

The image features a large, light gray watermark of the IGNOU logo and text. The logo on the left consists of a stylized 'U' with a 'G' inside a circle. To the right, the text 'ignou' is written in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with 'THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY' in all caps below it. A vertical line separates the logo from the text.

**BLOCK 3**

**PEASANTS AND PEASANTRY**



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## UNIT 7 THE CONCEPT OF PEASANTRY\*

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- 7.1 Historical Background
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### Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will know:

- Who are peasants and what is peasantry;
- How to differentiate them from others;
- What is the significance of understanding peasants and peasantry as a category of society; and
- The relevance of understanding peasants and peasantry in today's context.

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## 7.0 INTRODUCTION

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In anthropology, the concept of peasant and peasantry, as a category of society, gained currency with the work of Robert Redfield, who introduced the study of peasants as part-society and part-culture. Though the definition of peasants was given by Kroeber (1948) in just one paragraph in his book on anthropology, it was Redfield who gave central position to study of peasants in anthropology. This was also one of the early attempts to study complex societies. Traditionally, anthropologists were studying simple societies that were remotely located and were largely complete societies. Peasant societies are comparatively complex, thus the study of complex societies by anthropologists began. Redfield introduced the concept of folk-urban continuum as a model to analyse complex societies. This has provided anthropologists greater scope to apply the theory and methodology that they have developed over the years, to the study of different strata of humanity. In a way, Redfield initiated the move to expand the scope of anthropology from the study of simple societies to more complex ones.

It is debatable whether peasants and peasantry are a distinct category or only a stage in the development of human history that 'disappeared' with the advancement of capitalism, as Hamza Alavi (in Shanin, 1986), Theodor Shanin

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\* Contributed by Prof. R. Siva Prasad (Retired), Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad

(1986) and others argue. Whatever be the arguments, the concept of peasants and peasantry has evoked a lot of interest among anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists.

One question that arises is, in view of the sweeping changes that have occurred in the economy and social structure all across the globe, are peasants or peasantry relevant in today's context? If so, how far it is relevant to study peasants and peasantry as a social category? This unit attempts to answer these questions and help the reader to have a logical understanding of the concept of peasants and peasantry and its relevance.

It is wrong to presume that the study of peasants and peasantry is no longer useful due to the many changes that have taken place in the economic, societal, and cultural realms. Birgit Muller points out, "After a long period of silence and disinterest, the term "peasant" entered centerstage again in 2013, when peasant organizations convinced the Human Rights Council in Geneva to initiate negotiations toward establishing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. ... Anthropologists have further asked whether the term "peasant" has become attractive again because it has evolved to become an aspirational category or ideal type linked to the political claim of "food sovereignty": the right of "peoples" to define or control their food system" (2018: 1).

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## 7.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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To understand the concept of peasants and peasantry, we need to understand the historical background under which the peasants existed. Muller observed that, "The term 'peasant' occurred in Old Middle English to designate people who worked the land and were tied to it. The term is derived from the Old French word *paisent* (country dweller). Its translation into Spanish, *campesino*, has similar roots in the word *campo* (countryside), whereas the German *bauer* (from the Old German term *bur*) designated a social category different from the nobles and the town dwellers, with specific rights and obligations often subordinated to landlords, and inferior to townspeople (*Burger*). ... In medieval societies of Europe, peasants were tied as persons to their lords. This lasted until 1861 in Russia, where the peasants constituted a "social estate," bound to landlords' properties with no right to geographical mobility. In much of Latin America, *de jure* and *de facto* systems of debt peonage and unpaid labor persisted until at least the mid-twentieth century; these were called *huasipungo* in Ecuador, *colonato* in Bolivia and Central America, *yanacanje* in Peru, *inquilinaje* in Chile, and *cambão* in Brazil. ... The "peasant condition" is thus historically one of "subordination, domination, and exploitation" (2018: 1-2). This points out to the historical linkage of peasants with feudalism in the medieval period in the West.

Redfield (1960) observed that the hallmark of civilisation is the emergence of peasants. In a way, peasants are linked to the growth of urban places, as the surplus extracted from the peasantry was used on the maintenance of living standards of the feudal lords and the hierarchies of governance. In fact, in many cultures, as observed earlier, peasants are regarded as a stage of development linked to urban places, be they towns or cities. For instance, in the middle ages in Europe, serfs engaged in agriculture grouped around the manorial class. Similarly marginal farmers living in villages close to small towns or cities, sold

their products there are regarded as peasants. In India and elsewhere peasants have been present over a long period.

It was Redfield who brought peasants into the fold of anthropology and sociology. As observed earlier, he also brought in the concept of folk-urban continuum as a theoretical argument of the typology that he devised. More importantly, it opened a window for the anthropologists to study more complex societies using their traditional methodologies, modifying them suitably. Traditionally anthropologists were studying social associations and institutions like the family, marriage, kinship, religion and social organisation. These are found to be important among peasant societies and thus, studying peasant societies became attractive to anthropologists. Also, it has provided a larger canvass to anthropologists than just studying remote tribal societies, which anyway are in the process of transforming into peasant societies. It also provided them an arena to test their theoretical formulations.

Is peasantry a distinct social category or only a part of the historical stage of feudalism? Some believe that peasants are bound to disappear with the advancement of capitalism, while others argue that the peasantry has a distinct economic logic in contrast to the logic of capitalism. They argue that peasants have long survived capitalism and continue to exist. They have also attempted to demonstrate that the peasant rebellions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have changed the course of world history (Eric Wolf in Shanin, 1987). Many argue that despite the heterogeneous nature of the peasantry, peasants form a large part of the world's humanity and share some common characteristics, though there may be regional variations. Hence, it is worthwhile to understand from an anthropological or sociological point of view, about peasants and peasantry.

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## **7.2 PEASANTS AND PEASANTRY**

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There is a clear link between peasants and market towns. Redfield unequivocally stated that, "There were no peasants before the first cities" (1953: 31). Kroeber was the first to identify the link between the peasants and the city. This is very clear from his now-famous definition of peasants (1948: 284). This clearly indicates that peasants are linked to markets. However, they are not swept by markets as they are, in the words of James Scott (in Shanin, 1987), largely a moral economy guided by a distinct economic logic.

As mentioned earlier, peasants are a heterogeneous group. In this context, Redfield observed that, "Peasant society and culture have something generic about it ... (that is) ... an arrangement of humanity with some similarities all over the world" (1956: 25). In other words, despite diversity, peasants share many common features. Burton Stein, another well-known anthropologist, said, "Peasant agrarian relationships are aspects of social and cultural systems; they are human adaptations to the natural environment within a social and cultural framework" (1980: 16). This implies that peasants are a social category with significant features in common across the globe spanning rural areas, yet linked to urban centres.

Peasantry and gentry are regarded as two contrasts. Gentry is the class of people just below the category of nobility, usually referred to as landed gentry, while the peasantry work for the landed as they are the underdogs.

**Check Your Progress**

1) Who said that there were no peasants before the first cities?

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**7.3 DEFINITION OF PEASANTS AND PEASANTRY**

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The credit for defining peasants goes to A.L. Kroeber. According to him, “Peasants constitute part-societies with part-cultures. They are definitely rural – yet live in relation to market towns; they form a class segment of a larger population which usually contains also urban centers... They lack isolation, the political autonomy, and self-sufficiency of tribal populations; but their local units retain much of their old identity, integration, and attachment to soil and cults” (1948: 284).

The peasantry can be defined in terms of their subordination to the groups of outsiders who are not cultivators but control them through different means. As a result of this, peasantry not only has to produce for their own sustenance but also for the demands of the outsiders. They always struggle to keep a balance between these two, their own, and the demands of the outsiders. Peasants are always regarded as a source of cheap labour which can be used to increase the power of those who control them. This clearly indicates their underdog position (Wolf: 1946: 13).

