



BLOCK 2
INDIAN SOCIETY, CULTURE AND
CIVILISATION

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UNIT 5 CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIAN VILLAGE*

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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.

5.0 INTRODUCTION

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

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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.

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-functionalist 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.

5.1 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.

5.2 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*.
- In Punjab province there were villages of *pattidar* in which separate land shareholders lived.
- 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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5.3 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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5.4 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 (*strotiyam* 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.

5.5 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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5.6 SUMMARY

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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5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 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.

UNIT 6 TRIBAL ETHNOGRAPHY*

Contents

- 6.0 Introduction
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- 6.8 Summary
- 6.9 References
- 6.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, students will be able to:

- know about the tribes of India and have a brief understanding of them;
- have an understanding about the bio-genetic characters, linguistic variation and livelihood practices of tribes;
- give a brief account of the culture of tribes; and
- discuss the changes occurring in the tribal life in India.

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Ethnography is the description of people, basically it is their culture, and the present unit is about the description of tribal life in India. Here, we are going to get an idea of tribes inhabiting Indian sub-continent in terms of their biological characteristics, languages, livelihood practices and the changes in their political and religious life.

Anthropologists have been writing the ethnography of individual tribes after living with the tribal society for a considerable time. But we are presenting a general picture of the tribes in India.

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The populations inhabiting the Indian sub-continent have been under enquiry from ancient times. Indian scholars even in BC wrote religious treatises besides foreigners from Greece, Persia and France who visited the country and wrote about the communities and their customs in India in their travelogues. However, a systematic recording about the castes and tribes was done by the colonial administrators and scholars in the nineteenth century while scientific anthropological investigations have been carried out only since the early twentieth century. According to the latest anthropological study the total number of communities living in India is 4,694. According to the information available there are 1208 Scheduled Castes (SC), 693 Scheduled Tribes (ST), 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG), 1,500 Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes and 150 Denotified Tribes (DNT), but the fact is that the exact figures of these categories based on any scientific survey is not yet known. However, at this juncture we should know the number of scheduled tribes listed under the Presidential Order 1950 and the amendments thereof constitute 8.6 per cent of the country's total population according to 2011 Census.

6.1 NOMENCLATURES AND DEFINITION OF TRIBE

At this juncture it necessary to clarify different names used in respect of tribes as mentioned above, and the term tribe is a generic term as opposed to caste. The terms ST, PVTG and DNT are different categories that the government has been using for the administrative purpose. Scheduled Tribe is the one that is listed in the Order of 1950 which is subjected to change from time to time and thus, several tribes were added in different amendments of the Order. It must be mentioned here that one important issue that has been troubling for a long time is, which community is a tribe and which is a caste? In several cases as some features are same in both, it becomes difficult to determine a community as a tribe and the other as caste. Therefore, government of India has formulated certain broad criteria toward defining a tribe for the administrative purpose which include

- i) indications of primitive traits,
- ii) distinctive culture,
- iii) geographical isolation,
- iv) shyness of contact with the community at large, and
- v) backwardness.

Again, considering socio-economic backwardness of the tribe, certain tribes are identified as PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) which require special attention for their development. In case of DNT (Denotified Tribes), it is legacy of the colonial government that identified certain tribes which have been nomadic and semi-nomadic. These tribes are found to be having criminal record and they are listed according to a special Act which is

popularly known as Tribes Criminal Act enacted in 1871 and final version was made in 1924. After Independence the Act was repealed and termed some of these tribes as the denotified tribes as against the Scheduled Tribes, and further it has been replaced with the Habitual Offenders Act 1952.

However, the sociologists and anthropologists have adopted a concept of tribe that is different from the above criteria of a tribe. According to it, tribe is an ethnic and endogamous group having its own cultural identity and the social organisation is based on kinship and which is not a part of the caste system of interdependency of castes on the basis of occupational specialisation and on the hierarchy of castes based on the religious principle of purity and pollution. These distinctive criteria do not preempt the castes and tribes in daily interactions and maintain social relations. Since there are certain common features besides nomenclatures which are same in both the castes and tribes and this often blurs the distinction between these two categories. Thus, there is no accepted definition of tribe till date. Further, some do not want to be called as tribe as it is a derogatory term carrying the notions of inferiority and backwardness. They like to be called 'indigenous communities'.

Check Your Progress

- 1) How is the Indian population categorised?

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- 2) What are the main characteristics of a tribe?

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6.2 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF TRIBES

Indian anthropologists have identified five divisions of tribal geographical regions given the habitations of tribes across the country taking into consideration their administrative and socio-economic conditions. These include Himalayan, Middle India, Southern India and Island regions.

i) **Himalayan Region** has three sub-regions:

- a) north-eastern Himalayan
- b) central Himalayan region
- c) north-Western Himalayan.

This region includes the entire North East India, Tarai region of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh states and Jammu and Kashmir UTs. The important tribes in this region include Khasi, Rabha, Garo Naga, Dafla, Mismi, Chauma, Abor, Gurung, Kachari, Toto, Lepcha and others.

ii) **Middle India Region**– covers Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh. In this region the important tribes are: Santal, Oraon, Gond, Munda, Ho, Saora, Kollaha, Lodha, Kharia, Porja, Kisan, Bhil, Kawar, Sahoria, Halba, Baiga, etc.

iii) **Western India Region**– includes Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Bhil, Mina, Saharia, Koli, Varli, Kokni, Dubla, Dhodia, Choudhuri, Tathawa etc., are found in this region.

iv) **South India Region**– comprises Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. In this region we find tribes such as Chenchu, Yerukals, Kondareddi, Kadar, Toda, Kota, Kurumba, Uralis, Kannikars, Badagas, Mala Araya, Irula, Naikda and so on.

v) **The Island Region**– covers the islands of Andaman and Nicobar, and Lakshadweep. Prominent tribes in this region include Andamanese, Onge, Jarwa, North Sentilelese, Car Nicoberese, Aminidivi, Koyas, Malmis and Malacheris, etc.

While the tribal population constitutes 52.51 per cent of the total population in Middle India region, 14.4 per cent of total population constitutes the tribal population in Himalayan region. In the Western region, 27.64 of the population forms tribal population. As the Southern region has 5.31 per cent tribal population, it is only 0.11 per cent of the Island region.

The tribal population of 10,42,81,034 constitutes 8.6 per cent of the country's total population of 121,05,69,573 according 2011 Census. Among the states, the highest tribal population is found in Madhya Pradesh followed by Maharashtra and Odisha. On the other hand, the least from the bottom is found in the states of Uttar Pradesh followed by Tamil Nadu and Bihar. Also, no scheduled tribe is notified in the states and UTs of Delhi, Punjab, Puducherry, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh.

The most populous tribes are Bhil, Gond, Santhal, Meena, Naikda, Oraon, Sugali, Munda, Naga, Khond, Boro, Koli Mahadev, Khasi, Koli and Varli who are with a population of few thousands. These are not confined to any single state but spread across the states. For example, Bhil is found in states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Maharashtra etc., and

Gond is found in states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, etc. On the other hand, the total population of following tribes that inhabit Andaman and Nicobar archipelago Andamanese, Chariar, Chari, Kora, Tabo, Bo, Yere, Kede, Bea, Balawa, Bojigiyab, Juwai, and Kolare is 44, and the Sentinelese are 15 according to 2011 Census.

6.3 LANGUAGES OF TRIBES

Almost all the tribes have their own dialects and few speak the language of their neighbouring dominant non-tribal population. About 123 of the tribes are monolingual and the rest are either bilingual or even multilingual as they speak their own mother tongue besides the dominant language of the region, and some speak the national language Hindi and international language English. Several dialects of the tribes are gradually disappearing due to linguistic shift as a result of their contact with non-tribes. In this connection as the tribal languages do not have script they could not protect and preserve the language, however, some of them use Roman script, Devanagiri or local language script.

The languages of tribe belong to five language families: (1) Andamanese, (2) Austro-Asiatic, (3) Dravidian, (4) Indo-Aryan and (5) Tibeto-Burman. It is also important to point out that those tribes who belong to different language families live in distinct geographic settings. For example, in South Orissa there are languages that originate from the Central Dravidian family, Austro-Asiatic (Munda) family and the Indo-Aryan. In the Jharkhand area, languages are from the Indo-Aryan, North Dravidian and Austro-Asiatic. Andamanese languages are spoken in Andaman Islands and Dravidian languages are spoken by the South Indian tribes predominantly Gonds, Kolams, Chenchus, Toda, Badaga, Paniyan, Kuttanayakan, etc. The Santal who are spread over West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha and so on speak Santali, a Munda language, and they use OlChiki script. The Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken among the tribes of North East and Himalayan ranges.

6.4 BIOGENETIC VARIATIONS AMONG THE TRIBES

With the popularisation of Darwinian theory of evolution those interested in human history classified the populations on the basis of morphological features and thus developed the racial classification. They postulated that certain human societies are more evolved than others, and this followed the idea of racial superiority dehumanising others. However, anthropological researches found the concept of 'racial superiority' is a myth, and therefore, they adopted the concept of 'cultural relativism' which means no culture is superior to the other for studying the human societies and cultures objectively across the globe. But for understanding the nation formation or societal

formation there is no alternative concept except the application of race and racial classification as the race is a biological concept. Therefore, we make an attempt to study the variations among the tribes according to racial classification.

6.4.1 Racial Classification of Tribes

Anthropologists in the beginning used the anthropometry for this purpose and later followed the serological, DNA studies and molecular biology. According to H.H. Risley the principle races in India are: Dravidian, Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid. J.H. Hutton felt it is Negrito race that originally inhabited the subcontinent but B.S.Guha finds Mediterranean element also. There are others like A.C. Huddon, D.N. Mazumdar, S. Sarkar and others. Thus, scholars have given different classifications that the population of India is a mix of different races. The following is the classification provided by B.S. Guha for Indian populations which is very popular.

- 1) The Negrito: The physical features include short stature, dark skin, curly hair, broad and flat nose, thick lips, and so on. Examples are Urali and Kadar of Kochin, Onge and Andamanese islanders.
- 2) The Proto Australoid: They are of medium stature, dark brown to nearly dark skin, broad and flat nose depressed at the root, and dolichocephalic head etc. Eg. Santal, Munda, Oraon, Juang, Kharia, Bhumij, Ho, etc.
- 3) The Mongoloid: The physical characteristics include short to medium height, light or yellow brown skin, flat face, oblique eye-slit with epicanthi's fold, scanty beard and moustache and straight hair. Examples are Naga, Mizo and other North Eastern tribes including those in Sikkim.
- 4) The Mediterranean: The physical features include medium height, black skin; well- built body and long head with bulbous forehead and projected with high vault. Examples are Tamil, Telugu and Bengal Brahmins, and some populations in Rajasthan and Western U.P.
- 5) The Western Brachycephals: They possess western face with **broad face**. Examples are Coorgs of Karnataka, Parsees of Mumbai, and some populations in Saurashtra, Gujarat and Bengal.
- 6) The Nordic: The features of this race include tall stature, fair complexion, long head, and sharp nose. Examples are some populations in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Jammu.

