
UNIT 6 SOCIALISATION AND CHILDHOOD

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Learning Objectives

After having read this unit, you should be able to:

- define socialisation;
- differentiate and compare between the British and the American anthropological traditions in the context of socialisation and childhood studies;
- understand the anthropological approaches to socialisation and childhood studies;
- differentiate between socialisation and enculturation; and
- appreciate socialisation and childhood studies in the context of India and the Indian Tribes.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The structural-functional paradigm in anthropology pioneered and fuelled by scholars like Radcliffe-Brown tries to understand the society in terms of its social structure. Social structure is defined as the ensemble of social relationships. Such relationships according to Brown, can be located at the level of the ‘person’. “Social structure includes all interpersonal relations, the differentiation of individuals and groups by their social roles, and the relationships between a particular group of humans and a larger network of connections” (Moore 2009: 153). Social structure is also defined as “a system of real relations of connectedness between individuals, or more properly, between individuals occupying social roles, between ‘persons’” (Kuper 1983: 53). Both the definitions of social structure are concerned with social relations that are governed by social roles in society.

Social relationships are governed by the various social positions that individuals occupy. Such social positions are pre-defined in the society and each position is accompanied by a set of roles. As a member of society, we all learn such roles. We learn how to act in different circumstances according to the accepted norms of a particular social position.

For instance, the social position of a father is accompanied by the roles that are desired and expected from the father. Similarly, the social position of a son or daughter is accompanied by a set of roles that are pre-determined by a given society. Socialisation as a process can be defined in terms of learning desired roles for a given set of social positions in society. Such roles are learned as being part of a given society. "Socialisation may be broadly defined as the inculcation of the skills and attitudes necessary for playing given social roles" (Mayer 1970: xiii). It goes as a corollary with this definition that social roles are not fixed and they keep on changing. People acquire new roles and shun the older roles as they progress in their life cycles. This makes sure that people learn skills and attitudes associated with new roles that they acquire. This also ensures that one cannot define an end to the process of socialisation and it can be conceptualised as a life-long process. Newer roles are also generated by the larger process of social change like urbanisation and industrialisation. Such changes involve re-socialisation of people which is required in the changing socio-economic landscape. Social mobility also entails a change in social roles and thus involves socialisation. One of the very popular concepts of social mobility in anthropology- Sanskritisation- is a good example of anticipatory socialisation. Sanskritisation involves the 'lower caste' groups taking up values and norms associated with the 'higher caste' groups and therefore involve learning new attitudes. Sanskritisation involves socialisation where new lifeways are learned in anticipation of moving upwards in the caste hierarchy.

However, it is also a fact that many areas in the world are experiencing 'socialisation crisis'. This has emerged due to the fast pace of social change that the world is experiencing today. Rapid social change leads to a rapid change in social roles and therefore it becomes difficult to fathom and know for which social roles we are socialising our children. There is an element of uncertainty in the process of socialisation owing to such rapid social changes.

6.2 SOCIALISATION AND CHILDHOOD STUDIES WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF 'SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY'

Philip Mayer (1970) has argued that socialisation as a concept and as a process is well represented in Sociology and American Cultural Anthropology, but is underrepresented within the domain of Social Anthropology practiced in Britain and Commonwealth countries. In sociology, Durkheim considered education as the 'systematic socialisation of the young generation by adults'. Sociology has followed various themes in socialisation in the context of the peer, family, and the various social institutions. Similarly in America, anthropologists followed the theme of socialisation and conducted researches, but in Britain, except for anthropologists like Raymond Firth, Meyer Fortes, and S.F. Nadel, socialisation and childhood as a theme of inquiry were not explored much. This, according to Myer is reflected in British textbooks on anthropology where the theme of socialisation hardly finds any mention.

British social anthropology has been found to neglect the theoretical as well as the empirical ethnographic documentation of the process of socialisation. This neglect to some extent can be explained on the basis of too much emphasis on 'social structure' in British social anthropology. It is due to this reason that important ethnographic texts related to the age-set and age-grade systems of various African tribes and other tribes that were mostly studied in the British colonies were more projected as structural

systems rather than systems of socialisation within those tribal groups. Similarly, kinship systems were seen as part of the larger political and economic systems rather than educational systems playing role in socialising children in kinship behaviours.

