for the Changes.

Reference Books

The Position of Women in India : Bashin, Kamala.
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PAPER IV – *Sociology of India*

penetrated into India by peaceful means, although they later gained the support of the ruling powers. Both were influenced by the prevailing ethos and both made some impact on society in general. Christianity and Islam acquired some special characteristics in the Indian setting. They cannot be regarded as alien elements in Indian society, but, are organic parts of it.

One feature that is most often noticed about India is its unity in diversity. This caption has become a part of India's self identity. In the past too, many foreign travellers had observed and recorded this. After the partition of 1947, in which India lost the best known sites of the Indus Valley Civilization and much of the Panchnad associated with the early Indo-Aryans, this aspect has been passionately articulated both as a reality of the past and as the hope for the future. The tremors of the nineteen sixties and seventies and the turbulence of eighties which continued into the nineties have compelled frequent reiteration of the need to maintain the country's cultural diversity and ensure that the individual identities of different ethnic groups and communities do not get eroded. This acceptance of cultural pluralism does not detract from the ideal of promoting economic, political and social integration.

In the background of this general information, it becomes easier to understand the main feature of Indian culture, viz., diversity and unity. What are the sources of diversity? The most obvious are ethnic origins, religions and languages. The main racial types, six in all, have been discussed briefly earlier. It is essential to note that the bulk of the Indian population represents a racial admixture in varying degrees. Racial origins, however, tenuous, are a part of the ethnic memory of most of the communities. This plays a significant role in shaping their identity and self image.

In the Indian society, religious boundaries are more clearly drawn. There are eight major religious communities in India: Hindus (82%), Muslims (12.1%) Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), and Parsis, Buddhists.

Jains and others (1.7%). The tribes constitute nearly eight per cent of the Indian population. Though the tribals have a distinct religious identity of their own, many of these groups have a close affinity with Hindus. Many Hindus have also converted to Christianity, or Islam. These groups are mostly drawn from the lower socio-economic strata of the caste hierarchy and see conversion as an escape from the oppressive practices which were associated with the caste-ridden Hindu social order.

Each religion is sub-divided along the lines of religious doctrines, sects and cults. This is true both of indigenous religions and of introduced religions. The Hindus are now broadly divided into Shaivite, Vaishnava, Shakta and Smartha. Even among them there are sub divisions based on doctrinal differences and details of ritual. Sects and cults add to the complexity of Hinduism.

The Indian Muslims are divided broadly into the Sunni and Shia communities. The latter are the smaller of the two sections. Of the four schools of Muslim law, the majority of Indian Sunnis follow the Hanifi school; in south and Lakshadweep islands the Shafi school is followed. The third, the Maliki school is followed by the Sunnis of Gujarat, but the fourth, the Hanbali school, is not followed in India.

The long connection and associations of Islam with Hindu religion has had its mark. Among Muslims jati like distinctions do exist indicating social status and governing social interactions. These distinctions determine inter-group social contacts such as marriage, inter-dining, and participation in ceremonies and other social functions. Origins are remembered and converts to Islam from Hinduism still largely pursue their earlier jati linked occupations.

Indian Christians are divided into Roman Catholics and Protestants and into many denominational churches. The point to note here is that even among Christians a distinction is made between the high-caste and low-caste converts. Caste distinctions and their resultant injustice and

violence do still continue in Christian social life and practice in several places.

Though Sikhism is a synthesizing religion that emphasizes egalitarianism, it has not been able to undo some of the less wholesome aspects of the caste system. The lower jatis converted to Sikhism are known as Mazhabis. They live in separate hamlets. It has been observed that equality within the community has never meant marriage across the traditional caste lines.

Buddhism was spread widely in India once, but with the revival of Vedic Hinduism, it lost its hold in the country of its birth and remained confined only to a few pockets until it was revived by Dr. Ambedkar. Buddhism in India had a two-tier structure. In the upper tier were placed the Brahman, the Kshatriya and certain categories of Grihapatis and in the lower tier were tribal and other marginal groups.

Jainism too, once had a wide sway on India. They have two main divisions: Digamber, the unclothed, and Shwetamber, the white robed. Even though Jainism had an open class system, we do however get to see many endogamous groups among Jains.

The Parsis are a small community, but have played an important role in India's industrial development. They first came to India in the eighth century A.D. from Persia, seeking refuge from persecution. Their contribution to India is quite disproportionate to their number in the country's population. But for their religious rites, they have adopted the life style of the mercantile community in their region. The contribution of Parsis to India's economic and educational development is indeed unique.

The Jewish faith, like Christianity and Zoroastrianism has been established in India for over a millennium, The small Jewish population had two main settlements, one in Cochin (Kerala) and another in Maharashtra. They also have jati like divisions, the black and white divisions which lay restrictions on inter-marriage and inter-dining.

Language is another source of diversity in the Indian society. It contributes to collective identities as well as to conflicts. The Indian Constitution recognises eighteen languages, but it is an official list for official purposes only. In fact all the major languages have regional and dialectical variations. The situation is further complicated by the recognition of more than 330 mother tongues. This makes language planning and promotion extremely difficult and complex tasks. But the mother tongue does evoke strong sentiments and reactions. Tribal languages cannot be dismissed as dialects; many of them have a growing literature. The language multiplicity can be baffling in several situations, especially communication through mass media and education.

The Indian society presents a unique situation where there is a divorce between the mother tongue and medium of instruction. English education was introduced in India by the Britishers but, by and large, its beneficiaries were from the upper socio-economic strata of our society. In fact English education became a symbol of status and most of the service sector jobs were dominated by the caste Hindus. After independence, educational opportunities expanded and there was a shift from an elite to a mass character. Education is now being imparted through the mother tongue at all levels, but unfortunately, everywhere sincere efforts are not being made to enrich the languages to enable students to derive the type of expertise and experience required to enable them to compete in the conditions created by globalization and privatization. However, those who have been able to obtain the benefits of elitist English education excercise a virtually monopolistic control over occupations that provide an opportunity for upward mobility. Education which was expected to be a great 'leveler' has often acted as an instrument for widening the gap between the elite and the masses.

It is true that we have taken great pride in the concept of 'unity amidst diversity'. But it is very important to know how this unity has been brought about. The geographical location of India, with the Himalayas in the north and the sea around peninsular India gave it at least partial isolation.

For long periods, there was no more than a trickle of people from the north-west, the Burmese and Chinese routes, and the seas. During these periods there were population movements within the sub-continent which gave semblance of unity to it.

Hinduism is the dominant religion in India. It has influenced the ethos of Indian culture and society. Hindu religion is not timeless and changeless. It has had dissenting influences from within and from outside. Jainism and Buddhism were widespread and had considerable impact. Although Hinduism halted the spread of Jainism and confined it to a small population and Buddhism became more or less extinct, contemporary Hinduism shows their influence. Hinduism does not have only one sacred book; it derives from a corpus of sacred literature. What is practised as Hinduism today is not classical Hinduism, but popular Hinduism derived from myths, legends and easy to understand books. Saint-poets have popularized religion through their compositions and have taken them to the masses. These endeavours have contributed significantly to the unity of India.

The Indian society presents a number of paradoxes. While it is true that, on the one hand there is an appearence of unity, on the other, there are incidents which pose a serious threat to the unity of this country. Religion, caste, language, region and many other issues are posing a challenge to nationalism and tensions that can seriously affect our development efforts have become a near universal feature in Indian society.

Yet another feature of Indian society that deserves special mention is the change vs. static situation. Over a period of time changes of far reaching consequences have taken place in virtually every sphere of life and activity. There has been a communication revolution and transport network has widened thus drastically reducing the physical and social isolation that once characterized this society. Also, there has been a tremendous diversification of the occupations and increasing specialization of the service sector has been the hallmark of contemporary times. Opportunities for

health care have also expanded at a remarkable pace. However, all these changes have mostly benefitted the advantaged sections of our society. The poor and the rural masses continue to live lives of utter deprivation. Modernization efforts have not really touched their lives. While poverty cripples their efforts at trying to change the course of their lives, ignorance and superstition hold the masses in their sway. Many families still depend on their traditional sources of livelihood and hence cannot obtain the type of monetary incentives required to equip them to compete with the advantaged groups. India with its commitment to a free, democratic and socialistic social, political and economic order has no doubt launched a very impressive and well meaning programme of social reform but these efforts have not been able to penetrate the deep-rooted barriers to the achievement of socio-economic equality. It is true that affirmative action and conscious efforts to remove the obstacles to the establishment of an egalitarian social order have brought about some changes in the face of Indian society, yet we need to go a long way to convert our dream of a just and equal social order into a reality.

UNIT – II

HINDU WORLD VIEW

HINDUISM

Hinduism is understood with all its complexities as a particular life style, and a way of life of Hindus. It is the life philosophy that emerged out of various literary sources. Hinduism represents the Hindu attitude towards this world and other worldly concepts. The thought and action of an individual in Hindu society is guided by the Hindu philosophy. The Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, and the Grihya and Dharma Sutras have provided the required base for the establishment of various thought and action patterns which are considered as the most ideal and suitable ones. The Brahmanas which are vedic texts. guide people in their ritual and sacrificial duties. The Aranyakayas on the other hand are treatises on religion and philosophy and thus record the transition from ritualism to philosophical speculation. The Upanishads, on the other hand, provide the basis for Monistic thought.

Hinduism became a way of life probably because of Grihya and Dharma Sutras which particularly specified the principles to be followed in performance of domestic rituals which are specific to Hindus. The Dharma Sutras lay specifications concerning human relations, duties and obligations as understood in relation to the ultimate reality.

Hinduism believes in the existence of a 'force' beyond the human beings. It also stresses on the fact that this 'force' has an intricate relationship with mortal beings. And understanding this relationship is the ultimate truth. Hinduism developed through dual processes of considerable conflict and much accommodation and compromise. Thus, it provided for social and philosophical discussions and growth.

Tracing the origin of Hindu religion is very difficult for, we do not have specific and clear references of its origin. The word Hindu probably might

have been coined by the invading Arabs, referring to people beyond the Sindhu (Indus) river. At that point, it did not have any religious connotations, nor did it find any reference in ancient literature.

Hinduism that is perceived today has had within itself and made room for thoughts and ideologies from various quarters. Hinduism accepted cults and sects. It also accepted some amount of dissent and reform.

At this point it is necessary to record the accepted features of Hindu religion. They are as follows:

1) *Hindu religion has no single founder like many religions:* Hindu religion was not established by one person. It evolved out of various 'thought sequences' and 'doctrines'. It has evolved through the accumulated efforts of great thinkers and law givers.

2) *Hindu religion does not depend on any one scripture:* Hinduism derives from diverse literary sources like the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads and the Sutras. These sources provide knowledge and guide people in their action.

3) *Hindu religion is a way of life:* Hindu religion not only believes in the ultimate reality, but provides for a particular way of life. It believes that to reach the ultimate reality one should believe and follow the principles of universal humanitarianism. It also accepts and allows the rejection of other worldly concepts and provides for the doctrines based on the principle of 'work is worship' and 'people's work is god's work'. It stresses on the moral aspects, and on the righteous side of one's behaviour and action. It is because of these reasons that Hindu religion is believed to be 'a way of life'.

4) *Monotheism through Polytheism:* Hinduism believes in the ultimate reality being 'one'. At the same time it also seeks diverse paths to reach this ultimate reality.

5) *Hindu religion attempts to look into the mysteries behind birth and death:* It tries to explore the realities of life after death. This search for truth has given rise to the concept of God, an entity which is Nirakara, Nirguna and Sarvashakta.

6) *Hinduism stresses on tolerance:* Hinduism holds that there are innumerable ways of liberation. It does not expect all its followers to be able to approach the Divine in the same way, and hence, provides different concepts, rituals and spiritual exercises for different modes of awareness. At the same time it is a known fact that the Brahman is beyond concepts and images. From this attitude comes the great tolerance and inclusiveness which is a characteristic feature of Hinduism.

By way of summing up we can say that Hinduism is not just a well defined religion nor is it just a philosophy. It is, rather, a large and complex socio-religious organism consisting of innumerable sects, cults, and philosophical systems. It also involves various rituals, ceremonies and spiritual disciplines.

Hindu religion is a way of life. It provides a social basis for human action. This is achieved through different theories like Purusharthas, Ashramas, Varna system and Karma.

The purusharthas reflect the outlook of Hindus towards life. Ashramas direct an individual's private life. The Varna system on the other hand, directs interpersonal relationships and division of functions in society. The theory of Karma stresses on the aspect of discharging one's duties allocated, and of the rewards one gets in discharging the expected duties.

Purusharthas

The theory of purusharthas is concerned with understanding, justifying and managing the affairs of an individual's life in relation to the group.

The basic questions pertaining to an individual's existence are explained through purusharthas. Through purusharthas the main ideals that one has to reach are discussed. The Purusharthas are four in number,

viz., Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Purusharthas are considered as the basis of the psychological and moral training that one receives.

Usually the terms dharma, artha, kama and moksha are understood as morality, wealth, desire or passion and salvation respectively in English. These translations are not strong enough to represent all the inner or subtle meanings represented by each word. Hence it is more meaningful to use these concepts in the original context.

Dharma

The word dharma is derived from the Sanskrit root 'dhri' meaning 'to hold together or 'to preserve'. The social implications and meaning of dharma as a principle for maintaining the stability of society is brought out in statements like "dharma is created for the well-being of all creations" "all that is free from doing harm to any created being is certainly dharma". Dharma is created to keep all creations free from any harm. Dharma is referred to be so because it protects (dharanat) all; then dharma is that principle which is capable of preserving the universe. Dharma then could be understood as that force which binds individuals within the socially accepted morals.

Artha

Artha on the other hand, is to be understood as referring to all the means necessary for acquiring worldly prosperity, such as wealth or power. Artha represents the worldly aspects of one's life. It is believed that without realizing the worldly pleasures and its associated consequences one cannot realize the ultimate reality. Hence, artha refers to the essence of life. Artha refers to acquisition of wealth within socially accepted means. This concept stresses on the aspect that one should indulge and possess only that which is required. Only when the desires are fulfilled (ie., desires that are basic and fundamental), will the mind turn to thoughts that lead to moksha. Amassing of wealth by indulging in non-righteous ways is totally forbidden. It is only the artha that is achieved within the framework of dharma that will provide prosperity and hence will lead to moksha.

Kama

Kama refers to all the desires that exist in human beings for enjoyment and satisfaction of senses, including the sex drive to which the word kama prominently refers. The term refers to the innate impulses, instincts and desires of human beings and their natural mental tendencies. Equivalent English terms like desires, basic or primary motives, urges or drives by themselves do not represent the concept kama. The collective use of the term kama refers to the totality of the innate desires and drives of human beings. The term is often used in a broader sense to include socially acquired motivations also.

Dharma, artha and kama refer respectively to moral, material and mental resources, accessories and energies available to people.

Of these three, artha and kama refer to two of individual's earthly belongings. Dharma stands on a higher level. But it is also true that human beings cannot conduct their life without artha, which constitutes the material means of living and kama which helps the propagation of the species. Therefore, it is essential to lay down the correct mixture of these two. It is through dharma, this is achieved. Dharma defines the proper quantum, place for the right functioning of artha and kama. By addressing to one's dharma, therefore, an individual is able to lead a life which is bound to reap the best results. A harmonious co-ordination of these three will lead to the ultimate stage, the moksha.

Moksha

The most important of the four purusharthas is moksha which can be attained through the other three purusharthas. The ultimate goal of one's life is to attain moksha which means realization of the ultimate reality by overcoming all the worldly bonds. The realization of the 'para brahman' releases one from the bondage of the birth and death cycle. The first three purusharthas become the means for the attainment of the end 'moksha'.

Thus, on the whole, the purusharthas are concerned both with the individual as well as the group. They enunciate and justify the kinds of

relation between the individual and the group. They also state explicitly and by implication, the nature of improper relations between the individual and the group so that they can be avoided. Thus, purusharthas control both the individual and the group, and also their inter-relations.

Ashramas

Ashrama dharma is one of the outstanding Hindu social thoughts. The purusharthas discussed earlier symbolize the objectives of life and ashramas provide the path (ie., various life activities that one should perform) to realize these ideals.