6.4.2 Genetic Identities

The studies of haploid (Y-chromosomal and Mitochondrial DNA markers) and diploid (50 ancestry informative autosomal SNP) genetic markers of tribal populations in Indian subcontinent unravel the genetic variability of tribal populations. Though marked variations in morphological or phylogenetic characteristics can be noticed among the tribal populations, the

genetic structural features are few and the diversity can be accounted for different reasons such as mutations, gene flow, genetic draft, convergence, etc. The studies indicate common ancestry among the southern Indian tribes though morphologically diverse, and there has been no genetic connectivity with the African population. In case of Andaman islanders also it is revealed that they have no relations with Africans. The variation among the south Indian tribes is largely due to genetic drift which means disappearance of particular genes as individuals die or do not reproduce. In case of north Indian tribes there is more genetic diversity and they are less isolated than the tribes in the south. However, they received minor gene flow from the recent migrations from the West or East, that is, since their settlement in Pleistocene period i.e., 2.58 million years ago. The language of these tribes is largely related to Indo-European languages.

The genetic characters of central Indian tribes show confluence of South Indian i.e., Dravidian, Eastern – Austro-Asiatic and Indo-European populations. Interestingly enough, some tribes like Bharia reveal haplogroups, frequent among Munda speakers of Austro-Asiatic groups, speak Indo-European language which means adaptation to different language. While the Bhil show affiliation to the Indo-European groups, the Sahariya tribe is showing a high frequency of South Asian-specific haplogroup and West Asian-specific haplogroup. Thus, the central Indian tribes show genetic as well as linguistic diversity.

As mentioned above the North Eastern tribes belong to Indo-European, Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic linguistic families and each of these show respective gene pools. The Mundari Austro-Asiatic tribes of central and eastern India have mostly South Asian haplogroups. However, the later have a low frequency of new elements to the extent of 25 per cent. The Austro-Asiatic Khasi of Northeast India represents genetic continuity, linking the populations of South and Southeast Asia. The Tibeto-Burman speaking populations such as Adi, Garo and some other of the region show well differentiated genetic affinity with the neighboring populations of East/Southeast Asia, based on their shared ethno-history. While some of the Mongoloid groups such as Toto and Mizo maintain biological distinction and maintain closer relation with the Myanmar communities, the Tharu and Ho of the sub-Himalayan region show greater gene flow. The more than 100 Naga and Hmar tribal groups show distinct genetic diversity compared to the Indian tribes, and thus maintain genetic isolation. They also remain separated from East Asian populations.

Check Your Progress

3) Write about the racial classification of Indian Tribes as per B.S.Guha.

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6.5 LIVELIHOOD PRACTICES OF TRIBES

Tribes in India pursue different livelihood practices such as– i) hunting, ii) hill-cultivation, iii) plain agriculture, iv) crafts and cottage industries v) simple artisan, vi) pastoral and cattle-herding, vii) folk-artists, and viii) agricultural and non-agricultural labour (Government of India: 95).

In fact, the tribes combine various economic practices; however, some are identified with certain main type of practices mentioned above. Accordingly, the hunting and gathering tribes depend to some extent on small game and collection of fruits and tubers besides *podu* or slash and burn or shifting cultivation or sometimes even permanent cultivation. In this category some nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes are also included. Chenchu, Yanadi, Irula, Kadar, Hill Pandaram, Cholanaikkan, Kharia, Birhor, Paharia, Birijia, Korwa, Lodha, Onge, and Jarwa are a few hunting and gathering tribes. With the implementation of Wildlife Protection Act and also the large scale deforestation the foraging activity has been reduced.

Cultivation on hills known as *jhum* or *podu* in which several tribes engage requires slash and burn method and shifting the area of cultivation periodically, and often terracing the soil also. Usually rice is grown on the hill slopes while some tribes in South India cultivate coffee, black pepper and spices also. Several of the North Eastern tribes, Juang, Kharia, Maria Gond, Savara, Baiga and Kondareddi depend on the hill cultivation.

Plain cultivation is the settled or permanent cultivation practiced by many tribes like any other according to their traditions. They generally grow rain-fed dry crops and occasionally do cultivate wet crops like rice and others with water from streams. Few use check dams and bore-wells also for irrigation. Some of the tribes who engage in plain cultivation include Tharu, Kinnaur, Bhumij, Khasa, Gond, Mina, Bhil, Kora, Santal, Bhuyian, Munda, Oraon, Garasia, Warli and Lambadi. These are tribes of peasantry or tribal agriculturists.

Some tribes are engaged in different crafts with bamboo and wood and some other make ropes. Few of them are into weaving, metal works and so on. Gujjar work on wood, Irula make ropes, Mahali make baskets with bamboo, Agaria work on iron. Kota and Thaurua produce pots. These products of cottage industry are sold in the markets.

Few tribes lead the pastoral life herding cattle such as sheep, goats, buffaloes such as Toda and Gujjar and Bakarwal. The Gaddi herd horses, mules and buffaloes. For several of the tribes rear these cattle in few numbers besides

other livelihood practices. The Lambada used to rear cows but now most of them are giving up and settling themselves as cultivators.

Folk artists are bards and singers. Some of them engage themselves in dancing, acrobatics and snake charming, etc. The Paradhans are bards for the Gonds. The bards and singers usually also use musical instruments. Bhats are story tellers and singers. Sapera used to be snake charmers but they have given up due to the enactment of Wild Life Protection Act 1972. Dangs are good acrobatic dancers. Kela also practices acrobatics.

As mentioned above, there are several tribes that are agriculturists and practice either hill-cultivation or plain cultivation. But among them also there are few who are landless and engage in agricultural labour and non-agricultural labour. In the latter category we find several of them working in mining sector in Jharkhand and other neighbouring states. Some of the tribes like Santal have migrated to work in the tea gardens of Assam, and these are popularly known as 'Tea Tribes'. Few of them are also found in the industries located in the tribal areas, construction, road and railway works, etc., as unskilled labour.

6.5.1 Changing Scenario

The above mentioned traditional livelihood practices have undergone perceptible changes. One government document states,

"... the number of communities practicing hunting and gathering has declined by 24.08 per cent, as forests have disappeared and wildlife has diminished. Ecological degradation has severely curtailed the related traditional occupations. For instance, trapping of birds and animals has declined by 36.84 per cent, pastoral activities by 12.5 per cent, and shifting cultivation by 18.14 per cent. However, there is a rise in horticulture (34.4 per cent), terrace cultivation (36.84 per cent), settled cultivation (29.58 per cent), animal husbandry (22.5 per cent), sericulture (82.6 per cent), and bee-keeping (60 per cent). Many of the traditional crafts have disappeared and spinning, in particular, has suffered (25.58 per cent). Related activities such as weaving (3.32 per cent), dyeing (33.34 per cent) and printing (100 per cent) have similarly suffered. Skin and hide work as also stone carving has declined." (Government of India 2014:97)

Over the years business and trade also developed though in small scale. Employment in government and private sector also increased with the increase in the literacy rate. The rate of literacy has improved from 47.1 per cent in 2001 to 59 per cent in 2011. The literacy of men stands at 68.5 per cent while it is 49.4 per cent in women. However, they lag behind the general population in all India level of literacy rate. They are now found engaged in hospital, administrative, business, information technology, university and other educational institutions. It is mainly due to the constitutional provisions of reservations for the scheduled tribes. However, unemployment is on the

increase and a large majority of the tribal households remain in the clutches of poverty and suffer from exclusion and deprivation of several comforts of urban and technology driven modern life.

Check Your Progress

- 4) What are the various livelihood practices of tribes and why and how are they changing?

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- 5) Write briefly about the culture of any tribe that you have already read or come across?

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6.6 TRIBAL POLITICAL LIFE

Before independence, the tribal societies had their own systems of governance and maintenance of law and order. They are basically egalitarian in character. However, in some cases the social hierarchy gradually in an evolutionary perspective, evolved into chiefdoms and kingdoms also by the time the British had arrived, but the colonial governments destroyed the tribal leadership while some merged with the Hindu royalty. The chiefs provided the centralised governance, but several of them remained stateless and nomadic. Such developments are found in central India, Odisha and Meghalaya and so on. The Raj Gond with the capital at Chanda lost their hold to the Mughals. Rajbhansis and Dimasa Kacharis also rose to their kingdoms in Assam. Santals, Bhuiya, Mizo and Naga tribes had their own chiefs. The interactions between the tribal chiefs and Hindu kings can be noted in the rituals of worship of Hindu deities in Odisha.

The post-independence period has witnessed change in the political scenario with the formation of the Indian Republic as a democratic state abolishing the princely states of India. The parliamentary system brought in electoral system and adult franchise overriding the traditional village panchayats thereby annihilating the powers of the traditional leaders. New leaders were elected through the democratic elections representing the people in the three tier

system of the Panchayati Raj – Gram Panchayat, Block Samithi or Mandal Parishad, and Zila Parishad. They are elected to the State Assembly and Central Parliament where legislations are passed and Acts are made for governing the Indian state wherein the tribal areas are part and parcel of the state. The reservation system is extended to the scheduled tribes in their representation in all political institutions enabling the tribes to participate in the decision making processes of the state.

The constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule has enabled the establishment of tribal states in North East India. It also helped establishment of autonomous District Councils for which the tribal leaders are elected for the development of the people in the district separately from the rest of the state. Again the Fifth Schedule provides provision for the governance of tribal areas and Tribes Advisory Council constituted by the elected representatives of the Assembly. Thus, the tribal societies have been integrated with the rest of India despite the fact that majority of the tribes lived in relative exclusive pockets geographically and administratively for ages.

The recent Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996 or PESA [1] ensures self-governance through traditional Gram Sabhas of people living in the Scheduled Areas. It means the Panchayats through Gram Sabhas take decisions with respect to the matters relating to the use of natural resources, collection of minor forest produce, permitting exploitation of minor minerals, use of minor water bodies, selection of beneficiaries and sanction of projects. Without the approval by the Gram Sabhas the governments cannot interfere with any of these matters.

6.7 TRIBAL RELIGION

In the Census of British India, the tribes were distinguished from the Hindu as animists because their religious beliefs and the concept of god centered on soul, spirit, ancestors, supernatural powers in inanimate objects, plant, etc., unlike polytheistic belief system of Hinduism. Their religious practices are characterised as magico-religious practices. It also included belief in the immortality of soul and existence of life after death. Some such belief systems of the tribes are known with the concepts like Sari Dharma/Bonga (Santhal), Bonga, Gondi (Gonds), Koya Punem (Koya), Adi (Adi) and Sarana dharma (religion) which involves the worship of nature – sun, moon, earth, river, tree, pebble and so on – is followed by some tribes in Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh.

The religious practices of the tribes have not been static, but changing according to degree of contact with neighbouring non-tribal communities and also in response to the intensity of the proselytising processes of other world's organised religions. Though the tribal societies are often described as isolated, autonomous and self-sufficient, they did depend on non-tribes for

things like pepper, clothes, cigar, etc. Thus the tribes have been in contact with the Hindu society for a long time and this has resulted in syncretic beliefs and religious practices among several of the tribes. Some tribes are more Hinduised than some other. Few tribes such as Bakarwal, Gujjar, Tadvi Bhil and Siddi are also Islamised. There are also Buddhist tribes such as Monpa, Sherdukpen, Kamti, Singpo, Apatani, etc., of Arunachal Pradesh and Chakma in Mizoram and Tripura. Several North Eastern tribes predominantly Naga and Mizoram, apart from other tribes in several states of India have embraced Christianity.

It may also be noted that some tribes such as Kharia have blended their religion with Hindu as well as Christian beliefs besides the tribal beliefs. In tribes like Santal and Oraon while some claim themselves as Hindu, some others as followers of indigenous religion, some others as Christians and yet few as followers of Islam. Thus, tribal religion in India is multiplex.