Susana Narotzky observed that, “Certain aspects have been common to all attempts at defining peasantries: agricultural production, ownership of some means of production, a form of control over land and family labor, an orientation to household and community reproduction, and subjection to dominant groups that appropriate surplus. ...The concept of peasant was often imbued with an idea of a natural economy. It described peasants as members of self-sufficient households that could endlessly reproduce their means of livelihood and retain the sense of worth and purpose resulting from a nonalienated relationship with nature and production. Although admittedly part of the larger society, peasants were understood as forming part of communities, which in turn were pictured as united by strong solidarity ties, jointly struggling against the outside aggressions of an external power exacting surplus” (2016: 303). This description by Susana Narotzky provides, in general terms, a summary view of peasants and peasantry.

Theodor Shanin (1975 and 1987) considers peasants as ‘a mystification’ because in any given village there are rich and poor, landowners and tenant households as well as hired people, thereby one does not find ‘any continuity of smooth gradations’. He considers how history added “its dimension of diversity for even ‘the same’ would not be the same in different years, decades and centuries.” In support of this, he provides examples of feudal Burgundy, slash and burn bushland of Tanzania, merchandised Punjab, etc. Thus, he pointed out the problem in defining the term peasants.

John Embree in 1939, in his writing about a Japanese village, described peasants as a distinct category. He pointed out the similarities and differences between peasant and pre-literate groups. According to him, “A peasant community possesses many of the characteristics of a pre-literate society, e.g., an intimate local group, strong kinship ties, and periodic gatherings in honor of some deified aspect of the environment” (1939: xi). However, he pointed out the important differences of peasants from the simple societies wherein the peasant groups are regarded as a “part of a larger nation which controls its economic life, enforces a code of law, from above, and, more recently, requires education in national schools” (1939: xi-xii). He has also observed that “The economic basis of life is not conditioned by the local requirements ... The farmer’s crop is adjusted to the needs of the state” (1939: xii). Another important dimension that he has brought out to show the lack of independence from outside influence is the case of religion and rituals. He observed that “While full of local variations, the rituals and festivals are not indigenous to the community nor is the community spiritually self-sufficient” (1939: xii). This highlights the dependence of the peasant on the others for various aspects.

Eric Wolf tried to define peasants more narrowly as compared to scholars like Firth who tried to define peasants in a much broader sense of producers like the fishermen and artisans. Firth justified his use of the term arguing that “Like the European peasantry the Oriental peasantry are communities of producers on a small scale, with simple equipment and market organisation, often relying on what they produce for their subsistence” (1946: 22). Eric Wolf (1955: 453-540) argued that, “we must remember that definitions are tools of thought, not eternal verities”. He wanted to define the term “peasant” as strictly as possible. He used three distinctions as the basis for such his definition.

- he looks at peasants as only agricultural producers,
- he distinguishes peasants from tenants, as, unlike the tenant, the peasant has effective control on land, and
- he believes the peasant aims at subsistence, not at reinvestment. The starting point for the peasant is the needs that are defined by his culture. The peasant sells cash crops only to get money to buy goods and services that he does not produce or have. In contrast, a farmer looks at agriculture as an enterprise.

Thus, for Wolf “the term ‘peasant’ indicates a structural relationship, not a particular culture content.”

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## 7.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF PEASANTS AND PEASANTRY

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Theodor Shanin (1987) has observed four distinct features of the peasant society: They are:

- 1) The family farm is regarded as a basic unit of a multidimensional social organisation and production, labour and consumption revolve around it,
- 2) Land husbandry is the main source of livelihood that forms the basis for providing the consumption needs,
- 3) The traditional culture related to the way of life of small communities is specific to peasant societies, and

- 4) The peasants are regarded as in an underdog position and are dominated by outsiders who wield complete control over the peasants in all respects, be it economically, politically, socially, or culturally.

It is important to understand what distinguishes peasant societies from others. They are distinguished from the others based on six important characteristics (Shanin, 1987):

- 1) Peasants are largely involved in extensive self-employment as they use their family labour in their production activities. Also, they have control over their means of production, and the production is largely for self-consumption. They have multi-dimensional occupational expertise (Galeski, 1972). As Eric Wolf (1966) observed, the emphasis is on growing rather than on manufacturing with the economic system maintaining a particular balance of agriculture, animal husbandry, gathering, and crafts. As Chayanov (in Shanin, 1987) noted, the performance calculations are distinctly different from capitalistic enterprises.
- 2) There is a greater amount of similarity among the peasants concerning patterns and inclinations of political organisation. For instance, systems of brokers and patronage, the tendency for vertical division and factionalism, and a place for banditry and guerrilla struggle.
- 3) There is a greater amount of similarity between norms and cognitions among peasant societies. They are regarded as traditional and conformist in their rationalisations, with the predominance of oral traditions and specific 'cognitive maps' like the circular perception of time, patterns of socialisation, training, ideological tendencies.
- 4) The characteristic units of social organisation and its functioning also show similarity among the peasants across the globe.
- 5) One can easily identify analytically specific social dynamics of peasant societies, explicitly concerning social production, such as production and reproduction of social relations, patterns of inheritance and succession.
- 6) The causes of structural transformation and its patterns have something generic and specific to the peasants.

Given this, it is important to understand the difference between peasants and 'primitive' cultivators. This distinction will make us understand the concept of peasant and peasantry as distinctly different from primitive cultivators and other producers.

### **Check Your Progress**

- 2) What is the view of Eric Wolf in defining peasants?

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## **7.5 PEASANTS AND PRIMITIVE CULTIVATORS**

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Eric Wolf (1946) made an important distinction between peasants and primitive cultivators and also how peasants are different from farmers. Peasants are a part of a 'larger, compound society' which is distinctly different from 'primitive band/tribe', though primitives rarely 'live in isolation'. It is important to remember that primitive cultivators or producers have control over the means of production that also includes their own labour. They indulge in exchanging their labour for



‘the culturally defined equivalent goods and services of others’. During the process of cultural evolution, Wolf argues that “such simple systems have been superseded by others in which control of the means of production, including the disposition of human labour, passes from the hand of primary producer into the hands of groups that do not carry on the productive process themselves, but assume instead special executive and administrative functions, backed by the use of force.” Here ‘goods and services are furnished to a center and only later redirected’ (1946: 3).

On the contrary, as observed by Eric Wolf, peasants are “rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers that uses the surpluses both to under-write its own standards of living and to distribute the remainder to groups in society that do not farm but must be fed for their specific goods and services in turn.” (1946: 3-4).

Eric Wolf (1946) states that the process of transition of primitives to peasants is one of simple to complex social order. He makes a comparison between peasants and primitive cultivators in terms of three types of surpluses:

- 1) replacement fund,
- 2) ceremonial fund, and
- 3) fund of rent.

He argues that, “cultivators must not only furnish themselves with minimum caloric rations; they must also raise enough food beyond this to provide sufficient seed for next year’s crop, or to provide feed for their livestock. So, this amount is not absolute surpluses” (1946: 6). In fact, ‘replacement fund’ is what the cultivator needs to replace his ‘minimum equipment’ required ‘for both production and consumption’. Replacement fund should be looked at in terms of the cultural workout rather than purely technical arrangement. Similarly, the cultivators have to allocate their resources for ceremonies at the individual as well as at the community level that can be termed as a ceremonial fund, which is also not a surplus in the real sense. These two are common for both types of cultivators, primitive and peasant. But what differentiates the two is the fund of rent that is absent among the primitive cultivators. However, now the primitives are turning into real peasants. It is important to note that the peasants are the producers of social wealth but are downgraded to a subordinate position. The peasantry is defined principally in terms of its ‘subordinate relationship to a group of controlling outsiders’. The peasantry is always ‘forced to maintain balance between its own demands and the demands of the outsiders and will be subject to the tensions produced by this struggle to keep the balance’ (Wolf, 1946: 13). For the outsider, the peasant is a source of labour to ‘increase his fund of power’.