Human being pass from childhood through youth to old age. These stages represent the various periods in one's life, from birth to death. In these stages individuals should work in such a way that both physical and mental activity are combined. It is only then that the objectives of life, ie., the purusharthas can be realized.

What is Ashrama Dharma?

The word ashrama is originally derived from the Sanskrit root 'srama' which means 'to exert oneself'. Therefore, it may mean by derivation a place where exertions are performed and can also mean the action of performing such exertions. Literally an ashrama is a halting or resting place in the journey of life, in order to prepare oneself for further journey. The four stages of life form a ladder or flight of four steps which reaches Brahman. The development of ashrama scheme as an institution and social implications include within itself the above mentioned various interpretations. Each of the ashramas is a stage of life in which the individuals have to train themselves for a certain period, exert themselves within the circuit of the same in order to qualify themselves for the next.

THE FOUR ASHRAMAS

The ashramas are four in number (1) the Brahmacharya, that of the life of a student, (2) the Grihastha - life of that of a married person, the householder, (3) the Vanaprastha - a preparatory stage to complete

renouncement of worldly relations and (4) the Sanyasa - the life of complete renunciation of worldly relations and attachments.

Every Hindu after learning to pass through life's pleasures and pains in the first two ashramas, will be able to realise the existence of ultimate power and the next ashrama stresses on renunciation of bondage.

Let us look into each of these ashramas in detail.

Brahmacharyashrama

Brahmacharyashrama is the first stage of the four stages in ashrama system. This ashrama is concerned with the management of education as a social institution. Entry into this ashrama according to Hindu philosophy is only through the sacrament called 'upanayana' which is considered as a second birth for the young students. The Rig vedic scriptures do mention that education was available to both young girls and boys, and both would enter into brahmacharya ashrama. But, the Samhitas and the Dharma Sutras record that a girl's marriage is her initiation ceremony. Hence, the following discussion pertains to men only.

The upanayana is the most important ritual in the life of a Hindu boy. It is only after the Upanayana ceremony an individual is recognised as a person. After upanayana he becomes a 'dvija', a twice-born. And he is now born a second time, into a new world of activities, duties, responsibilities and expectations, for all these he has to begin training. A student in this ashrama is referred to as a 'brahmachari'. With the performance of the upanayana ceremony of the boy, his first lessons in simple living and developing 'frustration tolerance' begins, irrespective of the position or status of the family in which he is born. A student is expected to serve the teacher and perform the tasks of the ashrama, and train oneself to hardships of life.

When the student is fit to receive the spiritual and philosophical knowledge, the rigorous training of the mind begins. The fundamental lesson in brahmacharyashrama is to search an answer to the question,

what is Dharma? In this ashrama the pupil is taught his dharma, primarily as a pupil so far as his studies are concerned. He is also instructed as to what his future adult behaviour and performance when he enters the society as a grihasta (the householder) will be. Every thing that a student learns in this stage will be consistent with the dharma laid down for an adult. He should keep artha and kama completely in accordance with his dharma in the brahmacharyashrama. A student in this stage also learns to read, write and is introduced to arts, sciences, medicine, philosophy, logic and all other studies which have relevance to one's life. In this ashrama, dharma is the only immediate aim for the pupil. The rules and definitions of such behaviour are known as vratas, which include the rules of conduct. The brahmachari has to fulfil all vratas of brahmachrayashrama before he passes on to the next ashrama.

Grihasthasrama

An individual after mastering the rules of life enters into the next ashrama called Grihasthasrama through the sacrament called marriage. Grihastha is a person who stays in a house and accepts the responsibility for the activities connected with home. He should practice all those rites intended for the preservation and continuity of the 'kula' (family). Among the four ashramas the grihastashrama is considered to be the most prominent of all. It is in this ashrama that the three purusharthas are practiced together, ie., the dharma, artha and kama. And because of this reason it is believed that the grihasthashrama leads an individual to the last stage called moksha.

A grihastha with his wife, every day should offer oblations known as the 'pancha maha yajna'. These yajnas are the brahma-yajna, deva-yajna, pitru-yajna, bhootha-yajna and manushya-yajna. Offering oblations and praying to rishis and elders is known as brahma-yajna. Offering oblations through the sacrificial fire to god is known as deva-yajna. Offering respect to one's ancestors and caring for the parents is known as the pitru-yajna. Protecting the nature which includes the flora-fauna and also to provide for the destitutes and poor is known as the bhootha-yajna. Finally

manushya-yajna is living in harmony with relatives and other members of the community. Thus a grihastha is expected to provide for all types of lives. Smrithikaras were of the opinion that in case a grihastha due to ill health or any other reason could not enter vanaprastha or sanyasashrama, it is possible to attain moksha by continuing the pancha maha yajna.

It is in this stage that an individual stays for more number of years. Once the responsibilities of the family life are completed the grihastha will develop the mental preparation for the next stage ie., the vanaprasthashrama.

Vanaprasthashrama

Vanaprasthashrama is the stage that an individual reaches after he completes the rinas that are expected to be returned to the rishis, gods and ancestors. It is a retired life to which an individual goes after completing his obligations towards the family. In the Upanishads vanaprasthashrama is perceived as a stage where familial bonds are left behind and efforts are made to indulge only in search for the ultimate truth. In this stage an individual should give up personal demands and should try to grow above the mundane thoughts and work towards the moksha.

Vanaprastha literally means 'to move to forest'. This stage stresses on the ascetic way of life. One should by denying the worldly pleasures make efforts to develop the qualities of detachment. Vanaprastha is the training to reach the ultimate state of moksha.

Sanysashrama

Sanyasa is casting off all attachments with the world. The person who has entered this stage, is the one who has severed all the attachments. He should leave behind every thing and every one that once formed his world. A sanyasi should possess nothing; he must always move along, he should not depend on any one. A sanyasi could beg for alms only once in a day; and he should not feel dispirited when he fails to procure alms. A person in this stage should develop a mental state where he cares neither

for life nor for death. By restraining his senses, by casting away the passions of love and hatred within himself, and by living a life of simplicity, a sanyasi will be fit to achieve immortality – that is, to attain moksha. All the sins of the person who passes through the sanyasashrama in this manner are washed off and destroyed, and thus he attains the ultimate end or goal of existence.

Thus, we can conclude that the ashramas, are regarded as schools of life at several stages of human existence, devised and organized towards the best path for the individual to attain the end ie., the moksha, in accordance with the conception of existence and its relation to the Ultimate.

VARNA SYSTEM

The broad divisions and sub-divisions in Indian society are complex and many a time confusing. Varna is one particular system found in Hindu society which has been wrongly interpreted and on many occasions interchangeably used with caste system. It becomes very important to make an attempt to understand the Varna system.

In the Hindu social system, Varna is only a reference category; but not a functioning unit of social structure. Varna is a classificatory device, in which various categories with similar ascribed ritual status are clustered together and hierarchically placed. Varna system includes within itself four different varnas. They are, the Brahmana, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Shudra. The first three varnas are considered as twice-born, ie., in addition to biological birth they are born a second time after initiation rites. The fourth category the Shudra, includes a variety of artisans and occupationally specialized groups, which pursue clean occupations.

Varna organization refers to the work that individuals would undertake in society according to their nature. Varna system is explained from the point of view of an individual's position in relation to the group and with reference to their innate nature and dispositions.

Varna has been derived from the sanskrit word 'vir' which means 'to choose', ie., the choice of vocation. The word varna also refers to 'colour'. The first reference to varna is available in the Rig Veda. In Rig Veda, only two varnas have been mentioned, Arya Varna and Dasa Varna, which probably was used to differentiate between the Aryans and non-Aryans. In the later part of the Rig Veda, however, there is a description of the division of society into three orders: Brahma (priests), Kshatra (warriers) and Vis (common people). But this does not include any reference to the fourth order, ie., Shudra. But, we do come across the mention of groups despised by the Aryans.

At this point it becomes necessary to look into the available view points pertaining to the origin of varna system. The theory of divine origin is the one most cited often. The reference to this theory is cited in the Purusha Sukta of the Rig Veda. The four orders of society are believed to be originated from the self sacrifice of Purusha–the creator. The Brahman is said to have been born from the head or mouth, the Kshatriya from the arms, the Vaishya from the thighs, and the Shudra from the feet. This is to be understood as a symbolic representation of the rank and functions of the four Varnas. In the cultural body image the head, the arms, the thighs, and the feet are ranked in descending order. So are the traditional functions. Acquisition and disseminating knowledge and performing sacrifices were the functions of the Brahman, who enjoyed the highest position. Next were placed the Kshatriya, who were assigned such functions as defence and war, administration and government. Third, in rank were trade and commerce and agriculture, the work of the Vaishya. Finally serving others through crafts and labour, the work of the Shudra was ranked the lowest.

Somewhat less known is the Triguna theory of Varna origin. The philosophic speculation of ancient India identified three 'gunas' the inherent qualities in human beings, animate and inanimate objects, and in human actions. These gunas are 'sattva', 'rajas', and 'tamas'. Sattva consisted of noble thoughts and deeds, goodness and virtue, truth and wisdom. Rajas,

on the other hand, was characterized by high living and luxury, passion and indulgence to a certain extent, pride and valour. Tamas had the attributes of coarseness and dullness, overindulgence without taste, the capacity to carry out heavy work without much imagination. Those with sattvic qualities were classified as Brahman, those with rajasic qualities as Kshatriya and Vaishya, and those with tamasic qualities as Shudra. It is very difficult to visualize how an entire population could be subjected to such a classification.

Yet another view point tries to explain the origin of varna distinction and hierarchical arrangement by colour difference. Varna means 'colour', and it was in this sense that probably the word was employed to contrast the Arya and the Dasa, referring to their fair and dark colour respectively. The colour connotation of the word was used in explaining the four divisions of society. The colour associated with the Brahmin was white, the Kshatriya red, with Vaishya yellow and the Shudra black. One reason for this colour distinction might be due to racial difference. The other probable explanation might be that the colours had a ritual significance. The theory takes account of ethnic admixture, culture contact, and functional specialization. In the initial stage of the evolution of Hindu society race and complexion were important factors, but was not a biological reality. Aryanization was the result of culture contact, but it was not a one way process involving giver-taker relations. The pre-Aryan traditions asserted themselves and in the process modified the Aryan scheme of social organization, rituals, beliefs, and its ethos. Groups were incorporated into the emerging social order, adopting some new features, retaining some old characteristics, and imparting their imprint on the wider society. Functionally specialized groups were already in existence, and they were incorporated into the new society with appropriate social and ritual status.

The varna system that existed is highly idealized. The representative system is oversimplified and is presented neatly. It represents a model of broad divisions of society on the basis of quality and functions. It does not reflect, however, the reality of the social order, which is much more

complex. The four fold order does not explain the Antyaja, the fifth category which accommodates those following supposedly unclean occupations that are believed to be polluting. It has other ambiguities also. It does not explain the regional variations in placement of various groups. There is no uniform all-India hierarchy.

In the working of the social system, the Varna categories have limited uses. They provide rough and ready indicators of ascribed status, specialized functions in some areas of life, and the expectations of standards of behaviour and conduct.

KARMA THEORY

All the schools of Hindu philosophy do recognise and accept the Karma theory. The questions raised in relation to life after death are: is there an Athma (soul) in human body? What happens to this Athma after death? What relation does it have with the Ultimate Reality? These questions have generated a great deal of philosophical discussion. And, Karma theory is the resulting fact. Karma theory depends and extends the concept of rebirth. All the schools of Indian philosophy, viz., Sankya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vysheshika, Purva Mimamsa and Vedantha believe and accept Karma theory and the theory of rebirth (Charvaka school of philosophy is an exception to this).

The theories of Karma and rebirth are built on the following tenets: (1) Beyond the human body there exists an Athma. (2) All forms of life and even inanimate things do have an Athma. (3) Athmas of human beings can shift from one physical form to another physical form. (4) Athman is the one which performs and also the one which reaps the fruits of its action.

Karma stands for 'work'. It can also mean the result, effect of one's past actions. It is believed that this earth is meant for work, while the next world is meant for enjoying its rewards. As soon as the rewards in proportion to deeds are enjoyed, Athma takes birth again. Knowledge of Para Brahman releases the Athman from the cycle of rebirths, and those

who have failed to realise this get caught in their past deeds. The Athman is born again with its accumulated load of Karma. And, it is in consequence of a life of Karma that one obtains pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity. The acts of the previous births always get accumulated and always go with the athman.

The law of Karma, explains as to why sometimes persons who should evidently deserve happiness meet with failures and unhappiness, while sometimes the undeserving seem to succeed. It is believed that an individual's virtues and vicious karmas follow them and determine their fate in the next birth. Karma theory lays stress on the idea that one reaps the fruits of one's action. And hence, the consequences of one's karma can not be left behind. The karma could be either good or evil, and will lead to a state accordingly. Thus, the liberation from this cycle of births and deaths and its accompanying happiness and sorrow can be achieved when there is no more karma accumulated. The most effective way to end the life karma is, therefore, to end all desires.

The above points tell us as to how the social actions of the group was controlled and directed to generate social order.

UNIT – III

CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

For long humanbeings have dreamt of an egalitarian society where all members are equals. In such a society persons will no longer be ranked on the basis of prestige. No individual will occupy a high status nor any person would suffer from the indignity of occupying a position that commands little respect. Wealth would be equally divided between persons. But an egalitarian society clearly remains a dream. All human societies from the simplest to the most complex have some form of social inequality. In particular, power and prestige are not equally distributed between individuals and groups. Prestige relates to the amount of esteem an individual enjoys and power relates to the degree to which an individual or group could impose their will on others. Social inequality devotes the existence of socially created inequality. Social stratification denotes the existence of social groups which are ranked one above the other in terms of power, prestige and wealth possessed by the members. Members of a particular stratum have common interests and identities sharing a similar form of life. The caste system in India is a form of social stratification.

The term caste has originated from the Portuguese word 'casta' meaning 'race', or 'pure stock'. Traditional Hindu society was divided into five main strata: four castes and a fifth group, the outcastes, whose members were known as untouchables. Each caste was divided and sub-divided into many sub-castes.

The caste system in India has been studied from three perspectives:

1. The Indological
2. The Socio-anthropological
3. The Sociological

The Indologists rely on the scriptures and opine that the varnas originated from Brahma the creator and that the castes are fissioned units

within the varna system originating due to the practice of hypergamy and hypogamy. According to the Indologists the main objective of the origin of caste system was division of labour. As people began to accept the division of society into four groups, they became more rigid leading to hereditary membership, and occupation. The rituals to be performed by the four varnas were status-bound and were prescribed in the Brahmanas, while the customs to be performed were prescribed in the Smritis. Religious beliefs such as 'karma' and 'dharma' contributed to the rigidity of caste system.

Anthropologists like Hutton, Risley, and Kroeber examine caste system from four perspectives: organizational, structural, institutional and relational. The organization approach examines the origin of caste system while the structuralists focus attention on the structural changes in caste system. Kroeber and Risley who support the institutional approach view caste system as not being unique to India, but also existing in other societies like ancient Egypt and medieval Europe. The relationalists view caste as being linked to the force of mobility in society. Caste is absent if mobility is normal and vice versa.

The sociological perspective views caste system in terms of social stratification in society and a means of social inequality. Sociologists examine the interaction between castes and also the interaction between members of the same caste.

Definitions

'Castes are hereditarily specialized and hierarchically arranged groups' – Bougle.

'Caste is an endogamous and hereditary sub-division of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank or social esteem in comparison with other such sub-divisions' – Kroeber.

'Caste is a closed corporation, rigorously hereditary, bound with other castes by common occupation and equipped with a council that rules its members by the sanction of certain penalties' – Senart.

Both Bailey and Srinivas view caste as structures. Ghurye besides referring to hereditary membership also cites, caste councils, hierarchy and endogamy as important features of caste system. He also mentions restrictions on feeding and social interaction, absence of unrestricted choice of occupation and civil and religious disabilities.

Distinction between Caste and Varna

The terms caste and varna are very often used interchangeably though they are two separate concepts. This was pointed out by Senart, who explained the peculiarity of the Hindu theory of social organization by referring to the concept of Varnashrama. Though varna and ashrama are two different organizations they go together representing the issue of nurture and nature of man. In the ashrama system emphasis is placed on nurturing an individual through four different stages of life, viz., Brahmacharya, Grihasta, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa, whereas under the varna system an individual was in a position to choose an occupation on the basis of this nature.