There is also reaction from the tribal adherents of indigenous faith towards the dominant non-tribal religions. For example, Khasi in Meghalaya launched Seng Khasi movement around 1910 AD to protect and preserve the indigenous religion, and as of now more than half of them are converted to Christianity. Similarly, recently the tribes such as Karbi and Nyezi-No in Arunachal Pradesh started Dolyi Polo religion by giving certain structure and organisation to the indigenous religion known as Hemphu-Mukrang religion. Gonds, Koya and several others started demanding separate indigenous religious identity in the census recording.

6.8 SUMMARY

From the above description we understand that tribes are an important segment of Indian society. Certain populations with distinct bio-genetic, linguistic, racial characters and culture distinct from the rest of the Indian population known in terms of castes are the tribes and some of them are identified as Scheduled Tribes following a definition by the Government of India. They are spread over several states and most of them are confined to relatively isolated hills and forests either exclusively or together. Few of them live by the side of villages inhabited by castes in the plain areas also. They have distinct life style in terms of livelihoods, law and justice, and religious life. India is a multi-cultural society and the constitution ensures such a society.

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6.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 6.0
- 2) Refer to section 6.1
- 3) Refer to section 6.4
- 4) Refer to section 6.5
- 5) Refer to Unit 6



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UNIT 7 DALITS OF INDIA*

Contents

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Historical Background
- 7.2 Theoretical Perspective on Dalits
- 7.3 Socio-Economic Situation and Changes among the Dalits
- 7.4 Dalits Movements
- 7.5 Dalits and Politics
- 7.6 Summary
- 7.7 References
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, students will be able to:

- introduce *Dalits* of India from an anthropological perspective;
- provide various theoretical perspectives on *Dalits*;
- understand the issues and concerns of *Dalits* in contemporary India; and
- discuss the role of Dr B.R. Ambedkar in shaping the *Dalits* and Indian society.

7.0 INTRODUCTION

The Scheduled Castes, that the Constitution of India has recognised them under the policy of protective discrimination of Indian populations, constitute an important segment with 16.2 per cent of the total Indian population according to 2011 Census. Since the recent past they preferred to be called with the neologism *Dalit*, though the government of India has not recognised this terminology. It has its origin in Sanskrit; it means ‘divided, split, broken, scattered’, and it was applied to the Scheduled Castes since nineteenth century. It is not clear who had first applied the term *Dalit* for the untouchables. However, the Dalit Panther’s movement in 1970s has popularised the term and now *Dalit* is a widely accepted term as a synonym for a Scheduled Caste.

Social scientists of India and abroad particularly sociologists and anthropologists, who have been concerned with the Indian society, have showed greater interest in comprehending the *Dalit* societies from historical,

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biological and socio-cultural perspectives. There is a huge body of literature available in this regard; we shall touch upon certain aspects of the *Dalits* in India. The *Dalits* basically known as untouchables in the past are now called “ex-untouchables” as the government of India has out-lawed the practice of untouchability.

The *Dalits* have detested the practice of untouchability in any form: avoidance of physical touch, use of abusive words, and no entry into the physical space of the upper castes, to not allow even the shadow of *Dalits* to fall on them and so on. Now, in practical terms there is a perceptible change in the degree of practice of untouchability, but it cannot be said to have been totally disappeared particularly in the rural side. In fact, such a practice is not confined to India but it is wide spread in Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries. It is almost absent in Egypt and Japan. The unit basically provides a very broad picture of *Dalits* in history, theoretical perspectives of various academic and non-academic scholars. It also deals with the socio-economic conditions of the contemporary *Dalits* and the efforts of the government for ameliorating their deplorable situation and gaining access to political power. Finally, it briefly discusses the movements of *Dalits* in their struggles to overcome their plight.

7.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The contemporary Indian society has long historical roots, and its rudimentary form can be found in ancient religious Sanskrit texts known as Veda, Upanishad, Dharma Shastra and Purana, and others. One can find in them that the social intercourse was taking place according to categorisation of populations and one’s place in it through biological relationship and birth. Education was imparted according to the social background of the student as we learn from the stories of Satyakama Jabala in Chandogya Upanishad 4:4:1 and Ekalavya in Mahabharata. Though the social intercourse was fluid in the beginning it became more rigid by the time Manu Smriti came into existence between 200 BCE and 220 CE. The inflexible Varna system developed restrictions on the social intercourse and valorised the practice of untouchability on the basis of religious ideology coupled with occupational, social customs, and livelihood practices of the social groups. The Varna system gradually changed to the stringent caste system on which the contemporary Indian society is said to have been based on though not as rigid as it was in the ancient times. Those outside the Varna system were called Avarna (no Varna); a dualistic categorisation of those within Varna and those outside the Varna system. The latter category basically refers to tribes and other immigrant populations who did not conform to the Varna system and those included in this category were called by different names Mlecha, Chandala, Nishada, Antyaja and so on. Similar to these, the castes that were not allowed to live within villages but included in the caste system and village community to take the lowest rank and whose touch was believed to have caused pollution due to their occupations related to death of humans or

cattle or human waste were called as untouchable castes during the colonial rule. The Colonialists brought these categories of social groups under the concept of “Depressed Classes” in recording early Census prior to 1935. Dr Ambedkar termed all these Depressed Classes as Dalits who are now categorised as Scheduled Castes that number about 1,263 in total and they are listed separately for each state. Let us begin with some academic and non-academic theoretical explanations offered and an understanding gained about the *Dalits* of contemporary Indian society.

7.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DALITS

The creation story found in the religious text of Rig Veda and other texts mentioned above provides a broad Indian’s sociological of their own society including the *Dalits*. However, most significantly the *Dalits* have preserved their own versions and origin of Indian society and their own also in myths and stories. For example, Matangis of Maharashtra believe in their descent from Matang Rishi, Parayar of Tamil Nadu trace their descent to Jamadgni Rishi and Renuka, Madiga of Andhra and Tengana believe as the descendants of Jambava Muni (Rishi), etc. All these myths have been interpreted in several ways. Some reject the position ascribed to them while some account for their low position. Thus, Indian sociology has its own explanations for the prevalence of the caste system and the place of each caste in it.

Mahatma Gandhi believed in non-hierarchical Varna system and as such all occupations are of equal value, and the Brahmin who serves other castes should not feel superior, and all castes should render their occupational services, and children should learn the occupations of their parents. There is no need of changing one’s Varna or occupation, and all are important for smooth functioning of the society. It is similar to anthropological structural-functional theory. William Wiser brought out the idea of *Jajmani* system which later has come to be known as caste system. It a system of interdependency of castes, and there is no exploitation of any particular caste and each caste contributes for the good of the village community. Thus, in the village structure, each caste has a status and an occupational role to play for the survival of the social system.

Louis Dumont, a French anthropologist argues that caste system is essentially religious in nature and its inherent feature of hierarchy is based on the religious values of purity and impurity or pollution which are interdependent, and purity is always superior to pollution. The Brahmin who are at the top of the hierarchy maintain astute religious purity, and the untouchable at the bottom are inherently impure owing to their dealing with the death and impurity. What is significant in this theory is that there is consensus even from the untouchables to this religious principle and to their lowest position in the caste system and the impurity ascribed to them according to Michael Moffatt.

In Marxist Approach, the contemporary Indian social system is an outcome of the medieval feudal system that ruled through pre-colonial and colonial period, and the Dalit lived at bottom of the social hierarchy as the most exploited lot by the upper castes or classes. Gail Omvedt's works on *Dalits* clearly reflect this approach. While fully endorsing the upper caste exploitation of *Dalits*, Dr Ambedkar proposes the theory of Broken.

According Dr B.R. Ambedkar, years ago there were several tribes and each one was against the other for cattle, fodder, food, and women. While some settled and practiced agriculture and production of grains, some other led nomadic life, and the latter used to ride over the villages of the former. In these wars those that were defeated became broken-men. With the increased value for the settled life, the broken-men were enslaved for defending the settled villages from the attacks of the barbarians and for extracting labour from the broken-men. Some broken-men consented to the demands of the settled tribes and joined them in course of time but settled outside the village. The untouchable are these broken-men.

Social inequality is ubiquitous and racial discrimination is almost universal. According Berreman, the racial difference in USA is no way different from the castes in India, and untouchables are like Blacks and the treatment and discrimination meted to them is as that of the Whites against the Blacks. Thus, he draws an equation between caste and race, and untouchables are the most exploited lot. A related issue of race is ethnicity. Of late, ethnicity, an important concept in anthropology with reference to the culture and social intercourse among the social groups, and its political character has come into the discourse of caste in contemporary Indian politics. In this regard Christophe Jeffrelot argues that the Dalits in India have taken the path of ethnicity through politics pioneered by Dr Ambedkar for assertion of their rights and gaining of political power instead of *sanskritisation* adopting the Brahmanical Hindu customs and practices. Deepa Reddy on the other hand points out the caste outside India in the context of immigrant Indians in USA, UK and other countries has taken the identity of ethnicity. She argues, caste has changed its character perceptibly assuming the political character which is not the case in the tradition system. Therefore, the *Dalits* have become conscious of their rights and fight for equality guaranteed by the Constitution.

Check Your Progress

- 1) How do anthropologists explain the position of *Dalits* in contemporary Indian society?

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7.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION AND CHANGES AMONG THE DALITS

According to 2011 Census, of the 1, 263 scheduled castes Karnataka state has the highest number (101) followed by Odisha (93) and Tamil Nadu (76). However, the highest percentage of scheduled caste population to the total state population is found in Punjab (33.94 per cent) followed by Himachal Pradesh (25.19 per cent) and West Bengal (23.51 per cent), and the least percentage is found in Mizoram (0.11) where there is scheduled caste population in the state of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. However, in terms of the total scheduled caste population distribution the highest concentration is found in Uttar Pradesh followed by West Bengal and Bihar. The percentage of scheduled caste population living in rural areas in 2011 has got decreased to 68.8 from 72.2 which indicate the increased migration from rural to urban areas.

Early childhood mortality rate is 55.8 when compared to others 38.5 during 2015-2016. The peri-mortality rate is also higher among the SCs during five-year period preceding 2015. While the prevalence of anemia stands at 55.9 and among others it is 49.6.

The literacy rate among the SCs according to 2011 is 66.1 as against the total population of 73.0, and among the genders it is 66.6 among the males and 56.5 among the females. Though there is a steady improvement from 10.27 in 1961 and 54.70 in 2001 there exists a gap between the scheduled castes and the total population and between the genders. Further, there continues to be a high drop-out rate of about 30 percent in the primary school itself.

While the percentage of population below poverty-line among the SCs during 2011 is 31.5, it is only 16.1 among the others in rural areas, and it is not different in urban areas also. According to 2011 Census, only 8.5 per cent of the households have regular or salary earnings while 33.7 per cent live by self-employment and 52.6 per cent live by casual labour and within this category those depending on agriculture labour is 31.4 per cent and 21.2 per cent on non-agriculture labour. In contrast to these figures, 13.3 per cent of the households in the category of others and 9.0 per cent in OBC category are of regular or salaried households. The percentage of landless households in each of the social categories shows SC-7.18, ST – 9.41, OBC – 9.68 and Others – 7.40. The percentage distribution of labour force (persons) among different social group shows SC – 18.8, ST- 8.7, OBC – 44.0 and Others – 28.4. (Govt. of India 2018)

Given the vulnerability of the scheduled castes, the government of India has a separate Department of Social Justice and Empowerment under the Ministry of Social Justice and Employment for ameliorating the conditions of scheduled castes through various welfare measures. In this regard the government of India adopted the policy of protective discrimination by

identifying these castes and providing them reservations in education, employment and political institutions. The Constitution of India guarantees the social justice and equality under the Articles 17, 38, 46, 330, 352, etc. Further, the government has introduced Special Component Plan for Scheduled Caste during the Sixth Plan periods which was later called SC Sub-Plan for speedy development of scheduled castes and eliminate poverty. The welfare measures include Centrally Sponsored Schemes which include pre and post-metric scholarships to students to study in India and abroad, separate hostels, coaching schemes, Finance and Development Corporation, rehabilitation of manual scavengers, enactment of Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955, 1989 for preventing the atrocities against the SC/STs, Pradhan Mantra Adarsh Gram Yojana, etc.