Audrey Richards (1970) has presented a more nuanced understanding of socialisation studies within the British social anthropological tradition. She is of the view that the first part of the twentieth century produced monographs that represented socialisation in a very crude form. Such monographs contained chapters on life-cycle rituals of the tribes under study. Such rituals and ceremonies formed a large part of the monographs as the societies in which fieldwork was carried out were 'simple' and therefore large chunk of the data was in the form of various ceremonies and rituals that were performed. Rituals starting from childbirth till death were presented. This scenario is exemplified in one of the most celebrated monographs of its time by W.H.R. Rivers on the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills in India. This monograph contains a chapter on 'Birth and Childhood Ceremonies'. This monograph was published in 1906 and therefore holds the testimony of Richards's first phase of so-called 'socialisation studies' in British social anthropology.

The next phase of socialisation studies extended between 1922 and 1940. This was the period when British anthropology was largely influenced by the work of Malinowski. He emphasised studying kinship behaviour and attitudes as he was interested in knowing how children classified various kins on the basis of similar attitudes and behaviours towards them. Scholars like Raymond Firth, Fortes, Powdermaker, and Richards produced works that gave space to socialisation and child-rearing practices among the people that they studied. Malinowski underscored the importance of the 'knowledge element' of a particular institution that is being studied. Without proper knowledge of institutional values, appropriate behaviour cannot be achieved. Therefore understanding such knowledge was important for knowing the system. However, it is argued that the transfer of this knowledge from one generation to another did not form part of the anthropological studies at that time. The entire emphasis was on understanding each system as a part of the larger system and its function in maintaining the society as a whole. This kind of holism overshadowed the socialisation studies in anthropology. It is also a fact that Malinowski gave much emphasis to political, economic, and religious institutions and neglected the all-important educational institutions in his study among the Trobriand Islanders. "The handing on of knowledge, technical skills, and traditions is a task fulfilled by a group, a family, clan-elders, age-mates, village or territorial authorities, priests of magicians. Such groups are responsible for a body of knowledge, not committed to writing, which may be esoteric or alternatively open to all, and which may concern myths, history, magic formulae or prayers, patterns of organising economic activities, or knowledge of the environment. The responsible groups can often claim charters of ownership for the handing on of knowledge, and observe rules for the passing on of esoteric knowledge or for the sale of, say, magic formulae. They may use a specific language for instruction, and mnemonic devices, such as ritual actions and songs, or emblems or designs associated with traditions or knowledge. The sociology of education could have been handled fruitfully by Malinowski's concept of institution, but he did not in fact do this himself" (Richards 1970; 2-3).

Besides the above observation on Malinowskian anthropology lacking clear-cut socialisation studies, it is also a fact that Malinowski contributed a great deal towards the understanding of the cultural factors in child development (Levine 2007). He was in fact one of the biggest critiques of Sigmund Freud who propounded the theory of Oedipus complex in the context of psycho-sexual stages of development of children.

Freud generalised his theory upon all human societies to which Malinowski objected and observed in his book- *'The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia'* that Freud's theory can be challenged within the context of matrilineal societies like the Trobriand Islanders. The kind of impact that an authoritarian father has on the personality development of the child in a patrilineal and patriarchal society, that Freud was talking about and generalised over all the societies, was found to be untrue in the case of Trobriand Islanders where the society is matrilineal and both father and mother participate in infant and care and have almost equal status in the society. This has a profound impact on the adult personality and gender roles. However, when Freud's theory of psycho-sexual stages of development lost credibility on accounts of its methodology and scope, childhood studies focusing on its critique also lost their significance (Levine 2007).

Activity

Gather information about the concept of 'Oedipus Complex' and Psychosexual stages of Child Development as given by Freud.

Childhood accounts also formed part of ethnographies generated by many of the students of Malinowski like- Raymond Firth, Audrey Richards, Phyllis Kaberry, Evans Pritchard and Margaret Read. Firth in his classic ethnographic account- *'We The Tikopia: Kinship in Primitive Polynesia'* talked about initiation ceremonies and rituals of Tikopian boys. Similarly *Chisungu* is a monograph generated by Richards where she talked about the initiation ceremonies and rituals related to the girls of Bemba of Zambia. Evans Pritchard in his monograph *'The Nuer'* and *'Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer'* discussed Nuer childhood and father-child relationships. Read published a book titled *Children of Their Fathers* in which she gave an account of childhood among Ngoni of Malawi. Meyer Fortes, also talked about learning and social relationship among the Tallensi children in his book *'The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi'* (Levine 2007).