In the Vedic period the division of society into four varnas was based on division of labour. Brahmanas were priests, Kshatriyas were rulers and fighters, Vysyas were traders and Sudras were treated as a servile class. Each varna worshipped different deities since they had to achieve different objectives according to their occupational roles.

But there were no restrictions on the matrimonial alliances or on commensal relations, and even change from one varna to the other was possible. However, as we pass from the Vedic period 4000–1000 B.C. to the Brahmanic period 230 B.C. to 700 A.D., the four varnas came to be arranged hierachically with Brahmins at the top and Sudras at the bottom. A few are of the opinion that this hierarchical arrangement has something to do with colour difference. Varna literally meant 'colour' and it was used

to denote the difference between the Aryans and the Dasas. In course of time, this colour affiliation was so strong that specific colours were associated with each varna.

Nevertheless the origin of castes had nothing to do with varnas but in the process of development castes began to be associated with varnas and caste hierarchy and mobility came to be associated too with varnas. According to M.N. Srinivas, varnas have provided a common social language which holds good for India as a whole.

Castes and Sub-castes

A sub-caste is a sub-division of a caste, but both have similar attributes. Both Chauhan and Iravati Karve have the view that sub-castes have originated due to the fissioned division of castes. Resley Hutton and Majumdar are of the opinion that sub-castes are breakaway groups from the main caste in order to raise their status. The sub-caste performs the three important functions of controlling marriage practices, commensal relationships and regulating behaviour, while caste performs the functions of assigning status, defining civil and religious rights and assigning occupations.

Ghurye, H.C. Mayer and M.N. Srinivas feel that sub-castes are more meaningful for individuals and it is a unit of the caste system. Castes on the other hand are key points of cognition.

Features of a Caste

The features of caste viewed as a system are hierarchy, commensal restrictions and rules pertaining to physical and social distance, while the features of a caste as a unit are hereditary membership, endogamy, fixed occupation and caste councils.

FEATURES OF CASTE SYSTEM

Some of the features of caste as a system are as follows:

1. Hierarchal division of society on the basis of birth

Castes in the Hindu society are ranked in a hierarchal pattern each enjoying a different situation. Ritually the Brahmins are at the apex followed by the Kshatriyas, Vysyas, the Shudras and the sub-stratum of the Scheduled Castes. Two approaches have been adopted to assess the status of castes:

(1) The observational method and (2) the opinion assessing method. The observational method has been classified into two: (a) the attributional method and (b) the inter-actional method.

The attributional method determines the rank of a caste by examining its practices such as traditional occupation ascribed to it and vegetarianism. The interactional method studied the practice of bride giving and bride taking in order to ascertain the status of two castes. If caste A takes a bride from caste B but does not give a bride to caste B then the former is superior than the latter.

The degree of commensality has also been utilized to evaluate the position of castes such as in the giving and taking of food and water and sharing the same (hukka) pipe among various castes.

In the opinion assessing approach, caste groups are asked to rank themselves in a hierarchal pattern.

2. Restrictions on Commensal Relations

Under caste system, severe restrictions are imposed on social interaction and inter-relationships. According to Blunt, the important taboos were: (1) rules regarding in whose company a person could eat, (2) rules regarding the person who could cook the food, (3) rituals to be observed at the time of eating, (4) rules that prescribe from whom one could accept water, (5) rules prescribing the kind of food, kachcha or pucca, one could take in the company of others, (6) rules regarding sharing of

the pipe, and (7) rules prescribing the type of vessels to be used for cooking food.

3. Restrictions on Social Interaction

Restrictions were imposed on social interaction because of the belief that pollution could occur even by mere physical contact. Hence members of different castes were not permitted to interact with each other. The lower caste people who are engaged in inferior occupations were avoided by the upper caste people. Several lower castes who ate beef who were known as untouchables were avoided by the upper castes. In Kerala if interaction had to take place between a higher caste and an untouchable, a specific distance of 96 steps had to be maintained between the two.

4. Social Disabilities of the Outcastes Substratum

Castes which were engaged in polluting occupations were treated as untouchables. They are called as outcastes, depressed classes or Scheduled Castes. They were mostly segregated outside the village and had to take up low occupations such as scavenging, shoe making and tanning. They are not permitted to draw water from wells used by upper caste Hindus even today. They were prevented entry into temples and schools in the past. Their very presence was considered to be polluting to others. During the time of the Peshwas, the untouchables were not permitted to enter the town of Poona between 6:00 p.m. and 9 a.m. because it was believed that even the shadows cast by their bodies would pollute others.

Though several of these disabilities have been constitutionally prohibited, yet socially certain restrictions on interaction prevail even today in Indian society.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTE AS A UNIT (FOR THE INDIVIDUAL)

Caste has certain features which can be examined from the perspective of a single unit or person.

1. Membership based on birth

Membership of an individual into a particular caste is determined by birth. An individual enjoys a higher or lower ritual status on the accidental factor of birth. Birth is the determining factor of the status of an individual. Each caste is an island by itself, possessing its own customs and ceremonies. The sphere of interaction of an individual used to be greatly restricted to his/her own caste group.

2. Endogamy

Members of a caste or sub-caste have to marry from within their own castes. Westermark considered the practice of endogamy as the essence of caste system. Endogamy was advocated in order to maintain the purity of the castes and to ensure that no intermixing of blood took place. An endogamic group consists of families who have the same degree of purity in ritual practices.

3. Hereditary occupation

Each caste had a specified occupation associated with it. The son of a priest had always to become a priest. Nothing could change the hereditary occupation of an individual. Carrying on the caste occupation was not only considered as a duty but also a privilege. Since certain occupations were considered unclean, persons following them became untouchables. Different sub-castes of a caste also had specific occupations associated with them.

With the onset of industrialization in the country, and particularly after the Second World War, a massive change took place in the sphere of hereditary occupation. Restrictions on changes in occupation have become weak, thus contributing to occupational mobility.

Caste Councils

Each caste had a council of its own known as the caste panchayats. These caste panchayats were so powerful that they regulated the behaviour of its caste members. The caste panchayat acted as a watch dog committee ensuring that no caste taboos were broken or violated. Some of the offences dealt by these panchayats till recently were eating and drinking with other

castes and sub-castes with whom social interaction was prohibited, non-payment of debts, breaking of a marriage alliance which had been negotiated, and quarrels between members of the same caste.

The fines imposed by the panchayats were in the form of payment of some amount to the caste council, spending for a feast for the caste men, corporal punishment, and purificatory ceremonies. In extreme cases excommunication was also practiced. Before the advent of civil and criminal courts, the caste panchayats were all powerful and many a time the caste councils re-decided cases which were already settled by the courts.

Thus caste as a social institution was all pervasive, dominating and controlling every aspect of the lives of individuals.

THEORIES REGARDING CASTE SYSTEM

Several theories have been propounded from time to time regarding the origin of caste system. These are: (1) the Racial Theory, (2) The Political Theory, (3) Traditional Theory, 4. Guild or Occupational Theory, (5) The Evolutionary Theory.

1. The Racial Theory

The most important propounder of this theory was Herbert Risley, who was later supported by Ghurye, Majumdar and Westermark.

According to this theory, the contact between two different races and cultures leads to the origin of a new breed which is attributed to the commencement of caste groups in society. In the opinion of Risley when the Aryans invaded India, and settled in the Gangetic plains they drew sharp distinctions between themselves and the native inhabitants and called them Dasas. The term Dasa in Iranian denotes enemy. The Aryans who were the conquerors, married the native women or took them as concubines, but never gave their daughters in marriage to them. A class of half-breeds were born who married within themselves and this gave rise to castes. The Aryans considered themselves superior and had their own ideas of ceremonial purity. Further, the Aryans were patrilineal while the

natives were matrilineal. The children of such marriages between the Aryans and the natives were given a low place and were called as Chandalas.

Risley has listed six processes leading to the formation of castes:

1. *Change in traditional occupation:* When a caste or a sub-caste adopts a new occupation, it leads to the origin of a new caste.

2. *Migration:* In earlier times when a section of a caste migrated to a new place, the inability to maintain links with the caste groups in the place of origin due to poor means of transport, led to the formation of a new caste altogether.

3. *Discarding of customs:* Discarding of customs and adoption of new customs in their place leads to the rise of new castes.

4. *Preservation of old traditions:* Certain castes do not prefer change in their practices and life styles and hence the emergence of a break away group leads to formation of new castes.

5. *Entry into the Hindu fold:* Several groups at the fringe of the Hindu society such as tribes, adopt Hindu ways of life and gain entry into the Hindu society leading to the formation of a new caste.

6. *Role of religious cults:* Followers of particular sects in course of time would become new castes.

2. Occupational Theory

This theory has been propounded by Nesfield and has been strongly supported by Denzil Ibbesson. According to them, occupation and occupation alone has been responsible for the origin of caste system. Skills of occupations began to be passed on from generation to generation, leading to the formation of guilds, which later on came to be known as castes. The hierarchal arrangement of occupations led to the hierarchal arrangement of castes. Those castes associated with occupations which were considered as important and clean began to enjoy a higher status,

while those castes which had occupations of lesser importance, enjoyed a lower status. According to him, the highest status was enjoyed by the Brahmins. Since they were associated with such specialized functions as worshipping, performing sacrifices and reciting hymns, which were considered important in the social life of people, hence the high status accorded to them. In course of time when the Brahmins began to close ranks and began to consider priesthood as an exclusive privilege, all other occupational groups also began to close ranks and this led to the formation of caste system. Thus it was partly due to a defence motive and partly limitation that other castes became hereditary.

3. Traditional Theory

A large number of Indian and Western scholars are of the view that Hindu society is dominated by abstract truths and mysticism. Therefore, Hindus explain everything in terms of God and religion. Even the origin of caste system is described as having a divine origin, originating from the body of the creator Brahma. The traditional theory has two versions–the mythical and the metaphysical.

According to the mythical version, castes have emerged from the different parts of the body of the creator. As per this theory the Brahmins came from the mouth of the creator, the Kshtriyas from the shoulders, the Vysyas from the thighs and the Sudras from the feet.

Membership into each caste according to the Bhagavad Gita was based on the doctrines of karma and dharma. Membership into a particular caste was not based on accident. A person was born into a particular caste on the basis of his actions in his previous life; and if he performed better he would be born in a higher caste. An individual once born in a particular caste must perform the duties of the caste considering it as his dharma. Living according to dharma is rewarded while violation of dharma is punished both here and hereafter.

The metaphysical version explains that each caste has a specific function associated with it on the basis of nature or (swabhava) and

qualities (gunas) of the caste members. Further, the swabhava of an individual is based on two aspects of gotrika and namika. The gotrika qualities identify an individual to a particular group, while namika or individual qualities differentiate a person from others. Therefore, these ascriptive qualities determine the caste of an individual.

The traditional theory has been rejected because it considers caste as a natural phenomenon and, secondly it accepts the four varnas as the four castes.

4. Evolutionary Theory

According to this theory, caste system did not come into existence all of a sudden or at a particular time but was the result of several factors which operated, resulting in a long process of social evolution. Some of the factors contributing to this evolutionary change were factors such as hereditary occupation, the desire for caste groups to maintain their purity; the prevalence of varying customs and practices among different sections of the society, belief in re-incarnation and doctrine of karma, clashes of races, colour prejudices and conquests. The geographical isolation of the Indian peninsula was also another factor contributing to the rise of caste system.

CHANGES IN CASTE SYSTEM

Changes in the institution of the caste can be classified as those which occurred during the British period and those that occurred after India attained independence.

Changes during the British Period

Some of the major changes brought about in our country during the British administration contributed to drastic changes in the institution of caste in India. In the process of their administration several measures adopted by the Britishers directly affected the caste system.

With the introduction of civil and criminal courts by the British administration the caste panchayats for the first time found their authority

shaken because until then, the caste councils had exercised power in deciding aspects of civil and criminal matters.

Further, several legislations enacted by the British administration also affected caste system in India. The Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, and the Special Marriage Act of 1872 directly attacked caste system.

Several social movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission directly attacked the caste system.

Industrialization

After the First World War, India became industrialized and this had several consequences on the institution of caste system in India. With industrialization came the process of increased urbanward migration which contributed to the break down of the practice of hereditary occupations. Occupational mobility came to be witnessed for the first time, removing barriers for the free choice of occupations.

Industrialization also led to an increase in the means of transport and communication, where travelling in the same buses and trains made it impossible to maintain the ceremonial notions as well as practices of purity any longer. Further, the inter-mingling and inter-action of several castes together made it extremely difficult for rigid caste barriers to be maintained. Taboos regarding food, and interdining became extremely difficult to enforce with people eating from the same hotels and restaurants.

Urbanization

The growth of cities and the development of transport and communication have changed the functioning of caste system considerably.

Caste in Independent India

After independence apart from urbanization and industrialization playing major roles in affecting caste system, several other factors such as the spread of education, impact of westernization, rise of modern

professions, spatial mobility and the growth of modern market economy have affected caste system. The provisions under the constitution do not permit enforcement of any form of discrimination.

Increase in Literacy

With the increase in opportunities for education, perpetuation of caste norms, and blind beliefs pertaining to caste practices are not accepted by the people. Education has contributed in developing a rational outlook and a critical bent of mind. leading to questioning of several caste norms. Education has also contributed to the rise of a democratic outlook which has affected caste system.

Provisions under the Constitution

The most systematic and severe attack on caste system has been made by the Constitution of India. It aims at securing for its citizens social. economic and political justice, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, and equality of status.

Section 15 of the Constitution guarantees the right of equality by saying that no citizen shall be discriminated on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, or be subject to any disability, liability or restriction with regard to access to shops, restaurants and places of public interest, or the use of public wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads, etc.

Article 16 guarantees the right to employment for all citizens without any discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, race, sex or place of birth.

Article 17 has abolished untouchability thus making its practice a punishable offence.

Thus, several factors have contributed to bringing about a change in caste system. To sum up:

1. Caste system has not been completely eliminated from our society, on the contrary it is adapting itself to changed modern conditions.

2. The religious hold of caste system has been weakened in several fields.

3. Social restrictions imposed by caste system are gradually losing their meaning in many circles.

4. Caste does not determine the occupation of an individual though it still determines his/her social status to a certain extent.

5. Serious attempts have been made to provide equality to those castes which have suffered due to restrictions imposed on them.

6. Inter-caste strifes are on the rise more for achieving power than on grounds of ritual status.

7. Caste and politics have come to affect one another.

8. Caste today no longer acts as a barrier to social progress and for national development. India is on the move inspite of the caste system.

In conclusion, it can be said that caste related values have assumed new forms today. One finds a paradoxical situation with reference to caste in India today. In some areas one finds that caste has completely taken a back seat while in other areas, the influence of caste is very much alive. Even today caste is being used and misused, as the case may be in different forms and in different degrees. However, it can be stated with clarity that modernizing influences are posing a challenge to caste system and throwing up new questions.

UNIT – IV

MARRIAGE

Marriage is a social unit which admits men and women to family life. Marriage has been defined by Edward Westermark, 'as a more or less durable connection, between male and female, lasting beyond the mere act of propagation till after the birth of the offspring'. In the opinion of Jonson, 'marriage is a stable relationship in which a man and a woman are socially permitted, without loss of standing in community, to have children'.

The institution of marriage occupies an important place among the Hindus. The traditional view of Hindu marriage is that it is a sacrament because it is irrevocable. The parties to marriage cannot dissolve it at will. They are bound to each other until the death of either of them, and the wife is bound to her husband even after his death. A Hindu marriage thus involves adjustment of tastes, tempers, ideals and interests, instead of breaking with each other when they find that they differ. It thus involves sacrifice on the part of both the husband and the wife. However, in the patriarchal value system that has been prevailing in our society it is almost always the wife who is expected to conform to marriage related norms and the male partner enjoys the benefit of 'dual standards'.

It was this sacramental notion of Hindu marriage which also acted as a block to widow marriage. Though men could remarry, women were denied this right simply because it was believed that a woman could marry only once. However, modernizing influences have had an impact on marriage practices and change is on the anvil.