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## 7.6 PEASANTS AND FARMERS

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Peasants are regarded as “settled agriculturalists who employ a low level of technology” in pursuit of their agricultural operations. Eric Wolf (1946) looked at the peasants as ‘rural cultivators’ raising crops and livestock and are distinctly different from farmers. The important distinction is that the peasants are not dependent on the market for their survival, rather the market is dependent on the production of the peasants. Peasants always had control over their production and inputs, including labour. Their major focus is to produce primarily for self-consumption, and additionally for the non-producing dominant outsiders who also need to be fed.

On the contrary, farmers produce for the market and, hence, produce crops with an eye on the market. Therefore, if there are any fluctuations in the market a farmer’s living gets affected. A farmer is dependent on the market for different inputs, like seeds, fertilisers, credit, availability of labour during the season, and any fluctuations in the market affect the farmers badly. That is why we see today different development (economic) initiatives by the governments to help the farmers on various counts since their production is important for the society at large.

**Check Your Progress**

3) What is the difference between the peasant and the farmer?

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### 7.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF PEASANT STUDIES

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Eric Wolf, a pioneer in peasant studies, points out that the enlargement of the scope of peasant studies has had three important effects.

- It has brought about a notable convergence in the efforts of sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and of economic and social historians. One by-product of this convergence has been a common interest in patron-client systems .
- It has prompted a significant increase – not perhaps in wide-ranging, global theory – but in studies falling within the ‘middle range’ between theoretical efforts cast at high levels of abstraction and narrowly conceived local studies.
- These studies all evidence a growth in sophistication both in the questions asked and in the kinds of materials utilized to provide the answers ... Thus concern with the problems of peasantry has become one of the growth points of interdisciplinary comparative research, less through institutional organization than through convergent interests shared by a number of scholars.

“The appearance of Etudes Rurales in Paris, of the Journal of Peasant Studies in London, and of the Peasant Newsletter, based at the University of Pittsburgh, further aids in the spread of this growing network of communication” (1975: 386).

The study of peasant societies and village studies in India has thrown out many previously established concepts and provided an in-depth understanding of the functioning of village society and its social structure. This has also helped social scientists to understand the nuances of rural society, economy, polity, value system etc., that has significance for rural development in India and elsewhere. Given this, studying of peasant societies is of greater relevance today than earlier. Even when we find the peasants have, to some extent, turned into farmers, their attitude

continues to be of peasants. Their value system, mindset, production outlook continues to be still in the mould of peasants. Given this, it is all the more important for us to study the peasant societies for better planning and policymaking.

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## 7.8 SUMMARY

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Peasants form a large section of humanity. Thanks to the efforts of Redfield, they have now become a subject of interest for anthropologists and sociologists. Anthropologists who were earlier studying the pre-literate societies found it somewhat easier to switch over to studying peasant societies. This has opened up a new window for anthropologists to study complex societies. This has been beneficial both theoretically and methodologically. New concepts like the folk-urban continuum have evolved to look at the linkages between the rural and urban social structures.

This unit attempted to explain the concept of peasant and peasantry and the way different scholars have tried to define them. Most prominent among them are Kroeber, Redfield, Erik Wolf and Theodor Shanin. Peasants are considered as sub-ordinate to the outsiders who control them and extract both their produce and labour for their self-aggrandisement. An attempt has also been made to understand the difference between peasants and primitive cultivators. We also tried to understand the characteristics of peasants and the debates about whether peasants are a distinct category or will disappear with the advancement of capitalism.

We have tried to understand the relevance of peasant studies in today's context and looked at the way the peasant mindset works. It is pointed out that there is a greater need today to study peasants as it will be useful for policy and planning, especially in rural development. Peasant studies become all the more important as we need to understand the way social and economic transformation of the society at large has impacted the peasants and agricultural production.

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## 7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK PROGRESS

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- 1) Robert Redfield.
- 2) Eric Wolf thought that the definition of peasant should be narrowed down.
- 3) Peasant production is for self-consumption while the farmer produces for the market.

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## UNIT 8 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN VILLAGE\*

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### Contents

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Demographic Facts
- 8.2 Social Organization
- 8.3 Landholding and Agriculture
- 8.4 Impact of Market Economy on Villages
- 8.5 Summary
- 8.6 References
- 8.7 Answers to Check Progress

### Learning Objectives:

After going through this unit, you will learn about:

- the anthropological tradition of village studies;
- the anthropological perspective of rural society and its economy in India;
- the interrelationships among various inhabitants in the village community; and
- the peasantry, rural agriculture and the changes that are taking place.

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### 8.0 INTRODUCTION

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Village studies in India have been the concern of not only anthropologists, but also sociologists, historians, economists and other social scientists. However, contribution of anthropologists has been quite commendable. While administrators and ethnographers of the colonial government showed great interest in understanding the village community, it was for their own purpose of governance and understanding. Anthropologists focused on the same, but in the background of human history. Indian villages provide remarkable evidence of the evolutionary processes through which human civilization has passed, from the stage of rural community of settled agriculture to the stage where human communities are characterized by specialized economy, private ownership and emergence of leadership based on surplus economy.

After the independence, anthropological studies of rural society were carried out both for academic interests as well as national development concerns. In the academic domain, these became a testing ground of the anthropological methods of data collection such as participant observation by living in the village for long durations and descriptive analysis of the qualitative data gathered, as opposed to the Indological studies that were deeply entrenched in dwelling upon the Sanskrit texts to gain an understanding of Indian society of the past. The anthropologists opted the “field view” rather than the “book view”; and continued the civilizational approach.

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The village in India represents the peasant community and its connection with the urban society. While the closed society everywhere else gradually transformed into class societies with the growth of markets and industry, western scholars argue that Indian society has remained unchanged, even though India was ruled by various rulers, not only Hindu but also Mughal and British. However, Indian scholars have maintained that Indian society did undergo changes due to sanskritization, westernization and modernization, though the basic structure has remained the same; and the pace at which it has been changing due to external and internal forces has increased during the post-colonial period.

The government of India, in its efforts to modernize society, consciously introduced planned change. The global trend of inter-connections of nation states, markets and globalization have affected the rural masses of India. While social scientists have employed different theoretical perspectives such as functionalism, class and Marxism to study villages, anthropologists have largely adhered to structural-functionalism and structuralism. Of late, academic debates and discussions have centered on issues such as validity of village as a unit of analysis and methods of data collection for understanding the complexity of Indian society.

In the present unit our focus is on the characteristics of Indian villages.

### **History of Village Studies**

Anthropological studies of the Indian village began in 1950s with short essays published in edited volumes (Marriott 1955, Srinivas 1955). The first full-length book on this topic was Dube's *Indian Village*, which came out in 1955. The number of such publications increased in 1960s but declined sharply after late 1970s through 1990s. However, in late 1990s, such studies reappeared in the form of 're-study' of the Indian village. All these studies mainly deal with the cultural life of rural populations. These are considered important contributions not only for understanding Indian rural society and its changing patterns but also as an important source of information to the government, economists and others for planning and development of the nation.

From the cultural point of view, the village is seen as a 'microcosm' of the larger complex Indian society that has a long history of civilization. Close observation of the village society reveals that the village is not an isolated entity. It is the melting pot of the past, present and future Indian societies. The re-studies essentially trace the social and economic changes and emerging new forms of the village. Some of these also pay special attention to certain important dimensions of village life such as kinship, politics, inequality, exploitation, gifts, resistance, and rituals. These works enable us to understand the characteristics of Indian village as opposed to say, a Mexican village or any other, as also urban India.

### **Demographic Facts**

As one moves from north to south or east to west, one finds villages of various sizes in terms of demography and composition of households. Such variations can be mapped along linguistic lines or by geographical location. Nevertheless, there is both a degree of similarity as well as difference between villages. No village is a replica of another and each has its own distinctiveness in terms of its history, composition, geographical background, mode of life etc. Some villages could have as few as 500 inhabitants and some as many as 2,500. Some are closer to urban centers and others, farther away.

During colonial times, according to Diane P. Mines , some villages were “joint” and some were “severalty (ryotwari)”.