There was a period in Britain around 1940s when British anthropologists were influenced by the kind of studies that were conducted by their American counterparts. Such studies were labeled as the 'culture and personality' studies and anthropologists like Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead were associated with such studies. The role of socialisation in personality formation was a major theme in such studies. However, to the British anthropologists, such studies seemed to be too much concerned with weaning, swaddling, and bowel training and too little concerned with economic activities, social structure, and social roles. "The work of Kardiner and DuBois seemed somewhat nearer to the British outlook since they stressed, in addition to the effects of infant training, the importance of economic activities, such as the food quest; of structural characteristics, such as primogeniture and the authority system; and of life goals and ritual patterns, in determining the basic personality (Richards 1970: 5)."

Richards (1970) talks about an underlying paradox within the discipline of social anthropology in the context of socialisation studies as she observes that on one hand social anthropology claims to be comparative sociology and on the other hand paid little attention to the concept of socialisation which has been dealt with in much greater depths in the discipline of sociology. Again, the rationale that was put forward to explain the abandoning of the subject in itself seems to be paradoxical in that it is argued that if one follows Durkheimian sociology, as it was done in social anthropology

when people like Radcliffe Brown claims to be influenced by Durkheim, then one has to lay emphasis on the ‘social facts’ which are different from the biological and psychological facts. Socialisation as a concept was considered to be in the domain of the ‘psychological’ and hence little emphasis was paid on the subject. Richards labeled this phenomenon as the ‘British fear of Psychology’. She shows that psychology had been accepted here (in Britain) as quite respectable up to the 1930s, but in 1953 Firth could write of its having become ‘rather a scare word for anthropologists in this country’ (Mayer 1970: xvi).

6.3 CHILDHOOD AND SOCIALISATION STUDIES IN THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TRADITION

Things were different in America. “First presentations of the culture pattern concepts, obviously closely related to studies of socialisation, appeared in the works of Benedict (1934), Mead (1928, 1930, 1935).....The theories are now described under the heading of ‘culture and personality’(Richards 1970: 3)”. Under the leadership of Franz Boas, American Anthropology for a very long period of time was concerned with the basic debate of nature vs nurture. The racial discrimination that linked skin color with personality traits against the ‘black’ in America led Franz Boas to think on the line whether personality has anything to do with the biology of the individual or a group. He was a firm believer that racial discrimination is socially constructed and has nothing to do with biology. He wanted to empirically prove this point. This line of thought was picked-up by his students- Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. The basic idea behind the works of both Mead and Benedict pertains to the assertion that it is culture and not biology that determines the personality of the individual and of the nations as a whole.

Mead set out to empirically prove this assertion with her work among the girls in Samoa. She came up with a book- ‘*Coming of Age in Samoa*’ that dealt with the contrast in the education system/socialisation process and practice between the children in America and in Samoa. The Samoan adolescents were free from the stress that age and biology seem to bring among the adolescents of America. This difference was attributed to the contrast in the ways in which child-rearing takes place in America and Samoa. The adolescent personality which was thought to be a product of the biological changes during the adolescent age was now linked to the cultural factors of educating the children. The conflicting and contrasting standards of life in American civilization were seen as the root cause of the conflicts that emerge in the adolescent personality. Mead remarks that- “Samoa knows but one way of life and teaches it to her children. Will we, who have the knowledge of many ways, leave our children free to choose among them?.... We have many standards but we still believe that only one standard can be the right one. We present to our children the picture of a battlefield where each group is fully armoured in a conviction of the righteousness of its cause. (Mead 1928: 247, 248)” This suggests that the adolescent personality is a product of the socialisation process through which we are subjected to the constraints of our civilization. Franz Boas, while writing the foreword to the book- ‘*Coming of Age in Samoa*’, comments- “When we speak about the difficulties of childhood and of adolescence, we are thinking of them as unavoidable periods of adjustment through which everyone has to pass.....The anthropologist doubts the correctness of these

views. . . . The results of her painstaking investigation confirm the suspicion long held by anthropologists, that much of what we ascribe to human nature is no more than a reaction to the restraints put upon us by our civilisation (Boas 1928: xiv, xv).”