The following statement makes it clear about the contemporary socio-economic conditions of the scheduled castes.

Despite 68 years after Independence, the Scheduled Castes are still subjected to practices like untouchability and social discrimination by some sections of society. This has resulted in denial of education, as well as economic, social, political and cultural deprivation...

While the figure-wise allocations of the funds for welfare look handsome, but actual allocation to this sector is not sufficient to cater to the needs of the scheduled caste population. As a result, the social and economic development of the Scheduled Castes has not improved as per expectation since Independence. (Government. of India 2015-16:236)

Given the socio-economic background, experiences of social exclusion and the political climate during the Colonial period and the availability of leadership the *Dalit* leaders began to articulate about improving their conditions during the Colonial period. They participated in social movements launched by non-Dalits at that time keeping their own interest. But when Dr. Ambedkar was recognised as a national *Dalit* leader they followed him closely and joined his movements.

7.4 DALIT MOVEMENTS

Social movement or movement is an endeavour, occasionally unplanned also, with a short or long term goal(s) to achieve that a group organises collectively. It should have an ideology and framework besides set goals. The Dalits have been organising concerted movements since the Colonial period sporadically or as everyday form of protest or for a longer duration. The forms of protests and agitations of aimed for social and economic equality, dignity and respect. The goal is to put an end to untouchability, economic exploitation, discrimination and exclusion. These are popularly known as *Dalit* movements, and organised at rural, urban level and often at all India level also; in fact, it is a pan Indian phenomenon. Nandu Ram (1998) finds

three phases in the *Dalit* movements: Protests before the religious revivalism, Bhakti movement, and post-independence movements.

As regards to earlier *Dalit* protests, some scholars have mistaken that the *Dalits* accepted their subordination since there were no visible forms of resistance and their religion also does not indicate any protest but they did have the ‘culture of protest’ against the ‘culture of terror’ in the earlier period. There were overt sporadic and unrecognised and isolated protests though not in the present style. The terrorisation of dominant castes suppressed them every successfully and today one can notice such resistances in *Dalit* oral traditions in covert form. The open or visible forms protests that one can notice from the second half of nineteenth century have the source of inspiration in the non-hierarchical Hindu religion and social reforms initiated either by the British or Indian social reformers.

Kabir Panth (between 1398 and 1518 BCE), the Lingayatism (eighteenth century) in Hindu tradition having roots in Basavanna (twelfth century) and Veera Brahmendraswamy (nineteenth century) etc., preached against the caste discrimination. Guru Nanak (1469–1539) the founder of Sikh religion also preached against the caste system and untouchability. In 1861 the Brahma Samaj established on the non-caste Hindu Vedic religion which was initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Debendranath Tagore also rejected Brahmanism. These religious philosophies had given strength to the conceptualisation of social equality and human dignity that the *Dalits* cherished for ages. With the emergence of social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823–1892) Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu (1848 –1919) etc., the inclusive process gained momentum. Other noted reformers with political bend include Mahatma Gandhi (1869– 1948), Vinoba Bhave (1895 – 1982) etc. It is also a fact that the integration of Dalits with the Hindu society was not acceptable for several of the upper caste leaders and common people. However, the Dalit movements derived more inspiration from the social reforms of the nineteenth century lower caste secularists such as Jyoti Rao Phule (1827-1890) and Periar Ramaswamy (1879-1973), etc., who engaged in mass mobilisations rejecting the Brahmanical supremacy and Aryan hegemony for Brahmins’ identification with Aryans.

The second phase of Bhakti movement of the *Dalits* can be located in the emergence of *Dalits*’s rejection of Hinduism and *Dalit* leaders. The social and political reforms of the British by providing education to lower castes and jobs in the army, etc., census enumeration by caste and preference given to the upper castes in the army and administration by the British also encouraged them to resist the domination of Brahmins and upper castes. *Dalit* leaders such as Ayothee Thass (1845-1914), Bhagyareddy Verma (1888-1939), Swami Achhootanand (1879 -1933), Mangu Ram (1886 – 1980) etc., initiated reforms among the Dalits by raising the consciousness. Ayothee Thass was the first *Dalit* who embraced Buddhism. Adi-Dharmi and Adi-

Hindu movements claimed autochthonous status and indigeneity to the Dravidas and *Dalits*. The 'Adi' (meaning first or original) concept originated in Brahma Samaj from the Vedas when there was absence of caste rigidity. It spread rapidly in Bengal, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and so on. In assumed the title of Adi-Hindu, Adi-Dravida, Adi-Dharma, Adi-Karnataka, etc., rejecting the hierarchical Hinduism and the lowest position accorded to the untouchable castes. They demanded separate census enumeration in religion as different from Hindu.

The third phase of *Dalit* movement was started by Dr Ambedkar. Drawing inspiration from the above leaders Dr Ambedkar launched Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 taking a rally of *Dalits* to exercise their right of using the water tank and organized rallies for the rights of workers in 1920s and 1938, and for peasants in 1930 and 1938. Further, he launched Kalaram temple entry for *Dalits* in 1930. He also launched agitation for the abolition of Mahar Vatan system since 1927s, but it was accomplished only in 1959. Nandu Ram states,

Broadly speaking, the ideology of Dalit movements centred around the goals of achieving equality, liberty, fraternity and social justice — the core of Ambedkar's ideology which is the main source of inspiration for the contemporary Dalit movements in India. (Ram 1998:105)

From the above it is clear that there was not any *Dalit* national leader and the *Dalit* movements were localised struggles but after Poona Pact in 1932 Dr Ambedkar emerged as the national *Dalit* leader. Having received inspiration from Jyoti Rao Phule and Ayothee Thass' writings and acceptance of his representation of *Dalits* by the British Dr. Ambedkar toured several provinces and towns and spoke in public gathering strongly advocating for AISC and seeking unity of the *Dalit* communities. Having understood that Mahatma Gandhi has betrayed them from giving political power the *Dalits* supported Dr. Ambedkar. The maxim of Dr. Ambedkar 'Political power is the key to all social progress' had a long effect on the Dalit leaders. Though none has replaced Dr. Ambedkar as a national leader, the *Dalit* moments in the post-independence continued to exist in different states on local issues but all of them struggled for upward mobility of the *Dalit* community and for stamping out the practice of untouchability in Indian society. However, *Dalit* Panthers in 1970s in Maharashtra, the inspiring literary form, once again galvanised the movement after the demise of Dr. Ambedkar. An important aspect of the Dalit movement is Dr. Ambedkar's dictum of gender equality; the *Dalit* women's immense role in the Dalit movement and struggle for equality within the *Dalit* society as well as outside. Their contribution through literature continues to be great support to the *Dalit* movement. These movements can be comprehended in greater depths from the theoretical perspectives of caste, class and gender within the *Dalits*.

The *Dalit* movements not only helped conscious rising among the *Dalits* in terms of asserting their rights guaranteed through the Constitution, the need

for political participation, etc., further they have been giving messages to the government to take up their issues at the appropriate level. The government not only brought out Atrocity Act and formulated several plans and schemes for their welfare and socio-economic development and among these Special Component Plan for Scheduled Castes (1980-85) is a notable one. In other words, a positive social change had taken place across the country.

Check Your Progress

- 2) Do you think, *Dalit* movements solved their problems and enabled them to achieve their goals?

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7.5 DALITS AND POLITICS

After independence the *Dalits* entered the domain of the state politics duly encouraged by Dr. Ambedkar for participation in the decision making process through political institutions within the provisions made available through the Constitution. It further led to the mobility of masses for asserting their rights and privileges enshrined in the Constitution and the democratic principles that the nation embraced. The *Dalits* of India would have never thought about entering into electoral politics but for Dr. Ambedkar they could wrest political power at least in one state, though for a short stint. Dr. Ambedkar made a history initiating the *Dalits* politics by conscious raising and setting up an example by him contesting in the elections. The British granted the Communal Award in August 1932 in favour of Depressed Classes with 71 territorial constituencies in the Legislative Council along with other Minorities only because of his persuasion. It means in these constituencies only depressed class people elect their representative and others do not participate in the elections. Though he initially demanded for separate electorates in his representation to the Simon Commission in 1928, and persuaded the British government in the Second Round Table Conference held in London in 1931, the final the Communal Award was granted in the following year. Accordingly, 71 constituencies to Depressed Classes through the Communal Award were granted in the Legislative Council which was to be the premier body of Legislature for the entire British Dominion. But it was not acceptable to Gandhi and he went on hunger strike. Dr. Ambedkar finally yielded himself to save the life of Mahatma and it resulted in ‘The Poona Pact’ in 1932. Accordingly, an agreement was reached for 147 seats in total for the Depressed Classes in the Provincial Legislatures across all the 8 Provinces but not in the Legislative Council. The British Parliament enacted

an Act 1935 accordingly and it came into force in 1936; Dr. Ambedkar established a political party with the name Independent Labour Party in 1936 to contest the elections. Elections were also held for Bombay Presidency and the Independent Labour Party won 15 out of 17 that the Party contested. Thus, the *Dalits* made an entry into the electoral politics. Later in July 1942 Dr. Ambedkar established All India Scheduled Castes Federation (AISCF) party which contested election held in 1946 and 1952 but lost them. Towards the end of his life dissolving the AISCF he replaced it with Republican Party of India in October 1956 which continues to exist even after his death on December 6, 1956. The party participated in 1957 and 1962 General Elections and won many seats not only in Maharashtra but also in other states of India. In all it won, 12 Lok Sabha and 29 State Assembly seats in 1957; 3 Lok Sabha and 20 State Assembly seats in 1962; 1 Lok Sabha and 22 State Assembly seats in 1967. But at the moment Republic Party is active mostly in Maharashtra state and it is ridden with internal problems, and as such it has not able to achieve much by itself.

However, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) that emerged in North India has made over the loss of Republican Party in the electoral politics. Though BSP is not restricted to the *Dalits*, it is identified with them and the efforts of *Dalits* under the BSP bore fruits since 1989 and emerged as one of the third largest political party in the country. Kanshi Ram established the party as a national party 1984 and Kumari Mayawati emerged as a major leader and the former remained as her mentor, and for the first time the party contested elections in 1989 and won 4 seats in Lok Sabha; 67 seats in the Uttar Pradesh State Assembly in 1993 and 2 seats in the Assembly of Madhya Pradesh in 1990, 57 seats in the Assembly of Rajasthan in 1990 and so. In 2003 Mayawati was able to become the President of the party in 2003 and she also became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for some period in 1997 and 2002. The party fared well in the 2007 elections and came to power in Uttar Pradesh and completed its full term during 2007-2012, and the BSP continues to have its presence in several states. Since 2012 it seems the BSP has lost its sheen and its future remains to be watched.

Until BSP emerged as a national political party, there has not been any Pan-Indian Dalit party. However, since independence the *Dalit* have been actively involved in the general elections and leaders entered all the political parties. When they got elected they have also been participated in the decision making processes in the Parliament at the Centre and Assemblies in all the States. They served in the offices of Ministers of the State and Central governments and nominated positions in various institutions.