- The joint villages, mostly in Northern India, are further subdivided into pattidari and zamindari.
  - o In Punjab province there were villages of *pattidar* in which separate land shareholders lived.
  - o In zamindari villages the tenant lived in the village while the *zamindar* lived in the same village or a different one.
- The “severalty” category of villages is mostly found in central India. In this form, individual households owned the land.

Srinivas writes about two types of villages found in the west coast of Kerala and Gujarat.

- Nucleated villages: where all diverse inhabitants congregate in one location,
- Dispersed villages: where the inhabitants are segregated and households of one lineage or unilineal group live together and cultivate the land held by its members.

Further, in some villages all the inhabitants are Hindu while in some others there can be both Hindu and Muslim inhabitants. In yet others, there could be inhabitants who have embraced different religions. They may also differ in terms of ethnic composition. Some villages are inhabited by different castes, while others are composed of castes and tribes. Some tribal villages are of exclusively one tribe, yet others consist of different tribes occupying different locations in the village. Further, while in most villages, all the villagers speak the same language, in some, the inhabitants speak more than one language, being bi-lingual or tri-lingual. With all these differences, the Indian village has always been in a position of advantage, to shape the political, social and cultural outlook of its people.

In the colonial times when communication was poorly developed, the villagers lived in relative isolation as they were connected to only few villages in the vicinity. The physical isolation had its own impact on the inhabitants, but as communication improved, the networking of villagers increased as also the impact of external factors on them, through mass media. Today, most of the villages in the country are connected by road except few that are located in inaccessible hilly terrains, and those that become isolated during events such as floods.

**Check Your Progress**

- 1) In which years anthropological studies of the Indian village began and declined?

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## Social Organization

**Village Council:** Each village has a village council having representatives of important and different social groups, which may be based on language, caste, tribe, religion etc. All issues pertaining to the village or between the social groups are discussed in the village council.

In turn each social group has its own internal council with heads of all households as its members. Any dispute with regard to traditional norms of the group, marital issues between members, land issues or any issue that requires involvement of the group level council are brought before it for resolution.

The village was originally vertically connected to the chiefdom that functioned under a chief whose superior authority was the king, the ruler of the region. During the colonial period, such vertical structure lost its significance and totally disappeared in the post-colonial era.

**Caste and the village:** In a multi-caste village, households of several castes live together. Usually each caste member occupies a particular space. While the numerically dominant caste usually takes the central location, the ritually impure caste households remain in the fringe or outside of the village or even outskirts of the village. Each caste generally has a history of its origin, mostly as oral tradition. These castes operate in a system of interdependent relations, known as the *jajmani* system. William Wiser, a missionary, when writing about Karimpur village in Uttar Pradesh, for the first time described these interdependent caste relations as the dominant characteristic feature of the Indian village, which he called the *jajmani* system. Anthropologists have debated and discussed quite extensively on the nature of the *jajmani* system and the changes that are taking place.

Different forms of *jajmani* system have been discovered in different parts of the country:

- Balutidari or vatandari (Maharashtra),
- Hali (Gujarat),
- Ayakattu (Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh),

Each caste group in the village is bound by its own norms and regulations in terms of practiced dress and ornaments, marriage and other life cycle rituals – birth, puberty and death. As regards the location of their stay in the village and the nature of relationship between them, some groups are part of the village while some are partly out of the village.

In several south Indian villages, Brahmins are partly out of the village for they are superior to everybody else, the untouchable castes are also partly out of the village as they are considered inferior to the main caste groups of the village. The Muslims usually stand outside the village. In this kind of structured relations, ethnic groups that occasionally live in a multi-caste village are also partly out of the village but usually placed above the untouchables in the social hierarchy. Thus, not only is there a hierarchical structure in the village community, but also a sense of being or not being a part of the village.

In tribal concentrated areas villages may have either households of a single tribe or more than one tribe. In certain tribal pockets, one finds features of multi-caste



villages in tribal hamlets. Few households of different tribes live together occupying a common territory, each tribe has a specific role to play in the village and thus they maintain distinctive socio-economic relations. Such situations are found in Nilgiri hills of Tamil Nadu where Kota live along with Toda and Badaga. Similarly, in Visakhapatnam Agency area Mukha Dora, Konda Dora, Kotia and Valmiki tribe have socio-economic relations. While one tribe is a ritual specialist, another is music player, yet another takes the role of settling disputes and so on.

Either a caste or a tribe may be endogamous. Interestingly enough, the ideas of exogamy and endogamy are also extended to the village. In North India, villages are exogamous which means a woman cannot be married to a man of the same village, rather she is given in marriage to some other village. Further, a man cannot marry a woman of the village from where a woman was already given in marriage to the man's village, in an earlier transaction. Thus marital transactions take place across the villages.

In South India, since there is preferential cross-cousin marriage, a brother's son marries daughter of sister's son or father's sister's son marries sister's daughter. Thus in these cases, marriages do take place within the village.

**Solidarity:** The village not only has physical unity, but also social solidarity. A person identifies with the village as his/her native village where one is born. The characteristics attributed to the village apply to all who reside there regardless of caste identity. Families belonging to different castes of the same village also exhibit solidarity despite the fact that they are segregated and unrelated either through agnatic or affinal relations. However, a caste stands united against another when a dispute arises between a member of a caste and a member of another caste. Such unity stands even across village boundaries. A caste whose members are few gets support from the same caste of another village in case of need, such as a conflict or physical assault. It is also important to note that at times caste alignment takes place on grounds such as ritual purity, economic dependence, common interest and so on. It would not be uncommon if, in a serious dispute between an untouchable caste and an upper caste, the latter draws support from all upper castes.

**Dominant caste:** Srinivas (1955) has developed the concept of dominant caste, which helps us in understanding village life. According to him, a dominant caste is:

- numerically large
- enjoys high ritual status,
- has political and economic strength.

The members of this caste play an important role in the village council in decision making. They settle the disputes of other castes, for they can exercise physical coercion if need be, and outweigh others in physical strength. It also sets a model for others to follow, to respect the code of every other caste in the village, even when some of their norms may not be the same.

**Joint family:** Studies have revealed that the ideal type of family, i.e. joint family, is more commonly found in villages. The joint family is usually related to the economy of the households. While such families are generally patriarchal and patrilineal, in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Meghalaya states, some castes and tribes

maintain matrilineal joint families. The joint family system has been declining in India over the years. Often, a family undergoes a cycle of joint family to nuclear family to joint family in the course of time, which means that a joint family breaks down into a nuclear one when the members cannot maintain it, for example, brothers demanding separate living. Later, one such nuclear family may develop into a joint family. Nevertheless, joint families are found mostly among the economically sound upper castes rather than poor lower and untouchable castes. The nuclear families comprising the joint family usually live together under the same roof or share a compound. Normally they together hold their land as undivided holding. The inheritance, and division of joint property, movable and immovable, if necessary, follow the rules of Hindu Succession Act, legislated on the basis of traditional code of conduct enshrined in the Hindu scriptures. Traditionally, women did not inherit property, but now they have the right to inheritance.

**The *jajmani* system:** Social relations in the village are largely based on agrarian economy. The dominant caste possesses most of the agricultural land in the village, though the size of the holding by individual families may vary. All castes traditionally practiced their defined occupations, which were immutable. The *jajman* or *yajman*, is the ritual head of the household and also the owner of landed property. The castes that provide services to this household such as the Brahmin, carpenter, washerman, barber and others are known as the *kamins*. The *jajman* and the *kamins* comprise the *jajmani* system. These could be understood as patron and client; the patron who owns land maintains permanent and inherited relations with one of the households of the client's caste. Though the clients provided services throughout the year, the patron made payments for the services rendered in the traditional practice by giving grain at the threshing floor during harvest. What should be the amount of payment is arrived at by mutual agreement in the beginning of the year, which can be reevaluated only in the next year. Only in exceptional cases, the patron changed their clients. The patrons engaged daily wage labourers from time to time depending on the need for agricultural operations.