Mead’s contributions towards childhood studies in anthropology become important at another conceptual level. She tried to distinguish between the notion and concept of ‘enculturation’ and ‘socialisation’. Enculturation is defined as the “process of learning a culture in all its uniqueness and particularity (Mead 1963: 187)”. On the other hand, socialisation is defined as “the set of specieswide requirements and exactions made on human beings by human societies (Mead 1963: 187).” Based on the above definitions of enculturation and socialisation, Mead was of the view that for generating cross-cultural theories of socialisation, in-depth studies of enculturation needs to be carried out. Mead writes that- “each time an anthropologist applies to his own work the treatment of socialisation currently in vogue in behavioural sciences, which has not passed through the refining crucible of a comparative study of enculturation, the confusion is further compounded (Mead 1963: 187).”

Another American anthropologist Ruth Benedict devoted an entire chapter on childhood learning and rearing practices in Japan in her most celebrated book- “*Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*”. This book was an outcome of research that was conducted with a specific purpose to understand the Japanese culture and personality of the people to help America in knowing its enemy in a better way during World War II. This book is also an example of a different kind of research in anthropology which is known as studying culture at a distance as Benedict used secondary sources and interviewed American-Japanese in order to understand the Japanese culture as she could not visit Japan during the war. She compared the child-rearing practices in Japan to those prevalent in America. It was revealed in her study that if child-rearing practices have to be understood with the help of a graph or a curve in which freedom is plotted against the age then one gets a complete ‘U’ curve in the case of Japan and a complete inverted ‘U’ in case of America. In Japan, childhood is a phase in which children are free and are reared in a very cordial atmosphere with lots of love and affection. As their age progresses, restrictions and restraints are put on them and they face a lot of restraint during their adulthood when they are at the peak of their productive capacity and at the best of their health and energy. Again, during old age, a lot of affection is shown towards older people. The title of the book reflects this dichotomy- the chrysanthemum and the sword. On the other hand, in America, a lot of restraint is put on the child and is trained in a much-disciplined environment. Later on in adult life, people enjoy freedom when they are independent economically. Benedict writes- “We put him (the American child) immediately on a feeding schedule and a sleeping schedule, and no matter how he fusses before bottle time or bedtime, he has to wait. . . . He is punished when he does not do what is right. . . . The Japanese however do not follow this course. . . . The arc of life in Japan is plotted in opposite fashion to that in the United States (Benedict 1946: 118, 119).” The child-rearing and socialisation process in Japan produces a contradiction and duality in the Japanese character and in their outlook with respect to life.

The above discussion brings us to an understanding that childhood and socialisation studies took different forms in British and American traditions. While it is well represented in the American tradition, it is under represented in the British anthropological tradition. Nonetheless, scholars do admit that anthropology as a subject has its own approach with respect to the socialisation and childhood studies.

6.4 THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO SOCIALISATION STUDIES

Mayer (1970) while discussing the history of socialisation studies in Social Anthropology delineates basically two approaches to the study of socialisation in anthropology viz- a) studying socialisation as ‘practice’ and b) studying socialisation as a ‘process’. The basic difference between the two approaches pertains to the former approach being associated with the ‘vernacular model’ of socialisation and the latter approach being associated with the ‘observer’s model’ of socialisation. In other words, socialisation as a practice can be studied through the vernacular model or the people’s model. Practices that are defined by people to contribute towards the socialisation of the child come under this kind of study. There might be some practices in a given society that are labeled as socialisation practices or which explicitly claim to contribute towards socialisation of children. This approach is ‘actor driven’, which means that the agents and actors of socialisation define the context and the anthropologist records it. According to Mayer (1970), socialising practices include-

1. “Initiation rituals and all explicitly initiatory institutions and practices;
2. Explicit vernacular theory and practice regarding the training of children and young people for adult roles;
3. The same regarding the training of adult aspirants to given roles;
4. Informal but deliberate exercise of socialising pressures, as by the teasing, etc. of those who seem to discharge their roles ineptly; and
5. Vernacular opinions-not necessarily endorsed by the observer about the suitability and effectiveness of socialising techniques.