Check Your Progress

3) Whether political power is necessary for the upward mobility of Dalits? Explain.

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7.6 SUMMARY

The unit has attempted to provide a brief history of *Dalits* and various theoretical perspectives about them, and their social and economic conditions. It also discusses the circumstances under which they entered into the electoral politics and their participation in the decision making institutions in the country. The unit brings to light the issues, problems and concerns of the *Dalits*. It concludes with the background of movements that they have been engaged for their liberation, assertion of their rights and aspirations for gaining sense of equality and dignity.

7.7 REFERENCES

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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 7.1 & 7.2
- 2) Refer to section 7.4
- 3) Refer to section 7.5

UNIT 8 GENDER AND SOCIETY IN INDIA*

Contents

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Anthropology and Gender
- 8.2 Gender Ideology
- 8.3 Status of Women
- 8.4 Women's Movements
- 8.5 Dalit Women
- 8.6 Tribal Women
- 8.7 Empowerment of Women
- 8.8 Summary
- 8.9 References
- 8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, the student will be able to:

- develop an understanding of anthropological perspective of gender;
- understand the significance of gender ideology and gender inequality in India;
- understand the status of women and movements of women in contemporary India;
- find out the intersectionality, and problems of *Dalit* and Tribal women in Indian society; and
- become familiar with the empowerment of women in India.

8.0 INTRODUCTION

Anthropology endeavors scientific study of human society of the past and present in its totality, essentially the human nature. Sexuality and gender relationships constitute the most important aspect of human beings, and societies deal with this in different ways. Though biological roots cannot be denied, sexual desires and responses are shaped by the society as to the type of dress to be worn, patterns of speech, food to be taken, to marry, the control of births, work to be undertaken, responsibilities fixed, studies to be undertaken, employment taken up, etc. Since historical times eunuchs are known: Bakla in Philippines, Hijra India, Mahu in Hawaii, Dine among the

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native Americans and so on, who are placed between male and female. Albanian society recognises sworn virgins, women who do not marry but put on men's dress and act as men. While USA recognises four genders, India recognises three genders only.

Thus, cultures have constructed their own gender ideologies. Employing ethnographic approach and comparative method in studying gender in various societies/cultures across the globe through fieldwork and empirical knowledge anthropology has developed an objective understanding of sexuality and gender in human societies. This course bears upon gender and society in India from this disciplinary perspective.

While sex is biological, gender is a social construction through roles played as culturally determined which are often times taken naturally according to biological sex. But we notice these roles differ from society to society and the role per gender is not fixed as noticed in same-sex marriages taking place around the world and trans-sexuality also. Gender is an identity that one identifies with as regards to sexual preference. Views and perspectives are changing about the sex and gender over the years, and sexual binary or dualism is no longer valid. India has recognised the third gender in 2014, and one can choose the gender for any official records (the *hijra*, transgender, eunuchs) and also reserved three reservations in education, employment, distributions of house sites, etc. Realising the gender inequality socio-economic conditions India also has taken up several initiatives for bridging the gap between the male and female.

Social scientists including anthropologists have developed various theories about the genders. Feminism's theoretical consideration located the gender in power relations and feminists not only study gender in different social and cultural backgrounds but also take political stand for achieving gender equality for all gender categories. From the above background, the course provides preliminary ground for understanding gender in Indian society. It starts with a brief history of anthropology and gender. This is followed by conceptualisation of gender in India, gender status, intersectionality of gender, women issues, women movements, and empowerment of women.

8.1 ANTHROPOLOGY AND GENDER

Margret Mead (1901-1978) is the pioneer anthropologist who has dealt with the subject of sexuality undertaking a fieldwork in Samoa islands. She challenged the western notions of biological determinism and argued that the sexuality has more association with social aspects citing ethnographic data in support of culturally constructed sexuality. Accordingly, there is variability in femaleness and maleness. Early male anthropologists were criticised for neglecting women and gender issues in their ethnographic studies. Levi-Strauss has been criticised for his theory of marriage exchange, beside Malinowski paid little attention to the role of women's rituals in Melanesian

culture. Ethnographic examples do not support Sigmund Freud's theory of female sexuality and Oedipus complex in the psychosexual development. However, the rise of feminist anthropology around 1970s with their comparative studies contributed much to the understanding of gender and sexuality in human societies. The notions of incest, hetero-sexual and same-sex marriages are examined on the basis of ethnographic evidences. As premarital sex is not prohibited among the Samoans, and the Azande and the Dahomey approve same-sex marriages, anthropologists revise the notion of gender from polarity of gender duality to a continuous scale of gender.

Gender inequality is a near universal phenomenon existing in all societies regardless of their technological advancement. Religions in most of the cases relegate women to secondary position to women, and bodily secretions, menstruation and child birth cause ritual pollution to women, and virginity is viewed as the symbol of purity. Pre-marital sex is prohibited in many cultures so much so that in some societies even chastity belts were used in the past. Conception, pregnancy and child birth are conceptualised differently in different societies; in some there is no role of man as in case of Trobriand, but in some other both sexes contribute and in some other societies woman has little role to play except being a container and nurturer of semen. The gendered division of labour and economic contribution of genders is closely associated with gender inequality in many societies.

They agree for near universal dominance of men and account for gender inequality in different ways. While Rosaldo finds distribution of authority between public and private assigned domestic and private arena, Chodorow locates gender inequality exclusion of women from the public and restricted to socialisation of girls. Sherry Ortner finds culture and nature equation with men and women, and the latter is considered inferior; women's naturally endowed capacity of child birth is down as secondary to the culture with which men are associated. However, Marxist anthropologists find an association between capitalist mode of production and human reproduction laden with power relations. Men exploit women subjugating and using them basically for reproduction as a means of economic production, and thus woman has economic value.

The World War II and the subsequent world scenario ushered a new era wherein women entered the public space. They participated in the public life and started debating their role in changing the gendered world conditions. The discourse centered on the emancipation and liberation of women, equal wages, legal right for property and divorce, and inclusion of women in voting and decision making authority. This movement as the first wave was largely initiated and sustained by White educated women in USA and Europe before 1960s. It gained popularity as feminist movement which combined political, cultural and economic interests of women. It has several hues and colours such as Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Socialist Feminism, New Feminism, Post feminism, etc. The second wave emerged later in 1970s with

the active participation of coloured women seeking support from all marginalised women across the developing countries. It demanded civil rights along with class struggle and abolition of racial discrimination. The third wave followed in 1990s being shaped by post-colonial and postmodern thinking. It broke the boundaries of gender and challenged the definition of femininity. It engaged in critically examining the intersectionality of gender cutting across race, ethnicity, class, religion, nationality, etc. From these developments, the anthropological feminism is concerned with the male domination and Euro-centered gender taking into the comparative approach of gender construction across different cultures.

In the light of the above anthropological approach to gender and sexuality, the course focuses on women in Indian society.

8.2 GENDER IDEOLOGY

The roots of gender ideology in Indian society, as Susan Wadley, Vandana Shiva and others state can be located in the Samkhya philosophical tradition where both the genders are equally important. This philosophy explains causation, existence, creation and evolution of world with the concepts of *purusa* and *prakruti* that represent the male and female principles. These are also sources of knowledge. In this dualistic realist philosophy *purusa* and *prakruti* are opposite in nature. The world is created and recreated through the dialectical play of creation and destruction and also cohesion and disintegration; these opposite forces create tension by which dynamic cosmic energy emerges which is known as *Shakti*. This primordial energy manifests in all pervasive nature (*prakruti*). Thus nature that consists of both animate and inanimate beings and things is the expression of *Shakti*, the feminine creative principle that works in relationship with masculine principle (*pususa*). All the forms of nature are the children of the Mother Nature. *Prakruti* is also called Lalitha, player – free and spontaneous creative activity. The gender equality is well represented in Ardhanarishwara (Lord who is half-woman), a complete androgynous form of male and female representing deities Shiv (god) and Parvati (goddess); a synthesis of male and female principles.

The feminine principle is also found in the symbolic expression of female deities or goddesses as consorts of gods who represent the masculine principles. The popularly known goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati represent their counter parts– the trinity – Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara or Iswara, the gods who control the affairs of human world, and the former are embodiment of wisdom, wealth, virtues, chastity, devotion and benevolence. Sita wife of Lord Sri Ram is reincarnation of goddess Lakshmi, the deity of wealth, who also represents chastity and devotion to husband. These are role-models for Hindu women besides being symbols of virtuous woman. Further, goddesses like Satyabhama or Kali or Durga or Sheetala Mata symbolise valour and bravery of woman. However, unmarried village goddesses who

accept animal sacrifices are identified with Kali or Durga or Parvati who in turn represent the primeval energy Shakti or Adi Shakti, creative feminine principle as mentioned before. But these village goddesses who receive sacrifices are considered inferior to other goddesses and god who are worshipped only with vegetarian offerings. Anthropologists draw parallels between the divine hierarchy and societal ranking.

Third gender also finds place in this ideology. One refers in this regard to the divine beings such as Aravan, Harihara, Bahuchara Mata, Gadadhara, etc., who do not fit strictly into the gender binary. Not only in ideology but in practice also Hindu society has not been averse to unions of same gender and transgender behaviour. It is argued that women in Vedic age enjoyed equal status as that of men. But the post-Vedic age their position has been derogated. Some also point out to low esteem accorded to women in the past referring to Draupadi in Mahabharatha and others in *Puranic* period and *Devadasi* system and its several diminutive form practiced for ages.

Manusmriti not only upholds women in high esteem– “where women are provided place of honour, gods are pleased and reside there in that household” but also makes derogatory remarks against women several times. While married woman though remains under the authority of her husband, she enjoys greater freedom compared to the unmarried girl who has to be under the control of the father. As the sight of married woman is auspicious a widow symbolises inauspiciousness. Women’s domestic role includes her participation and engagement in various rituals for the prosperity of family, and long life for husband and brothers. The motherhood is the most venerated position and it is constructed through various rituals organised without the aid of any priest or priestess and these include rituals of marriage, pregnancy and birth of children. Widow cannot participate in any of these rituals and also lacks independence but remains under the authority of adult son. Thus, gender ideology is endowed with both positive and discriminatory ideas about woman in Indian society.

Check Your Progress

1) Is there a relationship between gender ideology and gender inequality in India?

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2) How is the gender inequality addressed in India?

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8.3 STATUS OF WOMEN

The Western gaze of Indian society during the colonial times pictured a bizarre gender inequality as appeared in the traditions and practices such as child marriages, sati, proscription of widow remarriage, polygamy, female infanticide and so on. Apart from that, there was rampant illiteracy, low work participation, lack of public audience due to *paradah* restrictions, violence against women, etc. However, the post-independent India has been quite different due to the social reforms initiated at that time and continued even after the independence. Several legislative Acts enacted to address the gender and social inequalities transformed the society so much so that the gender equality in contemporary Indian society is far better than what it was and even better as compared to the situation in many third world countries also. But it does not mean that the egalitarian society has been brought in.

Political participation of Indian women can be traced back to nationalist movement both by the elite and mass women to the present day. Women participated in the movements against the British rule in the peasants and trade union struggles besides the freedom movement. Not only social reforms but also English education motivated women in the political participation. After 1975 feminist ideology also played its role for their active engagement in the political struggles. Women rose to hold important positions not only in the political parties but also public office, and the notable example being Indira Gandhi became the first woman Prime Minister of India during the period of 1966-77 and again in January 1980 and remained in office till her assassination in October 1984. So far 13 states have been headed by women Chief Ministers besides Governors and Lieutenant Governors of States and Union Territories. Several of them held the ministerial positions of Cabinet and State rank. Since 1992 Indian army started recruiting women officers in non-medical roles. Since 1940s women started receiving Ph.D. degrees and entered the field of science though women have been in the field of engineering since 1920s. Women have excelled in arts and dancing since ages. Today India can boast of having, if not equal number, considerably high number of women engineering and medical graduates. These impressive achievements of women, however, should not undermine the problems and issues of women and gender inequality due to the extant dominant patriarchal norms in India.