The service castes extend their services to the village temples as well. During festivals when the gods are worshipped in the temples, the service castes provide their services of cleaning the temple premises, lighting, music etc., similar to the patrons in the village. In the village rituals of South India, participation of untouchable castes is mandatory though their entry into the temples of Sanskrit deities is restricted.

The number of families of service castes would be fewer than the number of patrons. Therefore, in some villages the clients make their own arrangement of equal distribution of their patrons. A few washermen or barber families may have to serve a large number of patrons; so, they equally distribute the families of patrons which are of different sizes and serve them for a specific period, and then there will be redistribution of patron families such that one need not serve a large family which may provide a substantial income all the time or a small family that may not provide as much income.

The *jajmani* relations are not restricted to the village in case of service castes. They often extend their services to the neighbouring villages also. In a village if there is no barber, the barber of the neighbouring village offers his services. Further, as the castes are divided into sub-castes, in some cases, the sub-castes

are specialized in certain professions. In such cases, the sub-castes maintain permanent relations with patron castes and sub-castes in different villages in the area. For example, in Nellore and Chittoor districts of Andhra Pradesh, the Kommulollu of Madiga sub-caste provide funeral music to Golla caste. The former does not live in all villages; these families of x-village provide services to the Golla caste families living in the villages of a particular area (a). Likewise, Kommulollu of y-village provide their services to the Gollas of another area (b). Whenever there is a need of their services, they visit the patron family that lives in the other village and perform the traditional role.

It is argued that the interdependency of castes has sustained the system for ages, and provided guaranteed employment to all service castes. In fact, this system is not purely economic; being hierarchical in nature, it is blended with personal and emotional bonds between individuals. As a result, the clients enjoyed several benefits apart from sustenance. The system integrates all the castes and gives a sense of unity among its inhabitants. However, there are divergent opinions in this regard, as some scholars are of the view that the system is inherently exploitative and the service castes and landless labourers are exploited by the landholding upper castes. Most importantly, as Louis Dumont argued, *jajmani* relations are not basically economic in nature, rather they are religious in nature and the payments made to the service castes do not necessarily follow the economic principle of value of services and goods.

It is important to note that the relations between the patron and the client are no longer permanent, and in most of the cases they are replaced by contractual arrangements. The payments in kind are now replaced by cash. Further, today individuals from all castes have the freedom to practice any occupation.

### Check Your Progress

2) Define *jajmani* system.

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### Landholding and Agriculture

The backbone of village economy is essentially agriculture, though not everyone depends on land and agriculture. A few live on cattle tending, petty trade and business, masonry, tailoring, leather work, service in government offices and so on. More than three fourths of the families live on agriculture; these are families of landlords, marginal farmers and agricultural labourers.

**The Cultural Background of Agriculture:** Land ownership patterns and land regulations have undergone tremendous changes through the ages. Ancient India saw individual as well as collective ownership of land. There also existed the phenomenon of conquest, appropriation and collection of revenue. The king was considered the owner of the land, though communal and private landed property existed. Brahmins cultivated land despite being proscribed to practice cultivation.

According to Manu, Brahmins must devote themselves to study and meditation and become priests. Cultivation was to be carried out by Shudras, and untouchables who stayed outside the village.

A clearer picture emerges during the colonial period with the emergence of systematic collection of revenues. At the time *zamindari*, *ryotwari* and *mahalvari* systems were prevalent. There existed a large population of attached landless agricultural labour, who were not entitled to hold land. In South India, they were sold along with the land.

The following land was rent-free and not transferred to others:

- Land donated to Brahmins (*brahmadeya* land),
- Land donated to temples for maintenance (*strotiriyam* land),
- Land donated to service castes in the village (*inam* land),
- Lands belonging to the masjid (*inam* land).

Neither *brahmadeya* nor *inam* land was cultivated by the Brahmins or service castes. Rather, they were leased out to others. The temple's or masjid's *inam* lands were also leased out, and not necessarily to Hindu or Muslim cultivators but others as well.

**Land Tenure:** Independent India not only abolished zamindari system but also brought land reforms and redistributed surplus land to the landless and the *inam* lands to those who cultivated them. The land acquired through *bhoodan* and *sarvodaya* movements were also distributed. A large chunk of land still remains in the hands of upper caste landlords who belong to the erstwhile feudal system, though some of them are now poor farmers, and very few of them even landless. While most of the middle and service castes hold small extent of land and quite a few are landless, most of the scheduled castes are landless labourers, though a few hold marginal extent of land.

However, to a large extent, peasantry of rural India is characterized by the relations between landlord who is able to engage tenants, and tenant who does not have land or possesses unviable land and engages in tenancy. Some landlords engage annual servants. In annual service, an individual enters into an agreement with a landlord as a farm servant for a fixed wage either in cash or grain or both, in addition to food one or two times a day and one or two pairs of clothes. In some cases, the traditional practice of landlord engaging a servant family is followed. In this relationship, husband and wife are engaged in the service of the landlord and his family as per established tradition. There are instances in which a landless man or woman borrows money from a landlord under the condition of providing farm or domestic service to clear the debt. But in several cases, they fail to do so and renew the bondage or borrow afresh after payment of the first one, and thus they perennially remain debtors. Such an institution of bonded labour now stands outlawed. This is the broad spectrum of land tenure relations.

**Crops and Migration:** Most agriculture in India depends on rains despite existent sources of irrigation such as village tanks, individual open wells, tube wells and irrigation canals. Over a period of time food crops have been replaced by commercial and cash crops. Both, means of irrigation and cultivation of cash crops have brought about significant changes in the socio-economic conditions of villagers, and consequently changes in social relations. With cash taking a

predominant place, contractual relations have become more prevalent. Urbanization has led to increased avenues of higher education and employment, either in service or trade or business, resulting in large scale migration of rural elites and rich to towns and cities, leaving the lands to tenant farmers. In this way few families belonging to castes in the middle of the hierarchy as well as untouchables became tenant farmers or share-croppers. Thus, increased communication facilities and employment outside the village, leading to migration of villagers to towns and other parts of the country has impacted general rural life as well as land tenure systems.

**Problems:** It is important to note that agriculture has been under distress for a long time. The country has witnessed a spurt of peasant unrest and movements in 1960s. There has been high dependency of farmers on money lenders; rural banking has been trying hard to alleviate the situation. Lack of remunerative prices and proper market facilities, and loan repaying capacity has been leading farmers to committing suicides too. The issues of agriculture remain unresolved; rural poverty, feminization of economy and unemployment continue to remain on the top of the national agenda, to be solved.

### **Impact of Market Economy on Village and Globalization**

Indian villages have never been self-sufficient as contended by colonialist scholars; they were a part of a wider network of economic, political and religious matters. The *jajmani* system provided caste-based services supported by an agricultural economy. Cottage industries based on agricultural produce such as cotton, silk, jute and toys made from forest produce flourished in Indian villages. All these industries are of small scale that individual or joint families managed.

Weekly markets have been the characteristic feature of both caste and tribal villages, where goods - food grains, vegetable, cattle and others - are exchanged through barter system since ancient times. Even labour followed the same system in which payments were made in kind rather than cash, till the colonial regime when monetized economy fast replaced barter system. Though coins of gold and other metals existed during pre-colonial India, barter system prevailed in villages. Such markets are found throughout India even today despite the prevalence of organized and developed markets.

India has been known for trade and business for ages. Though villages depended mainly on agrarian economy and food crops grown were meant essentially for personal consumption, certain crops and spices grown on the west coast have attracted European and Arab traders since time immemorial. Thus, India has been connected to international markets for a long time.

The East India Company of the Great Britain purchased spices and agricultural produce such as cotton, turmeric, and jute from India. Later, the colonial government established processing industries of the same in different port cities of India. This not only brought rapid urbanization but also promoted growing of crops needed for feeding the industries in England. After colonization, the British introduced commercial crops like tobacco, indigo, rubber, tea and coffee which replaced the traditional crops, and reduced the cultivation food crops.