In a given culture the body of conscious, deliberate socialising practice and theory, as just defined, constitutes a vernacular system, and the anthropologist can hope to deal with it by the regular techniques of his discipline (pp- xvi, xvii).” Such a vernacular system can be easily studied at three levels:

- a) At the level of ethnography. Such systems can be recorded ethnographically in detail.
- b) Cross-cultural comparisons can be made of such vernacular systems and similarities and differences can be delineated out of it.
- c) Such systems can be seen within the context of other systems in a given society or a community and a functional relation can be studied between various systems with the socialising vernacular system.

Anthropologists have noted that it is somewhat easier to study the socialisation practice in complex societies as compared to simple societies because complex societies are more functionally differentiated and therefore specialised socialisation systems exist in such societies. However, it is also realised that simple societies also have some kind of a system that is devoted to socialising individuals into different social roles. Thus, socialisation studies become a legitimate field of anthropological enquiry.

Another anthropological approach lies in understanding the socialisation process. This is an observer-oriented approach or an observer’s model. This includes both conscious and unconscious activities that might lead to socialisation to different social roles. People

might get involved in socialising with their children without consciously knowing that the socialisation process is at work. It is the observer who can identify such occasions and talk about the process of socialisation in a given community. Having differentiated between the two approaches, it is also worthwhile to mention that there is no clear-cut distinction between the two approaches and it might happen in most of the cases that these two approaches may coincide. It is also logically and theoretically possible that the vernacular model and the observer’s model coincide with each other leaving no distinction between the two. Nonetheless, conceptually, we might distinguish between the two approaches.

6.5 THE SIX CULTURES STUDY: AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

A collaborative project known as the Six Cultures Study (SCS) was launched in Anthropology in 1954 by John Whiting who was a professor at Harvard University along with two psychologists Irvin L. Child from Yale University and William Lambert from Cornell University. Data on the social and cultural contexts of childhood were collected from six different societies across the world. A single field manual was prepared to collect data on different aspects of childhood in six different cultures to make the data comparable. Trained anthropologists conducted ethnographic studies on six communities between 1954 and 1957. The following chart outlines the communities and anthropologists who conducted the study.

Communities/Area	Country/Place	Name of the anthropologist
Mixtecan	Mexico	Romney and Romney
Ilongot	Phillipines	Nydegger and Nydegger
Rajput	India	Minturn and Hitchcock
Okinawa	Japan	Maretzki and Maretzki
Gusii	Kenya	LeVine and LeVine
Small town of West Acton	Eastern Massachusetts	Fischer and Fischer

Source - LeVine 2007

All the above-mentioned communities and areas were rural in nature and except for the last, all the communities were engaged in agriculture. The studies got published in 1963 in the form of a single volume edited by Beatrice Whiting. Later on, in 1966, all the six monographs were separately published.

The ethnographic studies of childhood in the SCS were based upon detailed and systematic observations of children in their natural cultural settings. The aim was to study the child-rearing practices in a particular culture and compare it with different cultures. The observational sample comprised of children between the age groups of three and eleven years. “Each book constituted a record or reconstruction of the routine practices, relationships, settings, and activities that made up the environments of children-and their interactions with those environments-from birth to adolescence in a particular local community at a particular moment in time (LeVine 2007: 253)”.

6.6 CHILDHOOD AND SOCIALISATION STUDIES IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Krishna Kumar (2016) is of the view that childhood studies in the Indian context can be viewed in the backdrop of various constraints. The first constraint is that of knowledge. There is limited institutionalised knowledge that is being generated in the allied fields of parenting, teaching, children's literature, and ethnography. He is of the view that the above-mentioned fields are not adequately represented in Indian educational and academic institutions. Another constraint in this area relates to the diversity of cultural and sub-cultural experiences that a child goes through in the Indian context. This makes childhood a heterogeneous category. Childhood therefore cannot be conceptualised as a monolithic and homogeneous category in the Indian context. Besides culture, economy, caste and gender are other variables that can be located within the context of diversity in childhood experiences.