Some of the social and cultural norms/practices prevalent particularly among the rural masses that stand somewhat impediments for gender inequality include: strong patriarchal norms, son preference, differential treatment of boys and girls with the emphasis girls being essentially home-makers,

imposing chastity more on girls than boys, decision making being male's privilege, limited educational and economic opportunities for girls, economic pressures of a girl's marriage with dowry and other related economic burdens.

Poverty is an important issue where either woman-headed households or a woman in general one finds inequality in Indian society. That is why the government has been making its best efforts for empowering women by providing various schemes such that work participation of women would increase. Yet unemployment rate among women is much higher than men even though state governments have been providing reservations in government employment. It has also been noted by social scientists that poverty among the rural, scheduled caste and tribal women is relatively more compared to other categories. Only 26 per cent of women as against 44 per cent of men have an account in the formal financial institutions in 2014 which speaks of the economic independence of women in the country.

In Indian households the gender inequality could also be noticed in accessing health care, education and other social services. Women and girls receive less attention compared to men and boys in a household in terms of incurring expenditure on health care and education in case of women and girls. Poor nutritional status is one reason for women and girls falling sick frequently. Boys are extended better education but as for girls it is believed that they leave their house after marriages and thus the family would not be able to the benefit of the girl child's education.

Though the sex is biologically determined and both the sexes have equal chances of being born i.e., 100:100, there is bias in the live birth of several populations wherein male - female ratio is 105:100. According to the estimates of United Nations the world has 986 females as against 1000 males. However, the sex ratio in India as per the Census 2011 is 943 females for 1000 males. This clearly demonstrates preference for boy and also sex selection. In nineteenth century there used to be female infanticide, it may not be there today but the sex imbalance could be due to abortion of female fetus and selection of male fetus which may have been carried out illegally and secretly despite the government's outlaw of such practices.

There is tremendous improvement in the literacy rate in India from 12 per cent in 1947 to 74 per cent in 2011. In 1951, the literacy rate of male and female was 24.95 and 7.93 respectively, and it increased to 45.96 and 21.98 by 1971. There is further improvement in 2011 which stands at 82.14 and 65.14 respectively. These figures clearly reveal great enhancement in the literacy rate of women in the post-independence era. However, it is also true that there is a consistent gap between male and female literacy rate – 17.02, 23.98 and 17.00; this explains the differential treatment between boys and girls in the household.

Concerned over the National Crime Records Bureau in 2012, the government of India established Justice Verma Committee on Amendments to Criminal Law to review existing normative gaps. There is an increase of violent crimes against women, especially rape and abduction. The dowry related death cases are also increased after 2008; a total of 7,621 cases of dowry deaths were reported in 2016. Under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act about 437 cases were registered in 2016. The cruelty both physical as well as emotional assault has been perpetrated by the husband for various reasons. Assault on modesty, abduction of women for trafficking, and acid attacks are some other heinous crimes against women.

Check Your Progress

- 1) How does the anthropological perspective help understanding of women in Indian society?

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8.4 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

The nationalist movement has witnessed participation of women along with Mahatma Gandhi who engaged in inclusive politics. These women were from elite society. But it is also true that masses also participated in their own way, for example, in the Armoury Raid of Chittagang in 1930 Bina Das was killed and Kalpana Dutta was jailed and she also led peasant struggles and workers' unions against the colonial policies. Women did participate in the *kisan sabhas* held in Bihar, Bengal and Telangana during 1946 – 51. At the same time, we also find Sarojini Naidu being elected as the first woman President of Indian National Congress and she later became the governor of Uttar Pradesh. She was also President of All India Women's Association. The focus was essentially on the freedom struggle and later on it was on the reorganisation of Indian society through the inclusive framework integrating gender, caste and class. Around 1960 there was a greater participation of middle class women in the politics concentrating on the women issues and by 1970 Indian Feminism started becoming active force focusing on patriarchy and male domination as in the West. The latter Feminism showed concern over socio-economic issues on caste lines and ecological issues. Here, it is important to note the Sharada Movement in Maharashtra 1973 wherein Adivasi women launched a struggle against wife-beating, rape and economic exploitation by upper castes. The Chipko Movement is another important movement launched by women with the support of men in 1970s in Uttarakhand against the felling of forest trees and for protecting the ecology

on which their lives depended. In 1977 Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh, a militant trade union was formed; it was basically to fight for the women's equal rights – manual miners' equal rights to wage labour. Since 1990s one could see the intersectionality of feminist movement with the raised voices of *Dalit* women with the formation of All India Dalit Women's Forum and National Federation of Dalit Women. Further, the first World Dalit Convention was organised in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1998. In the light of above discussion there is need to examine the Dalit and Adivasi in Indian society.

8.5 DALIT WOMEN

The *Dalit* women suffer discrimination at least on two fronts: as a *Dalit* from the non-*Dalit* society and woman within the society under the domination of male. She suffers from this double discrimination in the subordinate position. Often encounters sexual harassment, violence and assault. Rural *Dalit* women undergo inhuman treatment relatively more than that of the urban women where the discrimination is less compared to the rural society. Since most of the *Dalit* households are landless poor they depend on upper castes for daily wages, and some are employed on regular basis also in a traditional set up in the households of the upper castes who are politically and economically powerful. Thus, they are vulnerable for all sorts of unpleasant experiences ranging from caste based remarks, abuses to rape and murder. Due to their powerlessness they can neither resist nor revolt against the powerful individuals or communities lest their lives either individuals or families or community would be at stake. Thus, deprived off the political rights, they are also subjected to domestic violence often by the drunken husband, and for not bringing enough dowry also if they have little money, or are suspected of infidelity, etc. Added to the poverty is the illiteracy which makes them further weak: the literacy rate among the *Dalit* women in the country according 2011 Census is 56.5 per cent which is lower than that of *Dalit* men (75.2 per cent), and women of all categories (64.6 per cent). Urban women have more access to information when compared to rural women. Along with men the women are also sometimes accused of sorcery and black magic. *Dalit* women are caught up in the traditions of ignorance as they are married to gods and goddess in South Indian states which lead them to destitution and prostitution also. The seasonal migrations are more common in the *Dalit* households which also place the women in the most vulnerable situation in the new places among the strangers. These are the most muted, voiceless and even if they raise their voices these are not heard.

8.6 TRIBAL WOMAN

The position of tribal woman is more or less like the *Dalit* woman except in the degree of the intensity of discrimination shown by the non-tribal society. It is generally believed that tribal society is an egalitarian society, but not

really so; the gender equality is better compared to the non-tribal society. Their society is mostly patrilineal and patriarchal except Khasi, Jaintia and Garo of Meghalaya state who are matrilineal. Like anyone else the division of labour goes on gender lines though not as strictly as that of non-tribal societies, man is the head of the household. Except the matrilineal tribes, rests of them inherit properties on male line and the descent is traced through males only. Tribes in India are in general monogamous or polygamous or patrilocal; Toda of Nilgiri hills and certain Himalayan tribes are polyandrous. Not all tribal societies are homogenous; there exists social hierarchies in some of the tribes. Divorces and remarriages or widow and widower remarriages are not uncommon in the tribal societies. Despite all these variations by and large, gender inequality can be noted in tribal society in its own way wherein women are not considered equal to man. The tribal women are the least literate category according to 2011 Census: total literacy rate of tribal society is 59.0 per cent, while the literacy of tribal men is 68.5 per cent the literacy rate of tribal women is only 49.4 per cent against all women literacy that stands at 64.6 per cent. While choosing marriage partner, a tribal woman enjoys more freedom than her counterparts. Mostly being agriculturists, the woman toils along with man and in fact she labours more than man as she also takes care of domestic work as well as child care. However, her labour is always considered inferior to man's work or mean work and domestic work is not given economic value at all. Domestic violence by drunken husband is not uncommon among the tribal society. The decision-making normally rests with man only in the home. Further, in agriculture labour women are paid less than that of men. Seasonal migration of tribes is very common; the immigrant women are subjected to often sexual harassment, exploitation and violence. Unlike non-tribal society, tribes do not show any preference to a particular gender; girl child is treated with equal respect. In some society, the girl's parents receive bride-price at the time of her marriage from the groom; she is treated well in her in-law's house. She enjoys freedom even after marriage, and if she decides to leave her husband the society respects her decision. However, since tribal society is predominantly patriarchal the woman lacks legal rights over the property and also custody of her children. Rarely do we find tribal woman priests or ethnomedical practitioners; these prestigious positions in the society remain usually with men only. Moreover, a look at the health status of tribal woman as several studies indicate reveals malnutrition and poor health conditions compared to the general populations. Mortality rate of infants is also high. The tribal political structures including in matrilineal societies do not have room for woman's leadership.

Given the broad intersectional dimension of Indian women it is also important to briefly discuss the empowerment of women in India.

Check Your Progress

- 4) Evaluate the status of tribal women as compared to *Dalit* and non-tribal women.

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8.7 EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Taken into the cognisance of gender issue, the Indian leadership has been sensitive to the problems of women in the country and made concerted efforts from the beginning itself; ensured the gender equality not only in the Constitution but also brought in several legislative Acts giving legal protections. Further, they implemented several programmes and schemes to remove the imbalance between the genders. In 2014 the government also officially recognised the third gender and provided reservation in the employment. To discuss briefly these efforts, it may be noted that the concept of ‘empowerment’ came into currency since its introduction in the International Women Conference held at Nairobi in 1985. It means ‘redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women’. In fact, by then the Government of India had already made several plans for gender equality as mentioned above towards this end. The government is also a signatory of several UN Conventions, mainly the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In 2001 it formulated National Policy for Empowerment of Women.

Some of the Acts are related to marriage (Hindu Marriage Act 1955), inheritance of property (The Hindu Succession Act 1956), against the practice of dowry (Dowry Prohibition Act 1961), prostitution and trafficking (Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act-1956), against abortions (Pregnancy Act-1971), crimes against women (The Criminal Law Amendment Act-1983), against domestic violence (Family Court Act-1984), against the indecent representation (Act-1986) and so on. More importantly, the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts-1993 has made provision of 33% seats reserved for women at all levels of the panchayat and municipalities, whereas central government of India (2014) has extended 30% reservation for women in elected bodies.

The Government of India and the states, have initiated several programmes and schemes for the empowerment of women in the country. Some of them include, National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), Swadhar,

Priyadrashani, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), Sampurna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), Awareness Generation Projects for Rural and Poor Women, Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY), Swayamsidha Mahila Mandal Programme, Condensed Course of Education for Adult Women, Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls-Sable (RGSEAG), Swa-Shakthi, Swalamban programme, Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana, Conditional Maternity Benefit plan (IGMSY-CMB), Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women, Swawalamban Programme, Swashakti Project, Integrated Child Development Services, Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY), Maliha Samridhi Yojana (MSY), Balika Samridhi Yojana (BSY), National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level, Sukyana, Ladli Laxmi Yojana, Apni Beti-Apna Dhan (ABAD) and so on.