In the unorganized market, the buyers usually visit villages and directly interact with the producers, fix the price through bargaining and purchase the produce by paying cash. Often times, the price is fixed before the harvest and advance or

total payment is made. In either case, the buyer remains in the advantageous position. In the colonial period, these buyers were mostly mediators who sold the products to the city or seaport based businessmen and exporters of goods to foreign countries through sea routes. With the increase of transport facility some farmers directly engaged with the Indian businessmen who in turn sold them to foreign business houses. Thus, villages have been connected to international markets. However, urbanization and industrialization also fostered rural-urban migration at a large scale. Most of the migrants are unskilled labour and such migrations have affected agriculture as well as cottage industries. The finished industrial products of England such as fabric affected cottage industries as people preferred industrial products.

The trend has continued in the post-independence era. For instance, energization of agricultural wells and use of tractors for agriculture made the services of communities that produced leather goods for drawing water from wells redundant. The need for agricultural labourers also reduced, including those who took care of the oxen, for they were replaced by tractors. However, there arose the need for technicians and mechanics to service the tractors and this led to the breeding of new technical labour. Since only men could drive the tractors, women lost their work in the fields, and became dependent on men, which affected the social status that they enjoyed earlier. Similarly, with the availability of oil produced in the mills, the communities of oil producers lost their livelihood. Likewise, cinema industry badly affected folk media, folk artists and story tellers that villagers patronized, and along with them we lost the traditional myths and stories which were part of our cultural heritage.

As discussed above the process of globalization of India started several centuries ago but its impact has been felt more after 1980s with the liberalization of Indian economy and the new industrial policy after 1990s. Though globalization has several dimensions and scholars are of the view that it has both positive and negative impacts, here we are concerned with its effect on village economy. The exposure of villages to global markets has increased the scope for export thereby increasing the farmers' income, but at the same time the farmers stand in competition with others. Since Indian villages lack infrastructural facilities it becomes extremely difficult for them to withstand international competition. As foreign products are now available in the local markets there is a tremendous pressure on farmers to produce quality products. There is a need to provide communication connectivity and technical knowledge and skills to the rural folk which will facilitate their participation in international markets. As farmers are inclined to produce products which have international demand, they have been neglecting local needs. This has resulted in a change in dietary habits, affecting the health of rural population.

**Check Your Progress**

3) What is *zamindari*, *ryotwari* and *mahalvari* system? Explain.

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## 8.5 SUMMARY

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The unit has provided a bird's eye view of the characteristics of Indian villages and the changes that have happened over the years. It has touched upon the following:

- demographic facts,
- types of villages in terms of composition, geographical spread, social organization with reference to interdependency of castes through the age-old traditional institutions,
- dominant caste,
- landholding and agricultural practices which shaped typical social relations based on agricultural economy and the ideology of caste,
- markets with changing economy and exposure to international market due to globalization.

Students are expected to gain an objective understanding of the Indian village through anthropological studies that have a long tradition and history.

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## 8.6 REFERENCES

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## 8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK PROGRESS

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- 1) Anthropological studies of the Indian village began in 1950s with short essays published in edited volumes by Marriott (1955), and Srinivas (1955). Around the same time came Dube's single full-length book, *Indian Village* (1955). The number of such publications increased in 1960s but declined sharply after late 1970s through 1990s for various reasons.
- 2) In a multi-caste village, households of several castes live together, usually each caste occupies a particular space. The numerically dominant caste usually takes the central location, while the ritually impure caste households remain in the fringe or outside of the village or even outskirts of the village. Usually each caste would have a history of its origin, mostly as oral tradition. These castes exist in a system of interdependent relations, which is known as *jajmani* system
- 3) *Zamindari*, *ryotwari* and *mahalvari* were systems of revenue collection that emerged during the colonial period.

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## UNIT 9 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF PEASANTS\*

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### Contents

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Economic Approach of Peasant Studies
- 9.2 Social Relation Approach of Peasant Studies
- 9.3 Cultural Approach of Peasant Studies
- 9.4 Political Approach of Peasant Studies
- 9.5 Historical Approach of Peasant Studies
- 9.6 Summary
- 9.7 References
- 9.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

### Learning Objectives

In this unit you will learn about:

- the concept of peasant; how peasants are different from others;
- various approaches of peasant studies; and
- contribution of Marx in defining the concept of peasant;

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### 9.0 INTRODUCTION

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Peasant is a commonly used term for pre-industrial agricultural labourers or farmers who have limited land ownership; they were typically the lower class of agricultural community. The word peasant is derived from the Old French word *paisant* (15th century), which means “one from the *pays*”. *Pays* meant “country side” or “outlying administrative district.” The word “peasant” appears in English in late medieval and early modern times, when it was used to refer to the rural poor, rural residents, serfs, agricultural laborers, and the “common” or “simple” people. As a verb in that period, “to peasant” meant to subjugate someone as a peasant is subjugated. Earlier Latin and Latinized forms (French, Castilian, Catalan, Occitan, etc.) date as far back as the sixth century and denoted a rural inhabitant, whether or not involved in agriculture. Very early on, both the English “peasant,” the French “paysan” and similar terms sometimes connoted “rustic,” “ignorant,” “stupid,” “crass” and “rude,” among many other pejorative terms. The word could also imply criminality, as in thirteenth-century Germany where “peasant” meant “villain, rustic, devil, robber, brigand and looter.”

Peasants did not become a major focus of anthropological study until after World War II, when it was apparent that “primitive” and “tribal” were inadequate classificatory terms for many peoples around the globe. The primary object of anthropological study, the primitive, was disappearing. This emerging crisis in anthropology, coupled with anthropological research being directed towards understanding the resulting cultural change and new relationship of the state to

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“traditional” peoples, led to an interest in peasants. After the war, there was greater awareness on the part of anthropologists to conceive of all people as part of states and global economic systems, not as isolated groups.

A number of researchers have attempted to establish a definition of this term but a clear definition has always remained contested. Scholars like Horowitz, Foster, Lewis and Fitchen have used social parameters while Lopreato, Doving, Srinivas and Klass and the Niehoffshave used cultural ones. This contestation of ideas over definition of peasant is explicitly visible in different approaches to peasant studies by different scholars. As a result we find studies attempting to explain different aspects of peasant life and culture. A rigorous definition of the peasant is desirable, though it remains elusive.

Take the peasant to mean a person who undertakes agriculture on his own, working with his own implements and using the labour of his family. This definition, which would be acceptable to Marxists as well, in so far as it goes, omits any consideration of the extent of the use of hired labour and control over land. The moment these are considered, the peasants seem to fall apart into different strata. Thus, for example, the Marxists would divide the group into three sub-groups:

- the rich peasant (with extensive use of hired labour),
- the middle peasant (mainly using family labour) and
- the poor peasant (with land insufficient to absorb all the family labour).

Another definition widely used to explain peasant society is “a peasant society is one composed primarily of people who make their living by agriculture and who live in interdependence with market towns or urban areas, though away from them”.

Peasants form a distinctive group everywhere in the world. A peasant is not the same as a tribal. Unlike a tribal, a peasant is a part of society and is invariably linked with the market. He is a small producer who produces for himself and for others, mostly local people. On the other hand, a tribal society is a complete society in itself, with no links with the mainstream society. They produce what they want. Their production is for themselves. A peasant is also not the same as a farmer. A farmer’s economy is profit-oriented whereas a peasant’s economy is subsistence oriented. A farmer mostly produces for the market. T. Sachin claimed that peasants are rural cultivators employing low levels of traditional technology. “Only with modernization we can increase production. They are rural cultivators. They mostly use the manures produced from their livestock” (Wolf, 1965).

Peasants are also not same as cultivators. Peasants are part of larger society. In a peasant society there is a dominance by peasantry. A peasant has no control over means of production. In a peasant society goods from the primary producer go into the hands of those who are not producers. The productive forces, which do not carry on the production, extract the production. On the other hand, peasant cultivators are part of small society. Among peasant cultivators, there is no dominance, as they have complete ownership or control over their production and labour.