Anthropologists however have been studying childhood and socialisation processes in the backdrop of ethnographic studies of various tribes and also in the backdrop of locating various forms of inequalities prevalent in the Indian context. Gender is one such category that provides an opportunity to study childhood and socialisation to understand the nature of inequality that is prevalent in society. Socialisation is a process through which we learn our cultural values, traits, customs, and rituals. We also learn behavior patterns that are accepted and legitimised in the larger societal context. In this context, gender-specific roles are learned both at home and outside. This learning is largely observational in nature and both genders internalise the kind of behavior they receive which is later projected in their own behavior. Leela Dubey, one of the pioneers in the field of gender studies had discussed the construction and consolidation of gender identity. She is of the view that in a patriarchal, patrilineal society like ours in India, gender roles start taking shape very early in life. The difference in the enthusiasm of parents at the birth of a male and female child is keenly observed by the female child and is internalised which becomes part of her psyche. Later in life, she observes her mother, grandmother, and other female members in the society and try to become like them in order to gain acceptance in the family and in society at large. The very notion of women being '*paraya dhan* (someone else's property)' that is largely held in our patriarchal society also contributes towards constructing the gender identity that leads to discrimination and subordination. A woman is never regarded as a permanent member of her natal family as she has to leave that family and move to her husband's house. This gives rise to the belief that she will never contribute to the family income and instead she will take away a certain part of the family income as her dowry. In contrast, a male child is considered to be the savior of the family and as a permanent member of the family, one who will contribute towards the family income and take care of aging parents. Such expected roles and identity formation lead to a stratified system where gender is placed in a hierarchical pattern (Dube 1988).

6.7 CHILDHOOD AND SOCIALISATION IN THE CONTEXT OF TRIBES IN INDIA

Vidyarthi and Rai (1976) have described in detail the childhood days of tribes in India. They are of the view that gender-specific roles get crystallised very early in life. Both boys and girls learn roles that are suited to lead an adult life. Boys generally help their

fathers in the field or grazing cattle or in the hunt and girls generally help their mothers in domestic activities like cooking, looking after the infants, and doing daily household chores. At the age of five or seven years, both boys and girls start helping their families with their productive works. Evenings are generally spent in youth dormitories where recreational activities are performed and children play with each other.

L.P. Vidyarthi (1963) talked about the childhood days among the Maler community. A Maler boy spends time playing with other boys of his age. At the age of six years, he is initiated into the life of youth dormitory and learns a lot of skills necessary to lead an adult life. Through various games, he learns the likes and dislikes that are prevalent in his society. He learns what it means to be a valued member of his community and what takes to make a mark as an individual in his own community. He is socialised in the values and norms that are at the core of the community. Dormitories are great places where he learns what kind of behaviour is appreciated in the community and which kind of behaviour meets punishment. "Through imitating his older playmates and inmates of the youth dormitory he learns the good and bad habits, the value attitude system and above all the traditions, ideals and aspirations of the community" (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976: 275).

Verrier Elwin (1947) described Muria childhood. Among the Murias also, childhood is the time when both boys and girls learn gender-specific roles. Girls help their mother in fetching water from the village well and boys go along with their fathers to cut woods in the forest. Both boys and girls go to the jungle with the older members of their community for getting fruits and leaves. Elwin also talked about Ghotul and its role in early childhood among the Murias. Ghotul is a youth dormitory among the Murias. A Muria boy goes to this dormitory along with his father. He plays with axe, drums, and mud in the dormitory. Such dormitories are akin to educational places where socialisation of the young takes place. Elwin was of the view that in the backdrop of socialisation these dormitories are significant as they establish a relationship between the children and the older members (youth) of the society. Elwin believed that such relationships were more important than parent-child relations vis-à-vis socialisation. The relationship between the child and the head of the dormitories- Sirdar in the case of boys dormitory and Balosa in the case of girls dormitory- is of prime importance in the context of socialisation.

Sachchidanand (1958) had made observations on the youth dormitories of the Oraon tribes. The youth dormitories among the Oraons are called as Dhumkuria. Although they are youth dormitories children are engaged in some activities of the dormitories like cleaning and sweeping the floors. Boys are also engaged in massaging the older boys. Both boys and girls sing and dance in these dormitories. According to Sachchidanand it is during the time of dancing and casual gossip that the children learn a lot about social relations and gender-specific roles and behavior patterns. S.C. Dube (1951) while working among the Kamar tribes made observations regarding the childhood days of the Kamars. He observed and recorded that the Kamar boys at the age of seven or eight begin hunting small games like rabbits and squirrels with their small bows and arrows. They start mixing with the older boys and start taking up the responsibilities of protecting their cattle and domestic animals. At this age, they also learn to make baskets. Similarly, girls start learning household activities.