The Hindu marriage is viewed not only as a social contract, but also as a religious sacrament in which a man and a woman are bound in a permanent relationship for physical, social and spiritual purposes. The Hindu marriage aims not merely on physical pleasure but also on spiritual advancement. Among the Hindus, marriage or vivaha is an important ritual

through which an individual had to go through to be able to start his or her life in the grihastashrama. Vivaha literally means carrying away the bride to the house of the bridegroom. Among the Hindus marriage is generally considered as obligatory for every person. A male child undergoes several samskaras or rituals, from the time of his birth till death, but for a female child the only ritual which she could undergo during her life time was marriage. Therefore, it was natural for marriage to be considered important in the Hindu society. Because, without marriage a girl would be without samskaras. However, during the early vedic period social values relating to marriage were liberal and men and women had the freedom of spousal choice. Child marriage did not exist and widow marriage was not looked down upon. But during later times early marriage became a common practice and marriage virtually turned into a source of gender related exploitation.

Further, according to the Vedas, dharma must be practised by a man together with his wife. Marriage, therefore, is one of the sacraments through which each man and woman must pass at the proper age and time. The belief also prevailed among the Hindus that to obtain moksha, birth of a son was essential, hence the universality of the Hindu marriage. It is this pre-occupation with salvation that was one of the factors which led to the creation of a patriarchal social order.

The aims of a Hindu marriage are said to be dharma (righteousness or duty) praja (progeny and rati (pleasure). The concept of dharma dominates the Hindu marriage. Hindu thinkers regarded dharma as the first and highest aim of marriage. Marriage was desired for obtaining a partner for the fulfillment of one's religious duties. Moreover, the birth of a son was considered important towards helping the father fulfil his obligations which were due to the departed ancestors (pitru rina). There was also the feeling that male progeny would look after their parents in old age. Marriage also became the means through which lineage was continued.

TRADITIONAL FORMS OF HINDU MARRIAGE

In the Hindu society of the past there were eight modes of consecrating a marriage union. Out of these, four were considered proper and desirable and four were regarded as undesirable. The forms of marriages recognized by the smritis were Brahma, Daiva, Arsha and Prajapatya, while the four forms of marriage that were considered undesirable were asura, gandharva, rakshasa and paischacha.

1. Brahma

In this form of marriage the father gives his daughter in marriage to a man of character and learning. He gives his daughter in marriage without accepting anything in return, decking her with ornaments that he could afford. The smritis regard this form of marriage as most honourable, because it is free from physical force, imposition of conditions, and the lure of money. This form of marriage has been traced back to the vedic times and is currently still popular in India, though today it has been tainted with the stipulation of dowry.

2. Daiva

In this form of marriage the father gave away his daughter as a fee to the priest who officiated at the sacrifices conducted by the girl's father. In ancient India, kings gifted their daughters and slave girls to the priests in return for the services rendered by them at sacrifices. This gift of a maiden did not involve a proper marriage arrangement. It was concubinage associated with polygyny, a system which gradually began to develop among the rich and the powerful classes. Soon it began to be realized that this form of marriage did not provide a proper placement for the girls and hence began to be considered as an inferior form of marriage compared to Brahma.

3. Arsha

In this form of marriage the bride's family gets a pair of cattle or two in exchange for their daughter. This practice became obsolete in due course of time because even a nominal acceptance of any commodity became

offensive to the concept of Kanyadana and it began to be equated with the practice of selling one's daughter.

4. Prajapatya

In this form of marriage a father makes a gift of the daughter by addressing the couple with the mantra that they perform their dharma together.

5. Asura

In the four former forms of marriages mentioned above, it is the father or a person in his place who makes a gift of the bride to the bridegroom. But in the Asura form of marriage the bridegroom has to give money to the father or kinsmen of the bride, and this in a sense is the purchase of the bride.

The main consideration of this form of marriage was money. In the vedic period bargains were sometimes struck and the girl would be sold for a heavy price. In the initial stages no social stigma was attached to this practice, and gradually the bride came to be regarded as a gift to be given by her father. The Smritis considered the Asura form of marriage an existing evil. Manu felt that the bride's father should not accept any money. This custom was prevalent in the north-western part of India at the commencement of the Christian era.

6. Gandharva

In this form of marriage the partners to marriage choose one another. This form of marriage is like the contemporary marriages of mutual choice. This type of marriage has got this name as it was practised among a tribe by the name gandharva in the Himalayan region. In the medieval period it was common for kings and rulers to arrange marriage ceremonies called Swayamvaraas, where eligible suitors were invited and the princesses were given an opportunity to choose their partners. The rise of child marriages during the medieval period struck a blow to the gandharva form of marriage.

7. Rakshasha

In the past the victorious warriors would capture women and children of the vanquished group. These women were considered as booty of war and were forced into marriage. This type of marriage prevailed among warring tribes in the past. A system in which a girl was captured by force while her kith and kin lay slain all around is called as Rakshasha marriage.

8. Paischacha

It is the worst and most disapproved form of marriage since it was mainly based on deceit. It is a form of marriage when a cohabitation takes place without the consent of the bride by force when she is intoxicated or when she is unconscious.

CHANGING TRENDS IN MARRIAGE

The institution of marriage has undergone several changes over a period of time. Some of the significant changes that have taken place in the present century are discussed in the section that follows:

For centuries the practice of polygyny was prevalent in the Indian society among the Hindus but with the passing of the Hindu Marriage Act in 1955, practice of polygyny became an offence and monogamy became the accepted form of marriage. However, bigamy continues to be practiced in Indian society by quite a number of men (hard statistics are not available) and it is one of the key issues before the contemporary women's movement.

The gradual increase in the age at marriage is another trend that is undergoing change. It was only in the early vedic period that girls were able to receive education as was available for boys and hence had' a say in taking decisions relating to their marriage. But during the later vedic period and after, girls began to lose their right to education, and due to several social and religious factors, marriage began to be considered as the only goal in the life of girls. The appearance of several codes of law, especially that of Manu which stipulated that women should always be under the control of men at every stage of life robbed off the opportunities and privileges which girls enjoyed during the early vedic period. As a

consequence of the denial of education, girls began to be married at an early age, i.e., between 8 and 12 years. This tendency continued from the later vedic times through the Buddhist, medieval, and British period, only to undergo gradual changes in the 20th century due to several factors, such as legal initiative, spread of education, modernization, and the operation of economic forces.

The spread of education has had a definite impact on delaying the age at marriage, because, there is a positive correlation between level of education and the age at marriage. The higher the level of education, later the age at marriage. When girls are retained in school, it is likely that their marriage is postponed. The media have also been giving constant publicity to the evils of early marriage and this has, to some extent, created awareness about the dangerous consequences of getting girls/boys married early. Also, increasing awareness among men, women and adolescents about their rights, roles and opportunities available for development has led to a new kind of thinking about marriage.

The passing of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929 which raised the age at marriage of girls to 14 years and boys to 18 years was the first legislative measure of significance trying to check early marriage. Later, the passing of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 and the amended Child Marriage as Restraint Act (1978) have clearly stipulated the age of marriage for girls as 18 years and for boys as 21 years. The age at marriage however varies from state to state, while the mean age at marriage in states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh is very low, in Kerala it is the highest.

With the spread of modernizing forces such as urbanization and industrialization, changes have become evident in the institution of marriage in the Indian society. The greater opportunity for men and women to interact with each other due to expanding opportunities for education and employment has led to a situation where individuals have greater freedom in the choice of their marital partners. This has also led to a major

change in trends pertaining to endogamous marriages. Inter-caste as well as inter-religious marriages are slowly on the rise. Further, even in rural India parents are beginning to take the opinion of their children before settling any alliance.

A Hindu marriage which was once considered an irrevocable bond, is no longer so in the present society. The influence of modern ideas, such as emphasis on individual freedom and liberty have been contributing to rise of the divorce rate in the Indian society. Growing consciousness about gender equality is also one of the factors that has made the institution of marriage more democratic than it was earlier. Today the stigma that was attached to divorce or separation is no longer that rigid and, where women have social support, it is likely that they would come out of a relationship which happens to be exploitative. However, not all women, especially those in rural India enjoy the kind of family and social support which is required to combat marital oppression. The fact that there is an alarming increase in the rate of domestic violence gives an indication of the danger to which women are exposed within their own homes.

Another changing trend in marriage in India is the increasing attention that is being given to rights of partners in marriage by the law. Marriage need not be considered only as a private matter which concerns only the partners or families involved. If there are any complaints there is a provision to approach the law enforcing authorities. This has paved the way for making the institution of marriage more democratic than what it was.

Inspite of the changes that are taking place in the institution of marriage, marriage remains a near universal institution in India even to this day. Changes in the basic socio-economic structure coupled with a compaign to spread awareness about gender justice only can change society's attitudes towards marriage.

CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is a by-product of those patriarchal ideologies which held the view that marriage was a mandatory ritual in the lives of men

and women. The practice of child marriage was not prevalent during the early vedic period when boys and girls had equal opportunities to pursue vedic studies. It was during the period of the Smritis that this practice received the sanction of the two Smritikaras, Manu and Yagnavalkya. It was Yagnavalkya who emphasized that girls should be married before they attained puberty and laid down that parents who failed to get their daughters married before they attined puberty would be committing a grave sin. Adult marriages which enjoyed social sanction prior to Yagnavalkya Smriti faced severe opposition during later times. This practice continued through the medieval ages and well into the British period. It was only during the 19th century that organized efforts to combat this evil began to be made and even today the campaign against early marriage is alive.

Child marriage has disastrous consequences for girls. Leave alone child marriage, even cradle marriages were in vogue at one point of time. Often, the young wife would not have met or even seen her husband and if she became a widow, she would have had to lead a life of misery as long as she was alive. As there was no sanction for widow marriage a young widow was socially ostracized. Girls had no access to knowledge and this kept them in physical and social isolation from the rest of the world. It was this miserable condition of the young widows that moved many social reformers who not only insisted on raising the age at marriage but also pressed their demand for lifting the ban on widow marriage.

The credit of having launched a major initiative against child marriage goes to Rao Bahadur Harbildas Sarda, due to whose efforts the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in the year 1929. This Act also known as the Sarda Act laid down that girls should not be married until they reached the age of 14 years and boys till the age of 18 years. This Act which came to be amended in 1978 prescribed the minimum age for a female partner as 18 years and a male partner as 21 years. In other words, according to the legally stipulated age, only adults can contract a marriage relationship.

Though a legal ban has been imposed on child marriage, even today early marriages are quite common, especially in rural India. There has been a shift from child marriages to adolescent marriages. Early marriage has negative consequences for the development of girls/women. When girls are married early, it harms both their physical and mental development. Early marriage leads to early motherhood and denies girls the right to education, right to a healthy childhood and also access to all other development resources. Early marriage also leads to school drop out, deaths of young girls due to pregnancy and child birth related medical complications, malnutrition and poor health among children. Early marriage-poverty-illiteracy-illhealth are all part of a vicious circle from which many young girls have no escape. Unless there is a rigid implementation of laws and removal of gender inequalities, the situation may continue for a long time to come.

WIDOW MARRIAGE

Widow marriage which was never considered a forbidden act during the early vedic period gradually came to be frowned upon. Hindu marriage which came to be considered a sacrament or an irrevocable bond for life seemed to put the most rigid conditions for women. The ban on widow marriage created conditions under which young girls and women suffered the most humiliating insults. Child marriages were very common and when the husband died the child widow was physically deformed and mentally tortured. She had to give up the symbols of wifehood, eat a frugal diet and keep away from all occasions considered auspicious. In view of the fact that girls neither had the right to remarry, nor for receiving education, there was no future which a widow, in general, and, child widow, in particular, could look for. Unable to bear the torture many widows preferred to commit 'Sati' than live a life of misery.

It was during the 19th century that social reformers began to make serious efforts to impress upon the British government the need to pass a law lifting the ban on widow marriage. The efforts of the great social reformer from Bengal, Eswar Chandra Vidyasagar need special mention in

this regard. In the year 1856 the Widow Remarriage Act was passed, thus providing legal sanction to widow marriage. However, for a long time to come widow marriages did not really have the kind of social acceptance, which it was thought the legal action would bring forth. Widows continued to reel under the grip of tradition bound practices and values. But it is to be noted with happiness that today the situation relating to widow marriage is gradually changing. Modern education, increasing awareness about the futility of clinging on to age old values, and growing realization about the need to bring equality between men and women have brought about an increase in the number of widow marriages in the country.

DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage was once considered an irrevocable bond, but today an increasing number of men and women are seeking freedom of choice to stay on or come out of a marriage relationship. Under social circumstances that are undergoing fast changes, the rate of divorce is gradually on the increase. As mentioned earlier, marriage is no longer considered a private matter where there cannot be outside interference. Law has intervened to help people settle marriage related problems and a couple need not continue to be husband and wife if they do not wish to continue in a marriage. Marriage can be dissolved under conditions stipulated by the law.

Till mid 1950's the Hindu Law did not permit divorce, though among some castes, local customs did have sanctions for the dissolution of a marriage by a payment decided by the caste elders. Generally, in the Hindu society divorce is resorted to as a last measure.

In early India, Kautilya had sanctioned divorce in four forms of marriages namely Asura, Gandharva, Paishacha and Rakshasa on grounds of bad character, unknown whereabouts, impotency and posing a threat to the life of the spouse. Since most marriages were of the Brahma type, divorce generally did not prevail in the ancient Indian society.

With the passing of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, which applies to Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains in India, grounds for divorce were stipulated. The Hindu Marriage Act was amended in 1976, and 1981 under which divorce can take place on grounds of adultery, conversion to another religion; unsound mind for less than three years, desertion for more than seven years, incurable leprosy, veneral disease, renunciation and bigamy. The amendment of 1976 permits divorce by mutual consent after showing that the husband and wife have been living apart for 1 year and could not reconcile. An individual could remarry after the completion of one year after obtaining divorce.

MARRIAGE AMONG OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Besides the Hindus, the other major religious groups in India are Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsees, Buddhists and Jains. The following section contains a brief description of the marriage practices observed by some of the religious groups in India.

Marriage Among the Muslims

The Muslims are numerically the largest religious minority in India. Among the Muslims marriage related norms, values and practices have undergone frequent changes from time to time owing to the influence of socio-political factors.

In the initial stages of the spread of Islam polyandry was in practice. Ancient Arab marriages were characterized by three features, viz., a woman had a right to choose her husband, end the marriage relationship at will and was responsible for the care of the offspring. Over a period of time the position of women underwent a change and male domination became a feature of Muslim marriages.

Among the Muslims marriage is a social contract and is known by the term 'Nikah'. The important objectives of a Muslim marriage are control of sexual forces, bringing order to domestic life, procreation of children and racial perpetuation. A Muslim marriage is also regarded as a religious duty and is subject to the principles laid down by the holy book Koran.

There are mainly three forms of marriage among the Muslims, they being Sahi, Batil and Fasid. A Sahi marriage is one which has religious and legal sanction. The progeny born out of such a marriage enjoy all rights. Batil marriage is one which does not have any recognition in the Muslim social or religious order. For example, marriage among close blood relatives. Children born out of such a marriage are not considered legitimate. A Fasid marriage is one which is not considered fully irregular but certain conditions which have to be fulfilled in a Muslim marriage are absent and hence it is considered as irregular. For example, absence of witnesses at the time of a marriage proposal. A Fasid marriage, however, can be converted into a regular one by setting the irregularities right.

Nikāh is the most widely accepted form of marriage among Muslims. This is practiced both among the shias and the sunnis, and can be a marriage relationship of a permanent nature, because no time period is specified. A woman under a Nikah marriage is entitled to receive her husband's care. However, the marriage contract can be ended by what is known as Talaq. When the marriage is dissolved a wife is entitled to receive the Meher. The meher is an important component of a Muslim marriage and is an obligation imposed upon the husband by the Muslim law. It can be in the form of cash or kind. Mehar is not bride price and there is no fixed amount as such which could be paid as Meher.

Because of wide social acceptance and the amicable conditions under which it can be contracted Nikah marriage is the most popular form of Muslim marriage.