The Government of India also implemented Gender Sub-Plan (under the 8th Five Year Plan – 1992-1997), Women Component Plan (under the 9th Five Year Plan- 1997-2002), a Gender Budgeting Scheme (under the 11th Plan-2007-2012) for the benefit of women. Further, the country has observed the year 1975 as “International year of Women” in response to the UNO’s call. Since then the 8th day of March is observed as “International women’s Day.” The government declared the year 2001 as the “Year of Women’s Employment”. Also, the year 1990 was observed as “SAARC year of The Girl Child.”

Check Your Progress

2) Name any 5 programmes of the government for women empowerment.

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8.8 SUMMARY

It is clear from the above discussion though gender inequality exists in India since historical times; there is an unflinching ideological support for achieving the gender egalitarian society. The sincere efforts of the government would certainly bring gender parity in near future if all sections of the society support and work towards the goal.

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8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 8.2
- 2) Refer to section 8.2
- 3) Refer to section 8.3
- 4) Refer to section 8.5 and 8.6
- 5) Refer to section 8.7

UNIT 9 URBAN SPACES IN INDIA*

Contents

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Urban Anthropology
- 9.2 Urban Studies in India
- 9.3 Anthropology of City
- 9.4 Indian Cities
- 9.5 Industrialisation and Urbanisation
- 9.6 City Growth and Urban Spaces
- 9.7 Vertical Expansions of Cities
- 9.8 Working in Urban Spaces and Lifeways
- 9.9 Challenges
- 9.10 Summary
- 9.11 References
- 9.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- know about the sub-field of urban anthropology;
- show how anthropological approach is different from other disciplines concerning urban life;
- reveal how cities are cities from certain anthropological perspectives;
- discover the differences between urban, rural or tribal life;
- understand the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation on urban life; and
- demonstrate the changes that urban life is undergoing due to contemporary developments.

9.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the turning points in human history relates to urban phenomenon in which people started congregating at one place and sharing common space and that became city in course of time. It seems, as of 2018 about 7.6 billion, which is about 55 per cent, people live in urban spaces today in the world as against 3.4 billion living in rural areas. It is expected that about two thirds of the world population would be living in urban spaces by 2050, and in this

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regards India and China would be major contributors. India is undergoing urbanisation at a rapid rate.

The urbanisation in India according to 1901 Census was 11.4 per cent and now it stands at 31.16 per cent as per 2011 Census. It is, therefore, imperative to learn about the urban living in the country. Also, anthropologists who hitherto focused much on the smaller tribal and rural communities will have to shift their attention gradually to the growing urban world. In contrast, sociologists have been devoting their attention to urban societies for a long time while anthropologists turned their attention to urban life only since 1970s. In this context, it is necessary to know the interests of anthropologists in urban societies before we attempt to understand the urban India.

9.1 URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Though the concern for urban issues has increased recently, anthropologists have not been unmindful of urban societies. Robert Redfield (1940), an American anthropologist, should be credited for having started writing about the contrasting characteristic features of folk and urban societies; he was influenced by the Chicago School of Urban Ecology and also German sociologist like Ferdinand Tönnies. He developed the theory of 'folk-urban continuum' based on his studies carried out in Mexico carrying out ethnographic research in a tribal area, a village, a town and a city. A village is essentially a community of peasants having agricultural base with little social differentiation having folkways and traditions which is in other words a folk society, and on the other hand town is an urban society which is different from the folk society with economic diversity and the latter gradually transformed into city which represents civilisation. This theory has greatly influenced several anthropologists across the world to understand the social and cultural changes of societies particularly in the third world. Anthropologists also focused on the culture, folklore, rituals, family and kinship, etc., besides the problems of urban residents. On the side of the first British anthropological study of urban society, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, who were actually young sociologists, carried out an anthropological study about the family and kinship among the residents of Bethnal Green in East London (Michael Young and Peter Willmott, 1957, *Family and Kinship in East London*. Glencoe: The Free Press). Anthropologists considered urban as a 'complex society' vis-à-vis tribal and small societies, and hence they started discussing 'complex societies' in contrast to their tradition studies. Thus, cities became objects of anthropological studies in diachronic perspective tracing trajectories of social and cultural changes and gaining an understanding of complex social, economic and political processes within anthropological research framework.

By 1970s urban anthropology emerged as a sub-field of social and cultural anthropology in which influence of sociologists such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Robert Par,

etc., cannot be ignored. Apart from Redfield anthropologists like Godfrey, Wilson, Max Gluckman, A. Epstein, etc., focused their attention on de-tribalisation, politics, urbanization, etc., in Africa in 1940s. The interests basically concentrated on urbanisation, social institutions and problems of urban populations that continued in 1960s.

In this context it is important to note the work of Oscar Lewis '*Culture of Poverty*', Adrian Mayor, David Pocock, Scarlet Epstein's works on rural change and urbanisation in India that are important for urban studies.

9.2 URBAN STUDIES IN INDIA

Indian anthropologists have been enthusiastic to study the great Indian civilisation and its contributions for the development of Indian society which need to be integrated with the post-colonial national development. Surajit Sinha claims that anthropological works are carried out only since 1950 about urban India; beginning from L.P. Vidyarthi's study of Hindu Gaya in 1961 and of N. K. Bose's study of Calcutta in 1968 several other cities have been studied. Vidyarthi's study has inspired several others in studying Kashi (Varanasi), Puri, Tirupati which are known pilgrim centres that are rooted in Indian civilisation. These studies attempt to understand the ancient processes of urban phenomenon. Apart from Calcutta other cities like Bhubaneswar, Pune, and Madras are also studied at different points of time. Some studies have focused on castes such as Brahmin, Kayastha, Bhangies, etc., in cities of Lucknow, Hyderabad, and Banaras, etc.

The processes of urbanisation in India is historically linked to religion and during the colonial period to industrial development around the port cities which were also administrative cities. In post-colonial and independence India the process can be related to industrialisation, mining and development of the centres of administration and India's conscious efforts of modernising India through development processes initiated by the Five Planning though it has been abandoned recently. The development efforts of the state have had tremendous impact on the urban landscapes, and rural and tribal areas as well. Modernity in all spheres of life is more visible and greater in urban areas than in the rural and tribal areas. In these efforts, the role of social scientists particularly economists, geographers and planners, sociologists and anthropologists has been immense, and the anthropologists have been supporting the state with their studies of economies, changing processes, social institutions and so on besides evaluation of various development programmes particularly in tribal and rural areas. With this background we shall examine the urban phenomenon in India from anthropological perspectives.

9.3 ANTHROPOLOGY OF CITY

Redfield believed 'urban civilisation' is an important aspect of human development, and city of the past and the present represents the dynamic urban modern society. His modernity and cosmopolitanism departs from other social scientists such as sociologists, geographers, economics, urban planners and others that believed in technological and economy centric concepts. They proposed theories of modernisation in which the traditional societies should take off changing traditional practices accepting innovations and technology and thus emulate the West. Redfield did not see religion and traditions as obstacles for development of the society and in that modern ideas emerge from the traditions which are rooted in religion and therefore, traditions do not impede modernisation. Such conceptualisation of modernisation strongly contradicts theories of modernity and provides alternative theory. For Redfield civilisation is multi-centric as several urban centres contribute while the cities play significant role in providing political system and excellence of aesthetic, philosophy and culture. Further, civilisations have not been isolated but have interacted with other civilizations, in which cities played a significant role and thus exchange of ideas did take place in cities which enabled each of the civilisations develop in their own worldviews and values in turn taking different paths of modernity. The modernisation theorists on other hand believe that the West is the model of technology driven growth for the traditional societies and Redfield did not subscribe to the Western hegemony, but he took the cultural relativist stand.

For him urban civilisation is the characteristic feature of human society with complex structures of great and little traditions; the former relates to the formal forms of aesthetic, philosophical, cultural value systems practiced by literate few who learn through organised institutions while the latter relates to unrefined forms of cultural practices of folk populations who are basically illiterate masses who transmit through oral traditional practices. Cultural specialists keep these traditions active, and these traditions also remain in constant interaction through cultural performances and specialists. The city that contain these traditions is an epitome of human excellence that brought in transformations of physical, psychological, material and others and the folk societies have been moving towards this end of urban and city accommodated populations as an urban society in contrast to folk. The cities and urban centres have been through changes of 'orthogenetic' (dynamic activity in the traditional practices) and 'heterogenetic' (activities in relation with external sources of change), and thus city is the source of changes that percolate down to the folk which remain in contact to each other causing changes in the folk societies that gradually transform into urban and cities. There are other alternative theories also about the city, but we will not consider them here.

Check Your Progress

1) What do you understand by modernisation in the Indian context?

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9.4 INDIAN CITIES

It is clear from the above that the anthropological studies of cities have had a different theoretical base. Milton Singer joined Redfield in the comparative civilisation project and tested their hypothesis of traditions with modernity in the city of Madras in 1950s. With the foundation laid by the East India Company, Chennappa Patnam grew into the city of Madras and emerged as an important industrial, education, commercial and modern cosmopolitan city in course of time. Singer found it to be an ‘orthogenetic’ city where the Sanskritic Hinduism continued to flourish, and it also appeared to be a city of ‘heterogenetic’ as it had different foreign contacts and the impact of West was quite visible. His interest centered on the status of Great tradition in the modern city of Madras and it encountered modernity.

He found co-existence of both Great and Little traditions. The modernisation has affected little of these traditions; these are kept alive by different castes – upper castes more sanskritised inclined towards the Great tradition whereas the lower castes not sanskritised are closer to the Little traditional practices. However, modernisation can be seen affecting the individuals and individual families rather than caste or groups as such.

Singer focussed on modernised and cosmopolitan Smarta Brahmins of Madras city and considered their Hindu traditions as Great traditions which are based on Sanskritic texts and they had been the custodians of Sanskritic Hindu traditions, scholars, priests and professional religious story tellers; these were the ‘cultural brokers’ specialists and performers as well besides intellectuals both traditional and modern. He observed their rituals, ways of life, dances, religious text recitation, discourses and other cultural performances including rites. The cultural performances have been playing a very important role of transmitting the values and philosophy of Great traditions down to the semi-literate and illiterate masses that were in the audience. The specialists also interpreted the concepts that can be applied to particular concepts. While the Smarta Brahmins were getting themselves adapted to modern lifestyle by keeping the Great tradition intact, the upper castes moved closer to Sanskritic Hindu religion and participated in the public rituals, the lower castes tried to get sanskritised by following and

imitating the upper castes. The leaders usually engaged in the interpretation for the general masses, and they assert that by changing to modern dress patterns and other living styles they could still be good Hindus. They continued to believe in the *varna* system and Dharma Shastra, and the leaders were not prevented to engage in different economic pursuits and political activities by keeping their rituals and religion intact.

Individual families maintained the sacred and ritual activities following the traditions while viewing the work places as secularised. Not only that the values and messages of the Great traditions had been transmitted through cultural performances but also some of the earlier Little traditions were also incorporated in the Great tradition such as the domestic rituals which women generally practiced. Industrialisation did not prevent the traditional Smarta Brahmins who were priests to take up not only secular jobs but also establish and run the firms employing non-Brahmins. In fact, religious texts such as *Gita* gave more strength and moral values to perform their secular jobs and to become wealthy; the material prosperity gave them higher status and recognition as industrialists.