Peasants are a heterogeneous, not homogenous category. We cannot identify a peasant by looking at him. Peasants operate within the boundary of society. But, their culture is different from the culture of the mainstream society. It cannot be defined in an independent way. It can only be defined related to a wider society.

**Check Your Progress**

- 1) “A peasant is not the same as a farmer.” State whether the statement is true or false?

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**9.1 ECONOMIC APPROACH OF PEASANT STUDIES**

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Peasant economy is a moral-oriented economy, not a profit-oriented economy. A peasant is a rural cultivator, a small scale producer whose economy is subsistence in nature. Land and animal husbandry are the main source of livelihoods. The peasant family forms a basic unit of production. Wage labour is not employed. They mostly live hand-to-mouth. A peasant is a settled agriculturalist, engaged in agricultural mode of production. His culture is moved by his agriculture (Duncan, 1971). Agriculture is not a business investment for him to get profit, but his culture. His entire livelihood depends on land. For him security of his family comes before profit. The production of a peasant’s family depends on the labour put in by all family members. In a peasant economy land and labour are not variables. Depending on the labour they have, they cultivate their land (Thorner, et. all, 1966).

Critically examining economic and ecological criteria over peasantry with emphasis on peasant society as part society, Fitchen (1961) found no clear separation of peasant society from tribal society or urban society. She also suggested that social structures dimensions of peasant society can be ranged as the means of defining peasantry as a society type. It may contain volitional and contractual associations, self-sufficiency, social structure and value, local cohesion and involvement and participation with large society. The idea of volitional and contractual association was further discussed by Foster (1961) as a dyadic contract model for the social structure of a Mexican peasant village. Foster defined dyadic contract as a form of social contract between people of similar or different statuses. The contracts are informal and not sanctioned by law. Foster (1961) also described peasants as large, class structured pre-industrial civilizations *with* trade, commerce and craft having market disposition towards parts of producers efforts. Nevertheless, Foster concludes that these traditions of interpersonal relations, outmoded or not, make it difficult to introduce into peasant communities any change that requires cooperation among families. Lewis (1959) agrees with Foster’s description of the nature of peasant interpersonal relations, but is unhappy about the idea that in spite of all the suspicion and envy among its inhabitants, the peasant community can be considered a functionally successful social form. He believes the “success of a social form must be evaluated in terms of its human costs”.

Contracting the social form and focusing on economic advantage, Doving (1962) argues that “inventiveness rather than rigidity becomes the characteristic of peasant minds whenever they were confronted with a genuine chance to expand and improve themselves in a way that agrees with their know-how, their equipment, and their ideas about themselves and the world”. He further states that, in any case, a general theory of land use should include the total social, economic, and political situation of the agriculturist, with his concept of himself and his world as only one element. Doving believed that the passivity of the peasant exists only from the standpoint of contrast with the industrial world, and that the characterization is therefore misleading.

Dewey’s careful analysis of peasant marketing in Java stresses the efficiency of small-scale capitalisation under Javanese conditions. Geertz contributes an important paper on the distribution and functions of the rotating-credit association among peasants in many different cultural settings. He suggests that the device constitutes a common economic mechanism which has actually been adapted in certain parts of the world, and is capable of being adapted in others, suitably modified for new conditions, to provide capital for small-scale business enterprises instead of for weddings and the like. The rest of the economic discussions that relate to peasantry concentrate on the effects of technological and political innovations. Halpern (56) compares peasants in Laos with those in Serbia, and interprets some of the similarities between the developments in each locality as possibly representing parallel stages in the cultural evolution of peasantry.

**Check Your Progress**

- 2) A peasant economy is subsistence economy. State whether the statement is true or false.

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**9.2 SOCIAL RELATION APPROACH OF PEASANT STUDIES**

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When we study a peasant society we study it as a community. This community is an arrangement and this arrangement is a persistent arrangement. Peasant community is a social structure. In a study of a peasant community, we should explain their relationship among themselves and others inside and outside the village. Anthropologists claim that a peasant society is not a complete society. It is a part society. It is a feudal society. It is a part of a nation-state. Peasants have interdependency with others. A peasant village is not a complete system by itself as it has links with city and town. So, it is essential to know the institutions outside the peasantry to understand the peasant society .According to Horowitz (1960), peasants are different from plantation workers who live in more integrated communities. He defined communities as significant interaction of members within bounds.

Rejecting the ideas of Foster, Pitt-Rivers comments that it is certainly reasonable to assume that in a situation of limited resources and productivity, absence of primogeniture, and an expanding population, social structures marked by considerable rivalries will be created. He believes however, that Foster simply described the conventional rivalries, and not the quality of interpersonal relations. Nor does Pitt-Rivers think it possible to give an objective description of the traits Foster lists. He argues that there are no standards, except subjective ones, against which an observer can measure degrees of suspiciousness, mistrust and the like. In this debate describing social relation among peasants, Beals and Siegel postulate that pervasive factionalism will develop in communities that start with a particular kind of social structure and are subsequently assaulted by a particular kind of external pressure. The factionalism to develop, leadership roles are similar there is a ranked hierarchy by reciprocal obligations, the existence of constant which they must guard against.

Gumperz (1961), in the context of Indian civilization, recommends the use of linguistic variation as a clue to distinctive social units, but he is concerned with contemporaneous difference in dialect and the like rather than with grosser historical associations. The definition of the limits of vernacular speech in urban, village, and regional caste and class groups, and of the limits of each of the argots characteristic of occupational groups is the task of the linguist, Gumperz believes. In this debate Arensberg (1961) starts with the assumption that communities may be parts of larger wholes and therefore any theory of community must make some statement about representativeness, completeness, inclusiveness, and cohesiveness. Communities seem to be basic units of organization and transmission within a society and culture, [basic in the sense that] the community is the minimal unit table of organization of the personnel who can carry and transmit this [a particular society's] culture. It is the minimal unit realizing the categories and offices of [its] social organization. It is the minimal group capable of reenacting in the present and transmitting to the future the cultural and institutional inventory of distinctive and historic tradition. And from it, in it, the child learns from peers and the street, as well as from parents and teachers, the lore of his people and what must be learned to become one of them.

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### 9.3 CULTURAL APPROACH OF PEASANT STUDIES

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Scholars have given importance to studying the relation between culture and peasantry and how cultural approach helps in understanding peasant society. Redfield while discussing peasant studies argues that the social position of a person has some influence on the way he will behave. He said the priorities are not only on cognition but also on values, position, action, etc. When we are talking about uniformity, we don't ignore diversity. Discussing culture and society, Smith (1961) suggests that "society" be reserved for "territorially distinct units having their own governmental institutions". Smith holds that "the core of culture is in its institutional system. Each institution involves set forms of activity, grouping, rules, ideas, and values." He would reserve the concept of cultural pluralism for formal diversity in the basic system of compulsory institutions: kinship, education, religion, and the like. From Smith's point of view, class differences are differences in a single institutional framework and therefore do not constitute cultural pluralism. Cultural difference and social stratification may vary independently; various cultural groups can be at the same stratification level.

Discussing peasant cultural attributes, Lopreato (1961) suggested cross-cultural methods of measuring different personal relationships that establish peasants' view of life. The relationship among peasants is not the same as among Mexicans and Americans. Mexican peasants keep complaining regarding the "dog-eat-dog attitude" of American peasants as it doesn't match their values and standards. He believed that immigration from the Mexican community has changed the attitude of a few Mexican families but it has caused even more conflict. In this manner he concluded that peasants are a strongly bound cultural unit rather than a social unit. In contrast to Lopreato, Srinivas (1962) discussing Indian society, argued that peasants are willing to accept new technology. He rejected the idea of conflict between traditional and modern outlook among peasants. If he is occasionally unwilling to accept others, this occurs not out of pigheadedness but out of a superior knowledge of their probable unfavourable social consequences to himself.