Muta marriage, in contrast to the Nikah marriage is one where the period of co-habitation is stipulated and the amount to be paid as Meher is specified. This form of marriage is practiced among the Shias. The Muta marriage is not widely accepted because the relationship is for a short period, and a woman does not leave her parental home after marriage. The marriage can be termintated after a short period, sometimes lasting only for a few days.

Divorce under the Muslim law can be obtained under the Muslim Marriage Act of 1939, without the intervention of the court. A Muslim marriage can be broken and can be dissolved by a man by giving talaq, but a woman can dissolve a marriage only on mutual consent. A wife can seek divorce under such conditions as when a husband has been missing for four years, has been unable to provide for the wife for more than two years, imprisoned for more than seven years, is impotent, mentally unsound or cruel.

Not much change has taken place in the situation relating to Muslim marriages. In 1985 a judgement given in the Shah Banoo case by the Supreme Court laid down that a husband has to give maintenance allowance to his wife. This created a nationwide controversy which led to fundamentalists opposing the move and the progressives among the Muslims supporting it. It was also interpreted as interference in Muslim Personal Law by many. The issue also went to Parliament, and in 1986 the Muslim Women's Bill which came up before the Parliament was only accepted as an Act which sought to protect the rights of divorced Muslim women. A divorced Muslim woman lost the rights of obtaining maintenance from her husband and the responsibility of her protection was assigned to the Wakf Board.

There is a general impression that polygamy is widely practiced among Muslims but this is a misconception. Though polygamy is permitted under Muslim Personal Law, it is not to be interpreted that it is mandatory.

Marriage among Christians

The Christians have been stratified into two broad categories, the Catholics and the Protestants. The Catholics are further divided into Latin Catholics and Syrian Catholics. Each group and sub-group in it is an endogamous group. The main objectives of a Christian marriage are procreation, escape from fornication, and seeking mutual help and comfort. Therefore, Christian marriage is a contract between a man and woman,

intended to be binding for life, for the purpose of social union, mutual companionship and establishment of a family.

The procedure generally adopted in a Christian marriage is the selection of the marital partners by the parents of both the girl and the boy. The choice can also be mutual. After setting an alliance, an engagement or betrothal ceremony is performed, where both the partners to the marriage exchange engagement rings. The next important conditions to be satisfied before a marriage takes place are obtaining a church membership certificate by both the partners and submitting an application for marriage in the girl's church, which should be done three weeks in advance. This provides an opportunity for the church authorities to verify if there are objections from anyone to the marriage. If there are no objections, the wedding is solemnized.

The practice of monogamy prevails among the Christians and ploygyny and polyandry are strictly prohibited. The Christian Marriage Act of 1872 which was amended in 1891, 1903, 1911, 1920 and 1928 covers all aspects of a marriage such as who performs the marriage, the place of its performance and the time of its performance. Marriages according to this Act are regarded as null and void if partners are close relatives, husband is impotent or due to insanity of the partners and bigamy. Judicial separation can be obtained on grounds of adultery and cruelty. Widow marriages are accepted and encouraged among the Christians.

Marriage among the Sikhs

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 applies to Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs in the country. In addition, the Sikhs are guided by the Anand Marriage Act of 1909, which validates Sikh marriages in accordance with a ceremony called 'Anand'.

The 'Anand' ceremony was initiated by the third guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amar Das. It fell slightly into disuse at the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, due to indirect Brahmanical influence during the time. But the Anand ceremony did exist even then, and Brahmanical influences were

checked, by permitting widow marriages which were prohibited by the Hindus. A revival has set in again since the last thirty years and marriages have been solemnized by practicing this ceremony. This form of marriage is most popular among the Sikhs because it is simple and inexpensive thus receiving universal support.

Marriage among Parsis

The Parsis immigrated from their homeland during the third quarter of the eighth century, seeking political asylum. They lived in clusters in large towns and did not admit any converts to their religion. They were basically fire worshippers. Eighty percent of the world's Parsis live in India and sixty percent of them live in Mumbai. Being a highly close knit group, and where choice of partners are not encouraged from outside the community, the rate of consanguinous marriages is very high among the Parsis. Child marriages are completely non-existent among the Parsis who have a very high average age at marriage. Widowers and widows are encouraged to remarry and all information about the Parsi community is maintained by the Parsi Panchayat. Though different religious groups have marriage practices and norms distinct to their own groups, due to constant intermingling of these groups and regional influences, certain customs are being followed by most groups. There is however, one disturbing trend which is found in all groups and that relates to the alarming increase in the incidence of dowry. Cutting across barriers of religion and region, a large number of marriages have virtually become economic transactions where the bridegroom and his family make endless demands. Though dowry related laws have been made stringent and the punishments are becoming rigid, dowry demands and dowry related violence is on the increase. The law has really failed to crack its whip on this inhuman tendency and the consequent violence that is meted out on women. Unless there is a will on the part of law enforcing authorities, to impose the ban on dowry, the situation is likely to continue without much change.

UNIT – V

FAMILY

THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN FAMILY

Family is considered the most basic and fundamental unit in Indian society. Though the authority and influence of family has been weaning in recent times, it continues to be the focal point around which the lives of most people revolve. It is not really possible to make statements of a generalized nature about family in India, because there are regional and cultural variations in family forms and practices. However, in the next few paragraphs an attempt is made to discuss briefly some of the major forms of family in India.

Almost everywhere, the family performs such functions as procreation, giving sanction to sexual relationship within the framework of marriage and offering basic services such as shelter, food, kinship identities and economic co-operation. A family is also generally established when a man and a woman enter into a marital relationship. In most cases, family is patriarchal in form and authority. There are a few prominent exceptions, where the family is matriarchal, but such families are found only among some groups.

In a patriarchal family the authority of the male is recognized. In other words, it is a male centered family. The two major features of a patriarchal family are patrilocal residence and patrilineal descent. In a patrilocal form of residence, a woman, upon marriage shifts to her husband's house. This is the most commonly practiced form of residence in Indian society. Patrilineal descent is a form of descent where identities are traced through the male line. Also, property is generally handled between males only.

Patriarchal families tend to diminish opportunities for women's emancipation in view of the fact that male domination is the most accepted value in such families. Even today most women take on the name of the

husband or his family upon marriage. The process of identity loss for a woman begins as soon as she is married. Leave alone loss of identity, a woman is expected to adjust to the whims and fancies of her husband's family, and sacrifice her interests and desires. It is also true that patriarchy is one of the major factors precipitating domestic violence. The male oriented values that are upheld by patriarchal families tend to expose women to violence and the feminist movement has focussed attention on patriarchy as a major precipitator of violence against women. Though modernizing influences are beginning to make a dent into the absolute power oriented structure of the patriarchal family, by and large, the patriarchal family remains the most widely prevalent family form in Indian society.

The matriarchal family is generally cited as the opposite of the patriarchal family. But even in a matriarchal family set up a woman does not have absolute freedom or control. But in a relative sense, women have greater freedom of choice and decision in a matriarchal set up. The two main features of a matriarchal family are matrilineal descent and matrilocal residence. In matrilineal descent, lineage is traced through the female line. The most prominent examples of communities which have matrilineal descent are Garo, Khasi and Nayar. In many other tribal groups in different parts of the country matrilineal descent is found.

In matrilocal form of residence, a man, upon marriage shifts his residence to his wife's house. In such families, there is less likelihood of a woman being exposed to violence. It is, however, not to be interpreted that men have no role to play in a matriarchal family. In the traditional Nayar Taravad (matrilineal joint family among the Nayars) the mother's brother managed the entire affairs of the household, thus indicating the prevalence of a system where decision making powers vested with a male, even in a matriarchal family set up.

Besides matrilocal or patrilocal forms of residence, one also comes across neo-local type of residence. The neo-local residence is created when

a couple shift to a new residence after marriage and establish a separate family.

In view of the fact that opportunities for employment are expanding and an increasing number of women are finding jobs in the service sector, there cannot always be a rigid patriarchal or matriarchal set up. There can be shifts in family forms based on one's conveniences and circumstances.

Due to increased individualism, expanding opportunities for education and employment and a growing gap between generations, most families are in the grip of conflicts. The intensity, nature and repercussions of these conflicts, however vary from one family to the other. Family in India is definitely in the process of change and it is true that many of its traditional bases are being threatened. Yet, family continues to be accepted as a vital component of human existence and kinship relations which are formed within the family still exercise a profound influence on the lives of most people.

HINDU JOINT FAMILY

The family in India does not always consist of husband, wife and their children only. There are families which have more than one generation living under the same roof. This system known as the joint family system is a unique feature of Indian social life. Many sons after marriage do not shift to a separate residence but continue to stay on with the parents under the same roof sharing a common kitchen and also the family property. A joint family is based on the principle of shared familial resources. The earnings of all the members are put in a common fund out of which family expenses are met. Non-earning members also have a share in the resources of the family. The Indian Joint family system is thus like a socialistic community in which everyone earns according to his/her capacity and receives according to his/her needs.

The interpretation of the concept of 'jointness' in the term 'joint family' has varied from one scholar to the other. While some scholars like Iravathi

Karve regard "co-residentiality' as an important element in jointness, others such as B.S. Cohn, S.C. Dube, Harold Gould, Pauline Kolenda, and Ramakrishna Mukherjee regard co-residentiality and commensality as essential ingredients of jointness. Scholars like F.G. Bailey and T.N. Madan give importance to joint ownership of property or co-parcenary, irrespective of the type of residence and commensality. A few scholars like I.P. Desai place emphasis on fulfillment of obligations towards kin, even if residence is separate and there is no common ownership of property. 'Fulfillment of obligations' refers to identifying oneself as a member of a particular family, rendering financial and other kinds of help, and following joint family norms.

According to Iravati Karve, the ancient family in India was joint in terms of residence, property and functions. She terms this family as a traditional family or joint family. Kapadia, however, maintains that our early family was not joint or patriarchal alone, side by side with patriarchal families, we had individual families too.

But in spite of this trend towards individualism, the family was maintained as joint and agnactic. Karve mentions five characteristics of joint family viz., common residence, common kitchen, common property, common family worship, and some kinship relationship. Thus, her criteria of jointness are: size, residence, property, and income. On this basis, she defines joint family as "a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common, who participate in common family worship, and who are related to each other as some particular type of kindred".

Desai, however, feels that we cannot place undue emphasis on co-residence and a common kitchen as dimensions of jointness, because doing so would be failing to recognize the joint family as a set of social relationships and a functioning unit. According to him, it is the relationship between the members of a household among themselves and with those of another household that determines the type of family. It is the difference

in the type and nature of role relations and the normative behaviour pattern among relatives that distinguishes a nuclear family from a joint family. Desai's view is that when two families related through kinship live separately but function under one authority it is a joint family. He terms it as a functional joint family. According to Desai, a family can be considered as a residential joint family only when three or more generations live together. To Desai, two generation families can only be termed as marginal joint families. He, thus, cites three criteria for identifying a joint family, viz., generation depth, rights and obligations, and property.

Features of Joint Family

Joint family is a group of kins of more than one generation, ruled by a head in which residence, hearth and property are joint and whose members are bound with each other by mutual obligations. The most important characteristic features of the joint family are as follows:

Common residence: The members of joint family usually live under the same roof. They may also live in separate houses in close proximity to one another. An example of common residence is a family in which a son upon marriage does not move out but continues to live with his wife in his parental residence. The family will also have unmarried daughters and sons, and other married sons and their wives and children living together under one roof.

Common kitchen: As long as a common kitchen does not serve the entire group, different families cannot be simply regarded as a joint family even if they live under a common roof. The food for all members of a joint family, is cooked in a common kitchen. Establishment of separate kitchens is one of the factors that mark the beginning of the break-up of a joint family.

Joint property: In addition to joint residence and a common kitchen, a characteristic feature of the joint family is joint property. In a joint family, ownership, production and utilisation of property takes place on a joint basis. Writing about the joint family, Mellay compares the joint family to a co-operative institution, similar to a joint stock company, in which there

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is joint property. The head of the joint family is like a trustee who manages the property of the family for the material and spiritual welfare of the family members. The total earnings of all the family members are pooled together and the head of the family is only ensuring that the property is being used for the benefit of all the members.

Common religious beliefs and practices: Generally the members of a joint family owe allegiance to a common religion and worship a family deity. The performance of religious rights and duties is joint. They celebrate all festivals and social functions jointly. They also hold themselves jointly accountable for participating in ceremonies such as marriage or death. Festivals and other religious occasions generally bring all the members together. Even in families where some members have moved out, most of them generally make it a point to go back to the family of origin on such occasions.

Authority of the head: Yet another characteristic feature of the joint family is the rule of the head. Maine refers to the head of a joint family as the absolute authority. Absolute authority does not necessarily mean an autocratic attitude. The head may use even persuasion, affection and more milder methods of dealing with his members.

Co-operative organization: The basis of a joint family is co-operation. A joint family consists of a large number of members and if they do not co-operate with one another it is not possible to maintain the organization and structure of the joint family. It is, however, to be noted that in contemporary society co-operation based on coercion is very hard to secure.

A Productive unit: This feature of joint family is mostly found among agricultural families. All the members work on the same agricultural land. They sow and harvest the crops together. Even in artisan families there is a division of labour between the members of the joint family based on gender, age and skills.

Mutual rights and obligations: The members of a joint family have mutual obligations and joint responsibilities. The head of the family has some privileges but each member, according to his/her age, status and relationship has to shoulder certain economic and social responsibilities.

A Centre for social interaction: A joint family is almost always a centre for establishing and maintaining a network of social relationships. It has been mentioned earlier that even in instances of some members marching out of a joint family, they are likely to return to the joint family during special occasions such as festivals, deaths or other social gatherings. A joint family is also generally frequented by guests who may stay for varying lengths of time and almost always, the joint family extends its hospitality.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF JOINT FAMILY

The chief advantages of the joint family are as follows:

Economic advantages: The joint family system has proved to be a very advantageous institution from the economic viewpoint. It prevents division of property and land is especially protected from extreme sub-division and fragmentation. When land is fragmented into small pieces it not only becomes untenable but also a liability. Besides keeping the land intact, the joint family also assists in economic production. In agricultural and artisan families there is generally a division of labour among the members and one learns from observation and participation a number of economic functions: Dependence on hired labour can be minimised by joint participation. In rural areas the joint families of such artisans as the blacksmith, Carpenter, etc. also function as units in which men, women and children collaborate. Joint family system also minimises expenditure in view of the fact that a balance can be maintained between consumption and production.

Protection to members: Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the joint family as an insurance for the family members. In view of the fact that individualism is less pronounced the sick, needy and weak are ensured of a shelter in

a joint family. A joint family provides care to children, the old, the insane, widows and the helpless. It is also capable of providing the much needed assistance during critical times and lends support to these members who need it most.

Development of personality: The joint family system makes it possible for frequent interaction among members and hence both positive and negative aspects can be observed within a joint family set up. Due to constant vigil which the older members generally keep on youngsters they can be taught the pros and cons of different types of behaviour. Values such as generosity, patience, service. co-operation, affection, broad-mindedness, and obedience may be inculcated in a joint family. The 'we' feeling is more pronounced than the 'I' and this can go a long way in making an individual socially responsible.

Means of recreation: The joint family also acted as a chief source of recreation in the past. It is true that its influence has waned due to the increasing influence wielded by commercial recreation but the joint family promotes friendship, besides of course breaking the monotony and routine that generally characterize life in urban nuclear families.

Socialism: According to Sir Henry Maine, the joint family is like a corporation, the trustee of which is the father. Everyone in the joint family earns according to his/her capabilities but obtains according to his/her need and in this sense to a large extent the joint family achieves the socialistic order of "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs".

The following are the main disadvantages of the joint family system:

Hindrance to the development of self: The most glaring defect of the joint family system is the hindrance to the development of the personalities of its members. In a joint family most of the authority rests with the head and other members have to act according to his dictates. Individual wishes or differences are hardly respected. There is a hierarchy in the family and

if not the head, other older members tend to dominate the younger ones. individualism hardly grows in a joint family set up.