The above-discussed activities together with various ceremonies, rituals, and rites form a system of socialisation within the tribal context in which a tribal child learns his/her

values and morals sanctioned by the society and community. “Every individual undergoes a socialisation process that has reference to beliefs, concepts, values, skills and so on, and these in their totality form a distinctive mode of life, i.e., a culture” (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976: 303). It is also observed that socialisation in a tribal community is an informal process that forms part of the larger socio-cultural negotiations and transactions of everyday life. Adult roles are learned by the young boys and girls largely by imitating the elders and observing their behaviours in various situations.

The entire socialisation process within a tribal community is guided and governed largely by two agencies- family and youth dormitory (Xaxa 2011). Both the agencies work towards imparting values and attitudes that are suitable for adult roles. Traditionally tribal societies were differentiated only on the dimensions of age and sex. This has an important bearing on the process of socialisation as the age and sex/gender-specific roles are the ones in which children are trained from the very beginning in their lives. However, over a period of time, with the increasing outside influence on the tribal communities, the society became also differentiated on the dimensions of class and religion, but the overall value system and tribal worldviews remained the same. Xaxa (2011) observes that “Even after the emergence of social differentiation especially in the areas of class and religion, tribals do share cultural values and practices specific to their own society and culture” (pp 18). Division of labour on the basis of gender is highly marked among the tribal communities and thus forms an important part of the overall socialisation process.

With the advent of British rule, new agencies of imparting knowledge developed in the form of modern educational institutions. Christian missionaries were instrumental in popularising such schools of knowledge. This also had an important bearing on the traditional institutions like youth dormitories that were alien to the British ideals of education and socialisation. This led to a demise of the very important tribal institution of socialisation in the form of youth dormitories. “However, new youth organizations came up under the influence of Christian missionaries’. Though they were primarily church-based, these organisations engaged in activities affecting the community and also acted as an important agency of socialisation” (Xaxa 2011: 19, 20).

Xaxa (2011) also observes a new kind of socialisation that is of recent development among the Indian tribes. This relates to the communalisation of and loss of tribal identity. With religion forming an important part of harnessing vote banks and election strategies, various religious organisations are trying to impart a very specific kind of ideology among the tribes. This has an important bearing on the socialisation of tribal children in a particular kind of religious ideology which is different from their own worldview and magico-religious cosmology.

6.8 SUMMARY

From a developmental point of view, tribal childhood is marred with malnutrition, stunted growth, underdevelopment, unsafe drinking water, poor health facilities, low literacy levels, lack of sanitation, and traditional beliefs and practices pertaining to health care that contribute towards malnutrition and ill-health. Children not only learn the desired social roles as part of the socialisation process but also learn the health-seeking behavior and attitude towards health, ill-health, and treatment of diseases. Attitude towards sanitation and other aspects necessary for keeping good health also forms part of the socialisation process. However, “The available literature.....points to the lack of

knowledge about personal hygiene and reproductive health care practices. In fact, many of the diseases they suffer are traced to these problems in the tribal society” (Xaxa 2011: 20).

It has already been stated in the text above that childhood and socialisation studies were conducted in anthropology differently in different national traditions. The British and American anthropology show different sets of studies focusing childhood and socialisation. Largely, childhood became part of the overall ethnographic mapping of the specific communities studied by British anthropologists. This is reflected in the life-cycle approach where childhood and associated rites and rituals were studied and reported as part of the larger ethnographic text. In America on the other hand childhood and socialisation studies took different forms and were studied as part of the process of personality formation and the overall national character. In the Indian context, Vidyarthi (1976) claimed that socialisations have not been explored as a separate topic in the backdrop of tribal life. He writes that- “Few studies have been made in this light (pp-304).” However, talking about anthropology as a whole including different national traditions scholars like LeVine (2007) have argued that the claim that childhood studies have been neglected in anthropology is baseless. However, such statements need to be examined within the conceptual background that separates childhood as a development phase in one’s life from socialisation as a distinct concept demanding specialised and focused studies with different sets of methodologies and specific research questions.

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Sample Questions

1. What is socialisation and what are the anthropological approaches to study socialisation?
2. Write a note on the childhood studies in anthropology
3. Comment upon the British and American anthropological traditions of childhood and socialisation studies.
4. Comment upon the childhood and socialisation studies in the Indian anthropological tradition
5. Comment upon the Six Cultures Study in the context of anthropology of childhood.