With India as his locale, Cohn (1961) suggests that a significant contrast between traditional society and modern society lies in the degree to which the population agrees on the interpretation of the past. Cohn arrives at this conclusion through the examination of the different "pasts" of a number of castes in a North Indian village, pasts that are different both in actual history of members of the caste and in traditions about their history. Cohn suggests that each caste, impelled by what amounts to a nativistic movement, has been creating for itself a new tradition in proportion as the caste increases its participation in the larger society, and that ultimately it will be the agreement by all castes on a common body of tradition that will signalise the unification of India.

India alone offers many avenues of study of large peasant areas in which polyandry or matrilineal joint family organization occur. Caste is generally regarded as an Indian institution. Watson (1963) describes the concept of caste as a wider phenomenon in a paper that defines caste as a product of acculturation under certain, specified conditions. But others handle caste as an exclusively South Asian phenomenon. Studies on caste in the Himalayan foothills by Berreman (1962) and among immigrant East Indians in Trinidad by Schwartz (1964) add new dimensions to the concept of caste. Each reports a remarkable incidence of marriage across caste lines. Such a finding is less surprising in Trinidad, where caste is breaking down, than in the Himalayas, where a relatively stable social system persists. In fact, Berreman finds that the caste system reinforces persistence of the traditional social system by acting as a barrier to community development. Members of low castes are found to be unwilling to contribute to agricultural improvement programs which obviously benefit the high castes disproportionately.

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## 9.4 POLITICAL APPROACH OF PEASANT STUDIES

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Marx in his theory of social transference tries to know the nature of peasants who are involved in various struggles. He explored the political process of peasantry based on power, authority and conflict. He said peasantry is a community or social entity having some economic interest and political consciousness. Marx during French revolution between 1848-1850, discusses the political characteristics of peasants. Usually peasants look at them and enter into revolutionary activities. Napoleon represented the peasant as a class. His

labour party was the representative of peasant political party. There was no division of labour among peasants, nor scientific techniques of cultivation. They used to exchange their labour within themselves. Major part of their production was consumed by themselves.

Marx claimed that the peasant is a class but not emerging as a class. Peasants cannot represent themselves. They need others to represent them. They are a class themselves not class in themselves. They have no capacity to lead. As a class, their culture, economic condition and way of living is separate from other groups of people. Because of their hostility towards others they form a separate social class. Marx said peasantry is a subordinate state, because they subordinate power. They themselves cannot do it. Peasants always want to have direct contact with leaders, not a mediator. Citing the case of French revolution Marx claimed that the French peasants did not rebel on their own, rather their leaders motivated them to rebel. They rebel when their common interest compels them to rebel. Peasants always act politically as a class or a class-like entity (Shanin, 1971). Marx said that peasants are a class by themselves in the social sense but not in other sense. On one side peasants act as a political class whereas on the other side we find that there is no uniformity among them.

Marx said that the existence of society is not essential for a peasant's existence, but existence of peasants is essential for a society to exist. Peasant cohesion is a basis for formation of peasant class (Shanin, 1966). Peasantry is a degree of political action, consciousness and historical evidence. Marx' description of peasantry leads to a question that on the one side they are class and on the other side they are not class. If they are a class then how they are formed? If they are not a class then what is granting them their qualitative existence. A class position reflects social conflicts with other classes.

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## **9.5 HISTORICAL APPROACH OF PEASANT STUDIES**

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Analysing progression of peasant society, we find a long transition, one leading ultimately to quite a different structure of social and economic relations. From around 500 BC there was an immense acceleration in the process of change for almost 500 years, which universalised peasant production and also simultaneously created caste-divided peasantry. For the universalisation of peasant farming, we can perhaps suggest two factors of crucial importance.

The first is the extending use of iron. As time passed the extraction of metal increased in volume and the resulting cheapness diversified its use. Quantity influenced quality. In time iron tools would become directly available to the peasant, and that would be the turning point. The first recorded reference to the plough containing the "iron point" in India is in the Manusmriti, which may be dated as early as 200 BC but is probably a little later. But iron "ploughshares" have been found with the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBP), beginning 500 BC.

The second is the use of horse. The success of the Aryas is ascribed to the possession of the horse, and still more, the horse-drawn chariot. Compared with all previous weaponry, the chariot was an immensely expensive machine, its possession implied a pre-existing aristocracy; it is therefore difficult to envision

an early egalitarian stage within the Rigvedic society as has sometimes been suggested.

The state of agriculture glimpsed through the Rigveda shows the continuance of the ox-drawn plough (*sira*). The technology was still primitive, all the Rigvedic *shlokas* mention a metal, generally thought to mean copper, not iron. Barley (*yav*) is the chief food grain; but rice seems to have begun to be cultivated in the upper Indus basin (*Saptasin-dhavah*). The two-crop annual cycle survived in a new form of cotton and other crops in the Indus culture. Excess production with the use of technology, created a need for security and social order, which led to the formation of a large society and ultimately to the formation of state.

Historical progression of peasantry includes several developments which gave rise to several organs of large society and ultimately developed to a large society, leaving a part of it primarily focused on agriculture. The whole progression and its division on the basis of occupation is contradictory, as at a number of instances, these parts played multiple roles in the development of whole. History defies defining peasantry society solely on the basis occupation as it has always remained the primary source of manpower in different parts of large society.

### Check Your Progress

- 3) Which theory of Marx explores several natures of peasants who are involved in various struggles?

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## 9.6 SUMMARY

The terms “peasant” and “peasantry” and their cognates in other languages have long and complicated histories that reflect both peasants vast presence in most societies, even today, and their political and social subordination in those societies. The pervasive pejorative uses of these terms are also indicative of the historical and contemporary oppression of peasants in many societies and of the discrimination to which they are subject. In many parts of the world, peasants are still second-class citizens, with legal and de facto restrictions on their geographical mobility, limited access to social services (healthcare, education, housing, etc.), insufficient access to land, and few labor protections. In some countries where agrarian revolutions occurred (e.g., Mexico, Bolivia), the peasant became a legal category conferred with special group rights, particularly rights to land. Social scientific definitions of “peasant” generally recognize both that the category is extremely heterogeneous and that individuals and groups in the category typically engage in multiple forms of livelihood, including agriculture, wage labor, pastoralism and livestock production, artisanal production, fishing and hunting, gathering of plant or mineral resources, petty commerce, and a variety of other skilled and unskilled occupations. “Peasant” may be both a category of social scientific analysis and a self-ascribed identity. As a social

scientific category, the term “peasant” usually includes landless rural people who either work others’ land or who aspire to obtain land of their own (or both). In some parts of the world (e.g., Mesoamerica, the Andes, Central Java) peasant communities had and have a “closed” corporate structure with hereditary membership and widely recognized territorial rights.

The effort to document and to analyze the relationship of changing peasantries to changing larger societies is still in an elementary stage; there have been a few papers relevant to the problem. Scholars have discussed peasants as a social as well as cultural unit. As a single unit or social strata, the term “peasant” is fluid in nature. Peasantry can’t be accommodated in single segregation on the basis of occupation as it includes different parts of society including small and large society. Klass (1961) has claimed peasantry as a rural settlement rather than being a cultural or social unit. In a brief discussion on Italian migrants to Brazil he explained about separate colonies with cultural differences. Supporting the same argument, Ralph Beals writes a critique of the existing community typologies used in Latin-American research (e.g., folk-urban, Indian-mestizo, traditional-modern). He expresses dissatisfaction with them on the grounds that most typologies do not clearly define the class of phenomena under discussion, that they involve either linear or polar distribution of types, and that the data have been forced into the framework of the typologies.

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## 9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Answer 1

Yes. The peasant is not the same as the farmer. They are two different categories.

### Answer 2

True. Peasant economy is subsistence economy.

### Answer 3

Marx's theory of social transference discusses the nature of peasants who are involved in various struggles. Refer to section 9.4