Women do not always get their rightful place: This is also a major defect of the joint family system. Though one cannot generalize about the position of women in every joint family they generally tend to suffer a loss of identity in the joint family set up. This creates frustration which ultimately may lead to friction. Women have work almost round the clock but do not get their due. This is especially true of younger daughters-in-law. Often, meeting between spouses is also difficult. Privacy is a casualty and under constant watch by other members; many women feel highly depressed. This can lead to a situation of conflict. The mother-in-law and older sister-in-law may suppress the young daughter-in-law's desires or ambitions.

In many North Indian joint families even physical separation of women is enforced and their spaces within the home are extremely limited. Most often, the joint family is hardly the place for women's liberation efforts.

Strife: Joint family may become the hotbed of quarrels and generation gap assumes serious proportions in a joint family. Due to the close proximity that exists between members, conflicts break out easily and family peace may be severely affected. Often, the quarrels start within the family kitchen or the backyard and extend beyond. Minor and insignificant incidents are blown up and ill-will can set in very easily. Family strife is also created over the issue of distribution of household chores and spending resources. Such clashes often lead to some members breaking off from the main family and setting up their own nuclear units. Growing friction is a characteristic feature of joint family.

Encourages laziness: Joint family encourages the lazy and irresponsible members to live without working for the family. As there is a common kitchen everybody gets food and one need not strive hard to fulfil one's daily needs. The line of demarcation between those who work and those who do not is very thin and this creates a situation of frustration. When

some members have to do back-breaking work and others just laze around friction develops easily.

Joint Family can lead to serious legal Battles: Due to disputes that arise over the distribution of family property, members are often engaged in legal battles and at times it leads to situations of severe conflict. Such disputes are especially common in landed families and the dispute occurs almost always over land. In the background of increasing awareness of legal rights, a joint family can become the centre of violent feuds, sometimes leading to separation or other extreme consequences such as assault or murder.

Promotes and perpetuates irrelevant traditions: Because of the authoritarian value which it promotes, many traditions and practices which do not have any social relevance can be perpetuated by the joint family. The younger generation especially is forced to follow certain traditions in which they do not believe. The celebration of festivals, performance of rituals or observance of certain customs can lead to wasteful expenditure which the younger generation may not really appreciate. In one sense the joint family can prevent the spread of modernizing influences.

The joint family has both positive as well as negative points. Of course it is not right to come to any generalizations about the advantages or limitations of the joint family, because under different contexts and in different situations, a particular factor may be an advantage or a disadvantage. It is also interesting to note that with an increasing number of women taking to work outside the home there is a tendency to prefer parents, parents-in-law or younger sisters-in-law staying with them so that safe child care arrangements are ensured.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

Family in India is undergoing constant changes due to the influence of several factors, prominent among which are education, urbanization, industrialization, law, increasing employment of women outside the home and expanding relationship network. Though the role of family as the

primary agent of socialization, by and large remains the same, there have been significant changes in the functions of the family. Most of the functions that were being performed by the family in a traditional social order have now been taken over by other institutions. This is especially true in the urban context.

As our contact network with the world outside widens, our contacts within the family tend to become fewer and fewer. Family in India is thus involved in a continuing process of responding to changes that are taking place in other institutions. In the section that follows, an attempt has been made to analyse the role of some of the major factors that have brought about changes in the family. We begin with education.

Education

Education has affected family in more than one way. It has not only brought about changes in the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies of the people but has also encouraged individualism. Increasing opportunities for education have actually helped a large number of men and women to seek life chances beyond the family. Education has also helped a large number of women to seek employment opportunities in the service sector. When women become economically independent, there is bound to emerge in them a new kind of consciousness about their role and importance in society. When traditional role stereotypes are questioned and relationships within the family change structural changes are bound to be ushered in.

L.P. Desai and A.D. Ross have made important references to the reciprocal influence of education and family on each other. Desai refers to the role that education has played in bringing about changes in the traditional joint family. Education not only promotes individualism but also prepares persons to take up such occupations which are generally alien to traditional joint families. The quest for knowledge has also led to many joint families breaking up as members tend to move out in search of educational opportunities either for themselves or for their children. When people settle down in new places and acquire new values, many of the

traditional notions relating to role allocation, resource distribution, exercise of power and authority undergo changes. Nuclear families tend to become more popular among the educated sections because growing access to education is definitely a factor which promotes individualism.

Ross refers to the special skills and training that are required by new occupations. There is a growing desire on the part of many to improve their life conditions, and formal education which gives access to new skills is definetely the major means of achieving social mobility. In many middle and upper class families, great value is placed on higher education as a means of furthering one's life chances. Parents look upon education as a sure step to success for their wards and today, in many families first generation learners are leaving their homes to seek educational opportunities outside. Better access to education means greater access to well paid jobs and social mobility. When once persons settle down in a new place and get accustomed to a new style of life, it is very likely that they may not return to their parental families. Education thus creates a whole new range of opportunity structures to people, as a result of which changes in family structure and functions become inevitable.

Education has been primarily responsible for creating new attitudes in and towards women. Education gives women the kind of exposure needed to question and challenge the existing gender stereotypes in the family. Concepts such as 'dual parenting', 'shared responsibility for domestic work' are but products of the new experiences that women have been undergoing because, as women receive education and move out of the closed family circle, their world expands and new ideas emerge.

Education is thus a major factor contributing to change in the structure and functions of the family.

Urbanization

Urbanization is another factor that has affected family patterns. One of the marked features of recent times is the rapid growth of urban population. The fact that a large number of people migrate from rural to

urban areas is, in itself a factor that disintegrates the traditional joint family. The feeling that urban areas provide better life chances brings thousands of rural people into large urban centres and they leave their families behind. Urban life gives greater freedom of choice and movement and many of the tradtional values upheld by families may seem impractical to urban dwellers. Also, those who take up occupations which are considered non-traditional tend to question the power bases within the family and this is bound to bring about changes in the traditional roles and responsibilities of members in a family. There is a greater likelihood of urban dwellers adopting non-conformist attitudes towards joint family and its traditional values.

Urban life also widens one's contact network and thus gives greater exposure to people. Urban life also respects individualism and personal desires and most people today would prefer to be on their own rather than tolerate unwanted interference. There is also a tremendous amount of media exposure in urban areas, and the young would especially like to be on their own after learning from the electronic media about the varied opportunities available to them. Urban way of life has definitely altered the very perceptions of the young towards the family.

Urban life has also changed attitudes of women towards gender stereotypes in the family. When they become aware of the changing roles of women and also the innumerable opportunities available for economic participation and emancipation, women are bound to raise questions and also protest against gender based discrimination.

Urban residence as well as urban contact, have, more than in one way affected family patterns and forms.

Industrialization

The impact of industrialization began to be felt in India in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first half of the twentieth century. Urban centres grow up around industries and a whole range of services and facilities began to be offered by industries. These new services changed

the very face of family life. The pre-industrialized society was characterized by the following:

i) Agrarian non-monetized economy

ii) A level of technology where the domestic unit was also the unit of economic exchange.

iii) A similarity in occupations followed by parents, children and siblings.

iv) A value system which upheld the authority of elders above all else.

But industrialization brought about changes of a far reaching nature in society in general, and family in particular. In the economic field it created the need for specialized occupations, paved the way for occupational mobility and introduced market economy. The family could not give the kind of training required by modern occupations and this responsibility was handed over to institutions imparting formal education. With a close link being established between modern occupations and social mobility, there began a large scale influx of rural population into urban areas and this migration definitely affected the family.

The impact of industrialization on the family has been felt in more than one way. Family which was a major unit of production as well as consumption is, by and large, reduced to being a unit of consumption only. In the traditional family, learning took place in a very informal way, mainly through such processes as observation, imitation and participation. As the young came up of age, they took upon family responsibilities without much persuasion, for they had been made to realize that this was a part of the survival strategies of the family. But industrialization kept children away from the place of employment. However, the fact that a large number of children in India work under extremely hazardous conditions in industries cannot be ignored. This is a direct consequence of poverty and growing population.

Industrial wages are generally fixed and the system of wage payment reduced the dependence of the young or their families. Acquisition of skills the desire for a free and fair life and the innumerable opportunities provide

by the ever expanding industrial sector have actually made it possible for people to question family authority and interference. A large number of support services are also provided by institutions outside the family as a result of which dependence on the family is being reduced. As industries grow in number and size, a large number of facilities are created by, as well as around, these industries and they directly affect the roles and responsibilities of the family.

Changing Nature of Relationships

As a person's contact network widens, his/her relationships with other members in the family are bound to change. As long as the family was the major unit of production, consumption and distribution, an individual's dependence on the family was almost total. Kinship relations were considered very crucial and mutual obligations among different kin groups were considered very important. But today, our relationships with forces outside the home play an important role in determining the course of our lives and hence we have to maintain a balance in the different kinds of relationships we have built up. Relationships within the family tend to become fewer and fewer and distances between parents and children, adults and the young keep growing. The family cannot demand the undivided attention of its members any more and frictions have become more frequent today than ever before. The family fabric is severely threatened and whether, one likes it or not, one has to admit the fact that the family cannot occupy the central place in one's life.

Changes in the Institution of Marriage

Marriage which was once purely a family affair is becoming more and more a matter of private concern. Laws relating to age at marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption and maintenance have actually brought about marked changes in the institution of marriage. There is a considerable amount of freedom in mate selection and other decisions relating to marriage. Marriages are becoming more secular in character and family disapproval is often bypassed. But it is to be noted with great dismay and concern here, that as the family's role in marriage related decisions goes

diminishing on the one hand, on the other, there is the growing menace of dowry for which the family is, by and large, solely responsible.

Legal Provisions

Law has definetely played its part in ushering in changes in the family. Compared to a time when individuals had virtually no scope to question family authority or interference, today there is a great deal of freedom of choice. This has been basically made possible by a large number of legal provisions which have been introduced in India from time to time. Be it adoption, inheritance, maintenance, marriage or education the law comes to one's rescue provided one is aware of it and also ready to use it. Law has definitely brought about changes of a far-reaching nature in the Indian family.

Besides the factors mentioned above, there are also such forces as the media, peer group pressures and growing access to information which have been responsible for ushering changes in family in India. It is to be however, noted that, change co-exists with an element of permanence in the Indian family.

UNIT - VI

STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Every society allocates different roles to its members based on certain factors. The two most important criteria taken into consideration for role allocation are gender and age. Virtually every society is characterized by what is called the gender division of labour. At this juncture it is relevant to understand the meaning of the term 'gender'. Gender does not just refer to the biological differences between men and women, but it is basically a social construction of the differences that are supposed to exist between men and women. Keeping the biological bases of gender division, every society has allocated different statuses to men and women and this has resulted in the creation of a social order which is not only gender unequal but also gender unjust. An examination of the status of women in India during different periods of time will provide an insight into the different factors that have led to the creation of a gender unequal social system.

Before we embark on a discussion of the status of women in India we should clearly realize one important factor. There cannot be a common status for all women in India. Status is closely affected by considerations of caste, class, religion and also region. Not all women have equal access to opportunities for development and it is this factor which determines a woman's status. However, based on available data sources an attempt is made in the section that follows, to provide an insight into the status of women in India during different periods of time.

STATUS OF WOMEN DURING ANCIENT PERIOD

The Rig veda is the oldest source of information available on the ancient period. It is basically a religious text and a detailed account of the social conditions prevalent during the times, including the status of women, is not available in the Rig veda. However, it is possible to construct a picture of the status of women during this period on the basis of available information.

During the period of the Rig veda there was near equality between men and women in various areas of social life. Marriage was basically an economic understanding or a contract between the husband and wife and the parents took joint responsibility for bringing up their children. It was true that even during the period of Rig veda society was male dominated, but women did not face the kind of oppression which they started facing in later times. It is learnt from data sources that child marriage was non-existent during the period. Marriage was not contracted between those that were not mature and hence, the question of exploiting girl children in the name of early marriage never arose. Girls continued to receive education upto the time they were married and knowledge was not really considered a male prerogative as it happened during later times. It should also be noted that during this period there was no opposition to widow marriage.

A perusal of Rig vedic literature shows that the period of the Rig veda was characterized by many social values which more or less upheld gender equality. There is a reference in Rig veda to a system in which the husband's brother or a close male relative could invite a widow from her husband's funeral pyre to marry him. This reference is indicative of the social sanction that was accorded to widow marriage during this period. As child marriages were not in vogue, men and women had the freedom to choose their partners in marriage.

Both in family life and the religious sphere men and women had equal responsibilities. Though there are no specific references to the modes of gender based divisions of properties, it becomes imperative from the available references that women did have a share in property. It can be said that during the Rig vedic period men and women enjoyed near equal status in different walks of life.

The post Rig vedic period could be divided into three broad categories, viz., the period of the Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads. It was at that point of time in the history of India when an admixture between the

Aryan and Dravidian cultures was taking place and as a result, the post Rig vedic period saw marked changes in society's approach to the question of women's equality. The notions of purity and pollution gained ground and women began to be considered as impure during puberty or child birth. This led to a decline in the participation of women in the religious sphere.

Male dominance began to express itself overtly during the period of the Samhitas. There began a system of tracing the lineage through the male line and this led to women being denied the right to parental property. Belief in the concept of rebirth gained strong ground and elaborate rituals began to be performed to attain Moksha. The right of performing the ritual vested with a male heir in a social system which was clearly male dominated.

The declining status of women and the rising status of men during the later Vedic age could be primarily attributed to three factors, they being:

1. The performance of rituals to achieve salvation.

2. Protection of ancestral property.

3. Providing safety and shelter to parents during old age.

The increasing importance being attached to sons not only devalued daughters in the family but in all other social institutions. A woman who gave birth to a son received social sanction and the mother of a daughter was looked down upon. Likewise, a woman who predeceased her husband was worshipped and a widow was ostracized. Women had to live in a state of dependence on their male relatives all the time and the freedom which they once enjoyed was gradually curtailed.

During the period of the Rig veda marriage was contractual in nature but towards the end of the Vedic period it came to be viewed as a sacrament and thus the notion of permanent bondage gained prominence. However,

it is to be noted that even at this stage child marriages were not in vogue. Though there are references to polygamous marriages, monogamy was the most prevalent form of marriage.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN DURING THE PERIOD OF EPICS

While studying the status of women in India during the ancient period it is necessary to lay special emphasis on the position they occupied in society during the period of the two great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. The portrayal of women characters in the two epics gives us an idea of the status of women during the times.

Ramayana and Mahabharata, the two oft quoted works exercise a profound influence on the Hindu psyche even today. Sita and Draupadi the two central women characters in Ramayana and Mahabharata respectively are being cited as 'models' for Hindu women. It is strange but true that even in contemporary times, when modernizing influences have brought about changes of a far-reaching nature in social life, the imprint left by the epic characters is very strong.

Between Sita and Draupadi, it is Sita who is more often quoted as the ideal Hindu women. The Ramayana portrays the character of Sita as a self-sacrificing and obedient wife. At all times, she has an unflinching loyalty towards her husband Rama and unquestioningly accepts his superiority. She accompanies her husband to the forest on her own free will and goes through untold miseries for his sake. Sita is thus viewed as an embodiment of feminine virtues and her image has been accorded a virtual divine status. The character of Sita has been eulogized through both folk and modern media and in may homes daughters are socialized to behave and live like Sita. In spite of being suspected and excommunicated by her husband on account of doubts being expressed about fidelity and chastity, Sita never protests. She even steps into the fire (Agni pareeksha) to prove her chastity. The fact that there is no episode in the Ramayana where Rama's loyalty or chastity is ever questioned by

Sita is indicative of the dual standards of morality that prevailed during the times in question.

The social situations that prevailed during the period of the epic Mahabharata were somewhat different from those that prevailed during the period of Ramayana. Though monogamy was the most accepted form of marriage, polygamous marriages were not looked down upon. The fact that Draupadi the central woman figure in Mahabharata was married to the five Pandava brothers needs to be noted here. Also worth noting is the fact that children who were born outside the institutional arrangement called marriage did not face social ridicule. The system of Niyoga (an arrangement where a woman could have sexual relationship with a man other than her husband, in case she failed to beget male progeny) was practiced by many during this period. This, however, shows the importance that was attached to a male child.

In contrast to the character of Sita, Draupadi emerges as a person endowed with a strong will and self-esteem. She has a personality of her own. Also one does not see in Draupadi the kind of servitude to male authority that is visible in many Indian women.

Though there are references to Sati in Mahabharata, it was not mandatory. There are references in the Mahabharata to women who after the death of their spouses ran their families by shouldering the entire responsibility. One can infer from the available resources that child marriages were in vogue and that the will of the persons to be married was respected in arranging marriages. Widow marriage, however, was fast losing social sanction.

During the period of the Mahabharata women and men jointly participated in many social events and women did not really live in seclusion, a trend which set in later. A perusal of the available references shows that women enjoyed considerable freedom and equality during the days in question.

WOMEN DURING THE PERIOD OF DHARMASHASTRAS/SMRITIS

The period following the times of the epics assumes significance while tracing the history of events that led to the rise and fall of women's social status. It was during this period that the Dharmashastras were written and contemporary life began to be shaped on the lines of values propagated by the Dharmashastras. The Dharmashastras not only prescribed norms which acted as the code of conduct but also laid down that violation of these norms should be accompanied by punishment.

Among the Dharmashastras, two of the Smritis, the Manu Smriti and Yagnavalkya Smriti are important from the point of view of analyzing women's status. Manu and Yagnavalkya prescribed norms that were to govern women's lives for several centuries to come. A gist of the views of the major Smritikaras on the position of women is given below:

Women are dependents at all times during their life. The view of Manu that in her childhood a woman should live under the control of her father, in youth under her husband and in old age under her son had wide social acceptance. Manu's ideas posed a real challenge to women's emancipation and from then onwards there was a steady decline in the status of women. Though there was a fall in the age at marriage, Manu did not make child marriage mandatory. He opined that a daughter could continue to live in her father's house until she found a suitable husband. Yagnavalkya, however, laid down that girls should be married before they attained puberty and parents who failed to do so would be committing a grave sin. As the Dharmashastras upheld the idea that an unmarried woman would never attain Moksha (salvation), marriage became a compulsory ritual in the life of women. Until about the time of the Yagnavalkya smriti, women were being married only after they reached adulthood. But because of the values created and perpetuated by the Yagnavalkya smriti, early marriages came into vogue and several practices that were detrimental to women's emancipation came into existence.

Though the Dharmashastras stipulated that girls should be married before they attained puberty, there were no restrictions laid down relating to the age at which men had to marry. Marriage was considered the ultimate goal of a woman's life but men had the freedom to remain single if they wished.

In a marital relationship a man had absolute control over his wife and could even award punishment if he felt that she had erred. Because of the stress laid on chastity and its glorification neither divorce nor widow marriage was acceptable. Women were totally relegated to the background and girl child was begun to be treated as a liability. This situation more or less continues in several Indian families even today.

WOMEN DURING THE PERIOD OF BUDDHISM AND JAINISM

Buddhism and Jainism came into being as a result of the complex conditions created during the period of Smritis. Buddhism was a protest movement which revolted against Brahminical orthodoxy and the anti-progress values of Hinduism. Though Buddhism did not have any special concern for enhancing women's status, some of the Buddhist values created conditions which were actually favourable to women's progress. Buddhism did not really believe that marriage was a sacrament which had to be honoured for life. On the contrary, Buddha considered that marriage was a social and economic agreement between the partners concerned. If any partner wanted to move out of a marital relationship in order to accept religious life he/she was free to do so. Buddhism never forbade women from participating in religious discourses or activities. Buddhism also recognized widow marriage and by doing so put a restraint on the practice of Sati among its adherents. Neither did Buddhism place too much stress on Pativratya nor did it reject polygyny or polyandry. On the whole, Buddhism not only created conditions favourable to women's emancipation but also decried such practices as Sati, child marriage and compulsory widowhood.

Jainism, a contemporary of Buddhism targetted the caste ridden Hindu social structure and tried to uphold the value of social equality. But Jainism could not keep away from the influence of Hinduism and as a result did not do much to create or spread progressive values relating to the status of women.

STATUS OF WOMEN DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The influence of Buddhism and Jainism gradually started weaning after 8th century. In the history of India the post-Buddhist period is identified as the medieval period. This period stretches upto the time the British arrived in India. This period was known for the downward trends that set in the socio-religious-political life of this country. Women became targets of many social evils during this period. This influence of Hinduism which had receded to the background on account of the rise of Buddhism, again came to the forefront and the anti women values perpetuated by Hindu ideologies once again received a fillip. There were more hurdles to women's progress during this period than those that existed during the period of the Dharmashastras. Woman were denied access to knowledge and were kept away from vedic studies. Social evils such as Sati, child marriage, female infanticide, imposed widowhood thrived and widow marriage was banned. The Dharmashastras were revived and assumed a more complex and rigid form. As a result women were deprived of all opportunities for social participation. A stage was reached when women were considered and even treated as slaves.

The medieval period also saw the rise of Islam. Just as Buddhism emerged as an alternative to oppressive practices in Hindu religion, Islam also created hopes among several oppressed groups. Islam, however, brought along with it certain values which did not help to raise the conditions of women.

The contact with Islam introduced the practice of Purdah into Indian Culture. Under the Purdah system women had to cover their head and face as well as other parts of the body. This deepened the isolation of

women and there was a further divide between women and other groups in society. Women who practiced Purdah could have contact only with menfolk in their families and were virtually cut off from the rest of the world. There even arose a situation where women who did not use Purdah began to be treated with disrespect. As a result this Muslim practice began to be emulated by Hindu women also. Purdah not only resulted in physical isolation but also in social isolation. The Muslim rulers did not make any efforts to bring marked changes in Indian life. They no doubt rejected Sati but did not prevent the Hindu women from committing Sati. Almost all the evils that were present in this society as far as women were concerned, continued even during the Muslim rule. Women's position touched an all time low during the Medieval period.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN MODERN INDIA

The Muslim rule in India ended with the advent of the British. For nearly two centuries after the establishment of the East India Company, the British mainly concentrated on consolidating their empire and strengthening such sectors as trade and commerce. Their policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the natives, especially in matters pertaining to religion kept them away from doing anything worthwhile for the sake of Indian women. This apathy, however, could not continue for long. The British had to take interest in the life and problems of the Indian people.

The position of women was at the lowest ebb when the British came to India. Social evils such as Sati, female infanticide, child marriage, ban on widow marriage, denial of access to education and health care acted as real blocks to women's development. But unlike the earlier periods, during the British period efforts began to be made in a very systematic way to counter these evils. The credit of initiating the movement for women's emancipation goes to the 19th century Indian social reformers, who, inspite of facing severe opposition strode ahead with a determination to question the gender blind social system of the day. It was Raja Rammohan Roy, the well known social reformer from Bengal who prevailed

upon the then Governor General Lord William Bentinck to abolish the inhuman practice of Sati. It was due to the efforts of this benevolent administrator and the committed reformer that Sati was abolished by an Act passed in 1828. No doubt, the move was welcomed by all right thinking and progressive Indians, but the abolition of Sati gave rise to a new set of problems. In view of the fact that widows were not permitted to marry, those wives who did not die along with their husbands were made to feel miserable and were ill treated to the core. The plight of young widows was especially deplorable. Neither were they welcome in the parental home nor in the marital home. There was no access to education and this was a further handicap. Doomed in ignorance, steeped in tradition and ostracized by a change resistant value system most widows lived a life of utter misery.

It was the plight of the young widows that specially caught the attention of another great reformer from Bengal, Eshwarachandra Vidyasagar. He spearheaded the campaign for widow marriage and impressed upon the British Government the need to introduce a legislation lifting the ban on widow marriage. It is due to the efforts of Eshwarachandra Vidyasagar that in 1856 the Widow Remarriage Act was passed, thus making widow marriage legally acceptable. The two Acts under reference were laudable but did not succeed in bringing about the desired changes to the extent that they were desirable. But the fact that a stage was reached when laws could be passed against Sati and the ban on widow marriage indicated that change was on the anvil. The 19th century heralded the rise of a movement for the creation of a gender sensitive social order, a movement which is alive and active even to this day.

The next piece of legislation which could be considered as important as far as ensuring gender equality is concerned, was the Civil Marriage Act passed in the year 1872. This Act laid stress on registration of Hindu Marriages, besides giving legal approval to widow marriage and inter-caste marriage. It also lent support to monogamous marriages. The abolition of child marriage was also one of the objectives of this Act. It is not that the legislative response to the need for change in women's position brought

changes of a far reaching nature, but these efforts provided a real boost to a movement which was fighting against injustice and inhuman practices.

The 19th century was marked by the spread of democratic values and an increasing realization of the need to reject age old beliefs and practices that had no relevance to changing times. Due to the efforts of several Indian reformers who had a real concern and zeal for providing educational opportunities for girls and women, the British rulers initiated many positive moves to help women gain access to knowledge. But there was a major block to women getting education, and that was early marriage. Hence efforts began to be made to mount pressure on the British rulers to pass a law raising the age at marriage. The major credit for obtaining legal approval for raising the age at marriage goes to Rao Bahadur Harbildas Sarda. Child marriage was a major obstacle to women's development. Leave alone child marriages, cradle marriages and marriages between unborn children were also being arranged. If for some reason a husband died the wife had to remain a widow all her life, ostracized by society and unwanted by her own kith and kin. In 1929 a law was passed banning child marriage. Because of his association with the movement to ban child marriage, the 1929 Act came to be known as Sarda Act. As per the provisions of this Act, a girl who was below 14 years of age and a man who was below 18 years of age could not be married. This Act was amended in 1978 and the minimum age at marriage was raised to 18 years for women and 21 years for men.

The modern age which was heralded by the British saw changes of great importance as far as raising the status of women was concerned. It is true that when the British left India in 1947, there was a lot desirable to be achieved in the field of women's development, but by responding positively to the call for change the British paved the way for an era of reform and progress that was to come later.

WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT INDIA - FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR CHANGE

The process of liberating women from the clutches of oppressive traditions which began during the British times continued even after independence. In fact, the dawn of independence ushered in hopes of new changes which would bring about all-round development of women. The Indian constitution conferred on women the right to equality of opportunity. thus removing all barriers to the participation of women in different spheres of social and economic life. Besides the constitutional guarantee of equality of opportunities, a number of other legal provisions and welfare schemes were also introduced. Even to this day new acts and new schemes are being introduced to protect the interests of women and help them fight for their rights.

As a result of the efforts being made to bring about a transformation in the nature and extent of women's participation in all walks of life, we can see visible changes in the opportunities available to women in different spheres of social and economic life. Public opinion regarding such issues as education of girls, age at marriage,and employment of women is changing and we find many women, being able to break the traditional barriers to their emancipation. Compared to the situation in which women lived and worked at the time the country won her independence, there has been a significant improvement in the performance of women in different areas of social and economic life today. However, there is no uniformity in the way women have been able to break the barriers to their development. There are strong differences between women in urban and rural areas, women in different religious and caste groups and also in different classes. It is in this context that it was rated earlier that it is not possible to make a common statement about all Indian women.

Women constitute nearly half the country's population. In a theoretical sense they enjoy near total equality, but not all of them have equal access to developmental opportunities. In many cases, the constitutional guarantee of equality has not been able to help women surmount the strong barriers

that exist to the utilization of these equal opportunities. Time old prejudices and gender insensitive values have posed a real challenge to the efforts at ensuring gender justice. It is extremely sad to note that while on the one hand, many women are marching ahead in the path of progress, a large number of them continue to languish in conditions which are detrimental to their well-being and progress.

A cause for grave concern is the decreasing number of women in the country's population. The sex ratio which stood at 972 females per 1000 males in 1901, now stands at an all time low of 927 females per 1000 males (1991 census data). This decline cannot be simply attributed to biological factors but it is a product of socio-cultural values which have led to differential access to society's resources for men and women. In many families, even today girls/women are denied nutritious food and access to health care. The decline in sex ratio is a clear example of the neglect of the development priorities of women/girl children. This is especially true in the case of states like Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Since independence there has been a gradual increase in the level of female literacy, but the level of progress is nowhere near satisfactory. The rate of female literacy which was only 8.86 per cent in 1951 rose to 39.42 per cent in 1991, but the hard truth is that 60 per cent of the country's female population is still illiterate. There are also widespread disparities between one state and another in this matter. While in Kerala, female literacy is stated to be 86.93 per cent, in Rajasthan it is 20.84 per cent. Many among the girls who enrol themselves into schools drop out at a very early age because of such factors as early marriage, family responsibilities and family apathy towards girls' education. Drop out rates among girls between classes one and eight is stated to be as high as 70.05 per cent.

It is true that there has been a visible improvement in the availability of health care services in India during the past few years, but the distribution and location of these facilities is uneven. Most of the health

care services are concentrated in urban areas and rural needs are severely neglected. But rural women's access to and utilization of health care facilities is still more limited. A UNICEF Report states that out of the 12 million girls born in India every year, 25 per cent do not survive beyond the age of 15 years. About 3 lakh more girls die annually than boys. Maternal mortality rates are very high and stand between 400–500 for 1 lakh live births. In rural India the rates are far higher.

Indian women are only 22.69 per cent of the country's work force. As many as 90 per cent of India's women work force is in the unorganized sector of economy and suffer from various forms of discrimination such as unequal wages, long working hours and no protection from labour legislation. Women's house work hardly gets the kind of recognition it merits and women are victims of double drudgery.

There is also a disturbing increase in the incidence of violence against women. While on the one hand, new forms of legislation are being introduced to protect women against violence, on the other hand new forms of violence and in an increased degree are being perpetrated against women. According to a release by the National Crime Records Bureau there is a criminal offence against women every 7 minutes.

Though the figures and facts stated in the previous paragraphs raise serious questions about the current status of Indian Women, it must be admitted that compared to the situation that prevailed at the time when India won her freedom, there has been considerable change in every walk of life. From a state of near invisibility, women have been able to make their presence felt in the social and economic life of the country. The very fact that there is a legal solution to all the major problems which women encountered in the path of development is in itself a landmark in the struggle for women's emancipation. If the legal safeguards have not been and cannot be used by all women to their benefit, it is because basic changes required in the social structure and in the attitudes of the people have not been brought about. Gender prejudices cut across barriers of caste, class, region and religion and these prejudices operate at every stage

to curtail efforts at emancipating women from the clutches of bondage. If women's emancipation has to be achieved in a meaningful way there should be a strict and rigid implementation of all the laws and programmes that have a bearing on their lives.

The efforts to give special representation to women in the country's decision making process needs special mention. The provision of 33 per cent reservation to women in local self government and the movement to extend this benefit even to state assemblies and the Parliament is a major step in the efforts at drawing women into the country's decision making process. Male dominated values have tried to put up a strong resistance to this effort, but when women enter the decision making process in a big way, change is bound to occur. Public opinion has to be built in support of this historic move and all opposition must be stiffly encountered.

In conclusion, it can be said that change and rigidity seem to co-exist in the case of women in India. While it is wrong to say that everything has changed, it is also wrong to jump to the conclusion that nothing has changed. The media have also played a crucial role in moulding public opinion against gender inequality, but many of the media programmes and policies are still gender insensitive. Given the hold the media have on the public psyche, they should be used to create positive images of women.

Real empowerment of women, especially rural women, can come by providing functional literacy, opening creches, community kitchens, clean drinking water sources and access to low cost fuel and fodder. Flexible, school timings and a meaningful curriculum are also some of the ways by which girls and women can be released from the bonds that hinder them from developing awareness.

The women's movement has already made its inroads into different parts of the country and autonomous women's groups have taken up issues of a wide ranging nature that have a bearing on women's lives. Provision of equal opportunities on the one hand, and awareness building efforts on the other hand can together go a long way in ushering gender justice.

UNIT – VIII

BACKWARD CLASSES, SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES

In any society some people are better placed because they have facilities and opportunities for development. They can equip themselves and pursue careers which give them high social status and wealth. By contrast there are those who belong to disadvantaged groups as they do not have access to society's resources which help them to equip themselves. Consequently they are not in a position either to attain status or obtain wealth. In the caste ridden Hindu social order it is birth into a certain caste that determines the place a person occupies in the caste hierarchy. Social or economic status has often been inextricably linked to caste status.

The term Backward classes refers to three distinct categories of Indian population, viz., Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other Backward Classes who are entitled to what is today come to be known as positive discrimination under the provision of the Indian Constitution. The other Backward Classes are a vague category. The term Backward Classes is mentioned in the Constitution of India in a most general way. There is neither an all India list nor are they enumerated separately in the census. The problems of the three categories viz., Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes are in many ways different and it may be misleading to consider them together beyond a certain point. The term Backward Classes is not defined in the Constitution. But in accordance with the provisions of Article 340 of the Constitution, the President of India has been empowered to appoint a Backward Classes Commission to investigate the conditions of socially backward classes within the territory of India and make suitable recommendations to take necessary steps for their upliftment. From the history of Backward Classes Movement in India, it becomes clear that these groups belong to the Sudra Varna, albeit with

a hierarchy amongst themselves and they constitute the most populous segment of the Indian population.

Divisions on caste basis have been a ubiquitous feature of Indian Society. The Hindu population presents a very complex structure which is divided into different castes and sub castes. Ritual, social, economic, political and educational privileges which were arranged in a hierarchical order were traditionally conferred on upper castes who in turn monopolized the advantages that these privileges brought with them. Castes that were in the lower rungs of the social hierarchy were denied opportunities for development and bore the brunt of social and economic oppression. The caste based Hindu social order is severely divided and presents a classic example of deprived opportunities and privileges.

In the caste ridden Hindu social order where there is an association between caste and socio-economic status, a handful of higher castes cornered most of the privileges. Majority of the others were deprived of the bare essentials of life. Hence the most pressing challenge before the country after independence was the reduction of disparities between the "haves" and "have nots", the integration of the hitherto marginalized groups into the social mainstream and the establishment of a more egalitarian society committed to the principles of social justice and economic equality.

As per the provisions of Article 340 of the Constitution, the Government of India appointed the first Backward Classes Commission in 1953 with Kakasaheb Kalelkar as the Chairman. The Commission prepared a list of 2399 castes as socially and educationally backward out of which 837 were classified as most backward. The Commission also made some important recommendations which are yet to be implemented.

A second Backward Classes Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of B.P. Mandal in December, 1978. It was estimated that to the exclusion of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, Backward Classes constituted 52 per cent of the Indian population. The Commission

recommended 27 per cent reservation for the other Backward classes and directed that this reservation should apply to all government services.

Almost all the states in India, particularly the southern states have appointed Backward Classes Commissions from time to time and have identified Backward Classes in their respective states. Hitherto several policies have been formulated for their upliftment. Measures such as reservation of seats in educational institutions, appointments and provision of scholarships, freeships, and hostel facilities are some of the ways by which social justice is proposed to be ensured.

It has already been mentioned earlier that the Indian constitution does not define the term Backward Classes. Justice K. Subba Rao, former Chief Justice of India defined Backward Classes as an 'ascertainable and identifiable group of persons based on caste, religion, race, language, occupation and such others with definite characteristics of backwardness in various aspects of human existence–social, cultural economic, political and such others'. The criteria adopted by the first Backward Classes Commission to identify the Backward Classes could be considered relevant even today. The criteria were as follows:

1. Those casts which were in the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy.
2. Castes, most of whose members are educationally backward.
3. Those castes that have either low or no representation in government service.
4. Those castes who do not have enough representation in commerce, trade and business sectors.

The Backward Classes largely consist of agricultural and landless labour or tenants without occupancy rights. There may also be some members who are owners of small land holdings and those who are without security of employment.

The appointment of Backward Classes Commissions for ameliorating the conditions of backward classes has no doubt resulted in bringing some

improvement in their conditions but the benefits of reservation are not reaching all the needy and deserving sections among the backward classes. In every backward group there is a 'creamy layer' which is garnering most of the benefits meant for the backward classes. Whenever there is an effort to leave the creamy layer out of the benefits of reservation because of the fact that the group under question has been able to achieve sufficient progress there are protests. These protests pose threats to the government in power and the order is either withdrawn or new concessions are offered to appease the groups that are unhappy. Backwardness has become a bogey in which many individuals who have already been able to get over socio-economic disadvantages try to ride towards progress and in the process, leave the disadvantaged in their own groups more marginalized and impoverished. That there is a 'clamour for backwardness' is one of the hard realities of Indian society today.

If any viable solutions have to be offered to the problems confronting Backward classes, more realistic indices to identify backwardness must be identified. The movement for ushering social justice gains a meaningful momentum only when those groups who have been hitherto denied opportunities for participation in the mainstream development process are absorbed into this development exercise both as participants and beneficiaries.

SCHEDULED CASTES

The concept scheduled castes has been used in the Indian Constitution. Though the Constitution does not give any specific definition for the term scheduled castes, Article 341 of the Constitution empowers the President of India to declare any group as scheduled caste and give it sanction and the scheduled castes are entitled for protection under special provisions enlisted in the Constitution.

The scheduled castes are those groups which are considered as occupying the lowest rungs in the caste hierarchy. The terms 'Harijan' and 'Dalit' are used synonymously with the term scheduled castes. In the

traditional Hindu social order the scheduled castes were kept outside the mainstream because the occupations which were performed by them were considered unclean. Scheduled castes were also branded as untouchable castes by the upper castes and were kept in physical and social isolation. They were prevented from appearing before the caste Hindus in many parts of the country and subjected to various forms of humiliation. Though caste related prejudices are slowly on the decline, it is a matter of great regret and also concern that oppression of scheduled castes is continuing in several regions of the country in different forms and in different proportions.

Problems Faced by Scheduled Castes

As per the census of 1991 the scheduled castes constitute 16.5 per cent of the country's population. Most of the scheduled castes either work as agricultural labour or in occupations placed in the lower rungs of the occupational hierarchy. The scheduled castes have been suffering from certain forms of discrimination for centuries and due to legislative action and influence of modern values, the extent of this discrimination has only lessened. In many places scheduled castes are being denied entry to places of worship, educational institutions and hotels. They also may not have access to sources of drinking water.

In many villages scheduled castes are still living in separate localities on the outskirts of the village. Though untouchability has been declared a punishable offence, it is practiced in some form or the other in many places. There was not just physical isolation but also social isolation between the scheduled castes and other caste Hindus and in many places this isolation more or less continues.

The economic conditions of a large percentage of the scheduled caste population are still miserable. For a long time they did not own land or any other assets. Many of them even worked as bonded labour. The policy of protective discrimination has no doubt opened up opportunities to some scheduled castes in sectors like education and employment. Yet a large number of them still remain outside the ambit of these benefits.

It is true that with constitutional provisions giving special reservation to scheduled castes in educational institutions, some among them have been able to overcome the barriers that existed to acquisition of knowledge. Caste related prejudices have been by and large eliminated in educational institutions, but even today one hears of scheduled caste children being denied entry into some schools, or being discriminated against in class rooms or in the school premises. Those among the scheduled castes who have been able to receive the benefits of higher education generally emerge as an elite group and most of the benefits aimed at the development of the group tend to go their way

The constitutional provision of reservation of places in employment has not been utilized by all sections among the scheduled castes in the same way and to the same extent. A large number of the rural scheduled castes work as agricultural labour and there has not been any meaningful change in their economic conditions. The urban educated scheduled castes who have been able to overcome the traditional disadvantages are in a position to pass on the advantages which they have received from their education or employment to their children. Though government initiatives have helped rural scheduled castes to seek opportunities for higher education, there are a large number among them who continue to live a life of deprivation. Most of those who work in low paid and back-breaking jobs can hardly provide for their children the kind of opportunities required for achieving social mobility. Even today certain occupations such as scavenging, cleaning toilets, carrying night soil, cleaning raw hide, stitching or repairing footwear are being performed only by scheduled castes. In a traditional society, occupations that were considered unclean were not being performed by any group other than the scheduled castes, but that situation has not changed much inspite of all the laws and strictures being prescribed for discriminating against scheduled castes. This only goes to show that caste prejudices die hard and deep rooted social evils yet continue to hold society in their sway.

SCHEDULED TRIBES

India is among those countries of the world with a large concentration of tribal population. The tribals of India are also known as Adivasis. The term 'tribe' has not been defined anywhere in the Constitution and it is rather difficult to evolve a commonly accepted definition of the concept tribe. In a general sense, tribes are referred to as groups of people living in forest and mountain regions and in close proximity with nature. As per Article 342 of the Indian Constitution, the President of India can issue a proclamation identifying and declaring a group as a Scheduled Tribe in any state or union territory based on the recommendations of the Governor.

For a long time the tribals lived in near physical and social isolation from the world outside. But the last few decades have witnessed the establishment of increasing contact between the tribal and non-tribal groups. There is in reality no tribal group today which has been able to maintain its identity in toto. However, different groups of tribals are in different stages of transition. The unique and distinguishable features of many tribal groups are slowly disappearing and there is a conscious or unconscious effort being made to integrate the tribal groups into what is being referred to as 'mainstream society'.

Though it is no longer possible to evolve a common definition for the word 'tribe' or make a comprehensive list of characteristics that could help us to identify all tribals, some of the predominant features of tribal culture that gave it the kind of uniqueness which is today being threatened could be identified. Even today most tribal groups live in close proximity with forests and their life and culture are closely linked to the forests. Tribal economy is by and large forest based. Devoid of any special skills which can equip them to find employment in formal occupations, the tribals depend upon the forest for their livelihood. The agricultural practices of tribals were closely related to the forest. Cultivation which was the predominant mode of agriculture adopted by the tribals is virtually non-existent today due to increasing restrictions being placed on the use of forests. Forest laws have curtailed the free movement of people in forest

regions and tribal rights over forest land have been severely curtailed. Also, use of minor forest produce by the tribals has been restricted to a large extent and this has left the tribals in a state of utter dependence and marginalization.

With tribal access to forests being severely restricted, the health and well being of many tribal groups is negatively affected. When tribals ate the fresh and nutritious food grown in the forests, they were healthy and did not suffer from serious medical complications. Many diseases which bothered modern society did not affect the tribals, but today the situation has changed. Very often they have to buy food and many tribals cannot afford this. Poverty, hunger, malnutrition, impoverishment are problems with which many tribal groups have been living for years.

As compared to non-tribal groups, tribal societies were not characterized by severe forms of gender inequality. Tribal women had more freedom and leisure and ate healthy and wholesome food. Such social evils as child marriage, dowry, marital cruelty were not really found in tribal societies. But increasing contact with non-tribal societies has resulted in the infiltration of such values which are threatening to affect the gender just tribal social order.

It thus becomes clear that tribal societies are in a state of transition. Today many tribal groups stand on the brink of impoverishment and marginalization. The benefits of tribal development programmes are not reaching the poor and needy among the tribal groups. There is yet another dangerous trend that is being noticed in India with reference to tribal population. In many parts of the country new lists of tribal groups are being prepared and many non-tribal, urban groups are getting the tribal tag, in the process, depriving the real tribals the benefits of reservation and other constitutional safeguards.

Both the central and state governments are spending crores of rupees on tribal development, but when one reviews the impact of these programmes, one is bound to be disappointed. Some tribal groups have

virtually reached a state of total collapse and seem to be fighting a grim battle for survival. Some groups such as the north-eastern hill tribals seem to have reached a considerable state of development and at times one is even inclined to feel that they have not retained any tribal characteristics. The Christian missionaries have played a significant role in tribal development or uplift in this region. It is not that there are no problems here, but atleast basic amenities of life are available to many and access to education has helped them overcome many traditional barriers to development.

Even in other parts of India the voluntary sector is playing a very significant role in tribal development. The tribal struggle for land rights in different parts of the country has been mainly inspired by the voluntary groups working with the tribals. The mindless onslaught that is going on in the name of development is being slowly realized by many tribal groups, and tribal resistance to outside interference has often taken the form of violent struggles and clashes. The development efforts have, however, not succeeded in bringing any marked change in the conditions of most tribals.

Constitutional Protection for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Realizing the need to integrate the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the mainstream development process, the Indian Constitution has provided a number of special benefits to members of the two groups. Equality or opportunity, ensured by law in different spheres of life has little meaning to those groups who have borne the brunt of social oppression for centuries. While efforts at ensuring equality are only a few decades old, discrimination against these groups has a history of centuries. As long as the policy of 'protective discrimination' is not in operation the disadvantaged groups will never be able to reap the fruits of development even to a small extent. Underlined below are some of the major constitutional safeguards meant for the development of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

1. Article 15(4) of the constitution lays down that seats can be reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes in Educational institutions.

2. Article 16(4) lays down that reservation will be provided to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes in jobs in government and government aided institutions.

3. Article 17 abolishes untouchability and prohibits its practice in any form. The Untouchability (offenses) Act was passed in 1955 and in 1976 there was an amendment to this Act which renamed it Protection of Civil Rights Act. This Act prohibits practice of untouchability in any form.

4. As per the provisions of Article 46 the educational and economic interests of weaker sections, especially Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have to be promoted by the government. Article 46 also protects these groups against social injustice and other forms of exploitation.

5. Article 338 empowers the President to appoint a special officer for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This officer is empowered to examine whether all the provisions enlisted in the Constitution are being made available to them.

6. According to Article 330 seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Loksabha. As per the provisions of Article 334 this provision of special representation would be in operation for 50 years. Initially this provision of special representation was meant to last for a period of 10 years after the constitution came into existence. This facility was extended by 10 years, four times. It will now come to an end in 2000 A.D.

7. As per the provisions of Article 341 the President of India, in consultation with the states or union territories can from time to time publish a list of castes or groups that can be included to the already existing list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Changing Conditions and Factors Responsible for Changes

During the past five decades changes have taken place in the situation of all backward classes in the country. However, there is no uniformity either in the nature of changes or in their impact. It is true that constitutional guarantees went a long way in providing opportunities to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes for a meaningful participation in the country's mainstream development process. There has been a growing awareness of the kind of deprivation they have suffered for centuries and this awareness has manifested itself in expressions of anger and backlash at caste Hindus. Dr. Ambedkar who was a pioneer in the movement against caste based oppression played a key role in mobilizing the Dalit opinion against such social evils as untouchability, ignorance and superstition. His call to the scheduled castes to educate, agitate and organize left a deep impression on the movement for the emancipation of the oppressed. Dr. Ambedkar who was the chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution played a key role in evolving a system of constitutional safeguards to counter the long drawn oppression of the scheduled castes.

Increasing opportunities for education and employment in the government sector have brought about significant changes in the socio-economic conditions of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. But unfortunately the impact of these changes seems to be limited to select individuals who have emerged as a 'new elite' among these groups. The fact that constitutional benefits do not often percolate down to those who need it most, shows that social and economic backwardness is not a disadvantage that cannot be simply wished away.

There is a growing trend which is affecting the future of the scheduled tribes in a negative way. Lured by the constitutional safeguards that are available to Scheduled Tribes many groups, most of which are urban based are demanding and finding their way into the list of scheduled tribes. The clamour for a backward tag is a trend that is growing unabated in many parts of the country. The forest dwelling tribals cannot compete with the new but advantaged entrants into the tribal ranks and end up being further

marginalized and exploited. If measures are not taken immediately to stop this misuse of the policy of protective discrimination, its very purpose stands challenged.

It is definitely true that change is on the anvil. We have come a long way since the times when the caste Hindus virtually had every social institution in their control. Not only have opportunities for progress and change expanded but also the pattern of their utilization has changed. Those groups which at one point of time in Indian social history could never think of forming the social mainstream have been able to find a place in it. The very face of Indian social institutions has been changing due to modernizing influences. New questions are being asked about caste based oppression and the process of deconstruction of the rigid caste order has already been set in motion. Constitutional and legal guarantees along with a growing awareness of one's deprivations as well as rights is bringing about changes in people's perceptions.

A strong social movement against caste based oppression has now emerged as a force to reckon with and provides the ideological component to the struggle of the backward and oppressed. This movement which has a history of over a century has spread its influence far and wide and has gained a mass base. The issue is not simply one of one caste against the other but covers a whole gamut of socio-economic and political questions. The Dalit Movements everywhere may not have a common ideology or a common methodology, but the fact that serious questions are being asked about caste based oppression which has a history of centuries is in itself a very significant change.

We have to, however, end this role with a word of caution. Mere provision of equal opportunities does not ensure equal utilization of these opportunities. It is only when these conditions which are obstructing the emergence of an egalitarian social order are removed that change in a meaningful and viable sense will take place in the lives of the backward sections of the Indian Society.

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