Following the above model and method L.P. Vidyarthi studied Hindu Gaya in Bihar; Gaya is an ancient renowned city associated with Gautam Buddha which can be dated back to 400 BCE. Gaya is a city where secularism, Hindu and Buddhist traditions meet; the secular spaces cover the railway station, city administration, commercial complexes and so on are located in the central region and on the western side are the Hindu centres like Pinda Daan Gaya, Maa Mangla Gauri Mandir; Ramshila hills are located on the eastern side of the city closer to the river Falgu's western side; and Bodh Gaya is located on the southern edge of the city. Both Hindus and Buddhists have had pilgrim centres here for ages attracting national and international tourists, however, Vidyarthi focused on the Hindu Gaya having been inspired by Redfield. According to Part 2 of *Vayupurana*, Lord Brahma performed *yagna* on the body of Gayasur, a rakshasa (demon) king. It is also a place where an imprint of Lord Vishnu is also located. Hence Gaya became a famous pilgrim centre and Gayawal are the priestly community that organise various rituals in the temples and assist the pilgrims in their worship of various deities; for the living they entirely depend on the pilgrims' donations. Basically the social organisation of the religion, adopting quality method of enquiry, has been attempted using the concepts like sacred centre, sacred segment, sacred zone, sacred geography, sacred complex and so on. Each sacred complex has few sacred shrines of various deities officiated by the Gayawal Brahmins. Rural masses visit these places and get to know about the deities, their powers, stories about them and learn the performance of various rituals, religious merits, values, beliefs and so on. Gayawal are quite knowledgeable about the sacred texts and also local traditions and non-Sanskritic deities whose shrines are also located in the sacred segments of the sacred complexes. This study followed several similar studies of temple

organisations and sacred spaces sheds light on the Indian civilisation in cultural terms.

Check Your Progress

2) How are Indian cities studied in anthropology?

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9.5 INDUSTRIALISATION AND URBANISATION

So far the discussion has been on the ancient phenomenon of urbanisation in the civilisation development process based on the traditions. Now the turn is towards the colonialism, industrialisation and urbanisation. Of all that colonialism brought universally, apart from changes in local values, is the world market, in which the export of agricultural products and minerals of the colonies to England and other European countries and marketing the industrially processed and finished products in colonies, and monetised economy. In world systems theory the colonies became peripheries while the industrial states became the core. It also brought an end to feudalism, demise of princely states, centralised power under state’s control, and also industrialisation which ushered urbanisation. The anthropologists have studied the impact of colonial rule on the native in which the consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation are important. It resulted in the development of towns and urban areas and migration from rural to urban areas due to downplay of agricultural economy and employment in the industrial and business establishments besides in the government offices and institutions. The urbanisation has several positive and negative impacts but the latter has more dramatic effect such as growth of slums, health problems, economic inequalities, development of gangs and other associated evils such as prostitution, etc. Of these, sociologically more significant change is the breaking up of joint family, disintegration of social fabric, degradation of moral values and ethics. The heterogeneity also caused impersonal social, rise of contractual relations, mechanical solidarity (interdependency of professions), professionalism and so on.

Independent India welcomed industrialisation and engaged in power generation, agricultural development using modern technology, development of cottage industry such as power-looms, mining of various minerals, etc. Soon several small towns became urban areas, merging surrounding villages, which turned to be suburbs and with the centralised administration and

transport connectivity, grew into cities. The landscape has witnessed sea change with broad roads, shopping malls, markets, educational institutes, offices, etc. The shrines, temples and other religious places also transformed into complex not only externally but in social organisation. The impact of urban phenomenon on the rural and tribal villages has been visible in different aspects of life. This resulted in the rural backwardness vis-à-vis developed urban areas. For the development of municipalities, urban planning, urban development, industrial economy etc., governments also started taking support of international agencies such as World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc. Thus, with international cooperation, imports and exports machinery and several others, the process of globalisation increased rapidly. It is in this context anthropology changed its traditional focus on tribes and villages to urbanisation and cities.

Both state and private including public and private partnership contributed for the industrialisation in India. In this context it is important to note that the traditional system, intelligentsia, cultural ethos also promoted industrialisation. Even from the colonial times jute industry in Calcutta was in the hands of Marwari businessmen, in Bombay Parsi community engaged in running cotton industries and Chettiyars in Madras ran banking and Ahmedabad became industrial hub of India with the investments made by the local upper caste entrepreneurs. On one side there is family managed system integrated with the industrial division of labour based on skill, and on the other there are traditional relationships based on caste and peasantry. Therefore, for the labour it would be a change from one system to another apart from change of habitat from rural to urban set up wherein the former rested on the rigid caste based segregation of residences whereas in the latter such segregation is not so rigid. Though, during colonial period indiscipline and lack of commitment of workers in the industries was reported, the studies after 1960s indicate that the degree of commitment is at the lower end. Further, industrialisation has not played any significant role in the modernisation of society; the employment has no link with the social background; education and caste of the employees are related in which upper strata of the employee's belonged to upper castes. There is no evidence for breaking up rural connection of the workers or changing the traditional values of the family or breaking up of joint family due to the industrialisation. Some argue that though urban life favoured nuclear families, the joint families are also able to adapt to industrialisation and urbanisation.

The colonial establishments of tea gardens in Assam and Bengal that brought the tribes from Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, etc., continue to live in underdevelopment and isolation even after independence. Not much improvement has been noted in the tribal areas where mining has been carried out for years. Mining industry involved in quarrying and extraction of minerals– coal, copper, bauxite, manganese, mica, etc., located in the tribal areas of Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha has greatly affected the tribal villages and families. The migration of the tribal families to industrial towns

has impacted the traditional cultural life and the social fabric of the society and they have become a prey to the urban evils. The recent industrial policy of the state exploiting the natural resources and construction of multipurpose dams has been creating untold miseries for the tribes due to their displacement and rehabilitation which have been badly executed. With these developments of industrialisation and mining, the rural and tribal localities continue to transform into urban centres and cities which are now attracting the attention of anthropologists. The urbanism is believed to have started some 6,000 years ago. As the communities settled anthropogenic human activities begin to change the surroundings of the habitat. Archeological evidences have shown the pattern of residences and subsistence activities.

9.6 CITY GROWTH AND URBAN SPACES

For a long time, anthropologists have been interested in understanding the residential pattern of human activity in two spheres: utilisation of either domestic space or space of a community and non-residential utilisation of space; they considered the three dimensions – space, time and culture which are intertwined in the social life. However, not much work has been done so far as urban space is concerned. Village studies in India show that the central place of a habitation is allocated to temple around which are the residences of dominant caste (s) followed by lower castes and in the margin or outside, the houses of scheduled castes or tribes are located; often the temples are located in the north-east direction and face the east. Even in the domestic space according to Vastu Shastra the north-east is sacred and the rest being secular and the former is the space for the deities and worship, and in the outer space a well shall be located in the north-east. The elder brother has to live in the south to the younger one. In the village, the Dalits or tribes are supposed to live either in the west or north direction of the village. Each village has a boundary and each of the cardinal direction is guarded by a deity, and entrance of the village is also manned by a deity to protect the village from the attacks of diseases and evil spirits that harm humans and animals. Similarly, a deity protects the village tank from breaching and bless with rain water. These deities would have shrines and are being periodically worshipped by all the villagers. The village residential habitat is the space for humans, animals and divine beings. The non-residential space includes activities related to digging lakes, subsistence activities – pastures, agriculture, and manufacturing goods.

The change has been rapid in the recent past; when a village grows into a town with increased population and the urban spaces continue with the above features. As the residences increased beyond the boundaries of the shrines where they were, while nearby villages became nearer and nearer and in course of time, they became parts or suburbs of the city. As the expansion took place geographically the residential social norms were not strictly followed while caste restrictions were adhered to; upper castes mostly occupied the adjoining areas. As the residences increased, the lakes, streams,

pastures, agriculture, etc., disappeared from the scene and business of institutional establishments appeared. Thus, artificial spaces replaced the natural spaces. In cities also there exist localities known by the caste of these residents or the earlier residents. The scheduled caste localities can hardly be found by the main roads, but located in interior places. The present day gated communities, and posh areas are the locations of social, political and economic echelons of the society. All these spaces would invariably have shrines and temples often occupying public spaces receiving worship from residents of the locality with fan-fare. The contemporary cities would also have worship spaces of all religions and different sects of the followers of these religions in their localities.

Humans have always been trying to take control of the nature and modify the environment, and thus they create space and such spaces are greater in urban centres and cities; they include artificial spaces also for various purposes such as parks, playgrounds – exhibition, parade, military and police activities, public areas, industrial establishments, etc. These anthropogenic activities replace natural vegetation, common grazing areas, create clogging of natural streams, pollute the lakes and destroy natural biotic and abiotic spheres. The archeological studies have revealed that in urban sites, as the population increased, economic activities also increased affecting the regional environment, threatening the basic ecosystem and biodiversity. Historical studies of cities clearly show the development of road and transport system in pre-industrial cities and increase of this activity on the scale of increase of urban space and non-residential activities. The nodes of administrative offices, commercial complexes and business activities spanned out from the original core area within the walking distances as walking was the most common mode of transport in pre-industrial and early industrial cities. The change of mode of transport and expansion of urban space and large coverage have been interrelated and gone together over the years. These expansions have been often premeditated and sometime spontaneous also: planned and unplanned. Paris in France and Washington DC in USA are the most planned cities; Chandigarh is the most planned city in India.

9.7 VERTICAL EXPANSION OF CITIES

In the above description the city is understood to have been undergoing horizontal sprawl but today we find skyscraper and tall building as if competing one another in Mumbai, Gurgaon, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, etc., in India and many such cities in the world. Such city which grows vertically is called vertical city. Though such a building occupies less space, accommodates more population with less crowding and less pollutions, it is likely to cause environmental problems; these buildings fashion concrete forests generating reflected radiation and thus raising cities' temperatures creating environmental hazard. Therefore, the design and planning of the space include good landscape with greenery, community life and so on. Unless proper care is taken with regard to fire, and supply of

electricity and safe transport of children, it would be risky to live in such towers. Given these problems, like drying up of resources, environmentally unfriendly situations and huge investments, some express their doubts about the sustainability of such anthropogenic spaces. As the population continues to grow and more demand for land to grow food-grains and to meet other needs, it seems there is no option and the future would be in the vertical city or to reverse the migration process to countryside. Living in such towers hardly meeting anyone from outside for several years would not be healthy either in physical sense or in sociological sense.

Check Your Progress

3) What are your observations on contemporary growth of cities?

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9.8 WORKING IN URBAN SPACE AND LIFEWAYS

Urban landscapes have great impact on human lifeways; quality of life changed with increased mortality rates due to crowding and deterioration of health as the archeological studies reveal. Post-independence, India has been witnessing sea changes in urban life with growing industrialisation and immigrations from the hinterland and also movement of people across the country for their living. Working in the urban space unlike the rural set-up does not depend on the rhythms of seasons, the work continues throughout the year and it continues day and night particularly in factories. Division of labour according to different hierarchies in the establishments in an organised manner on the basis of set-up rules and norms for achieving the maximum production marks the urban work. Several studies across the world reveal the living conditions of workers in factories – textile, sugar, tobacco, mining, etc., without exception has been deplorable in early industrialisation. The wages were low and number of working hours were more and exploitation was great around and the World Wars only added to the sufferings with shortage of workers. The unrest in the factories with strikes and lockouts was a common sight; the issues had to be discussed at the international forums. Gradually the situation improved with refined technology, state’s intervention for improving the lot of workers by enacting Labour Act and formulating labour laws, arrangement of facilities at the work place, etc. Surfacing of such problems now and then even these days is not a surprising phenomenon. The Government of India has enacted Acts like Industrial and Employment Act 1946, Factories Act 1948, Minimum Wages Act 1948 and introduced

more than 40 Central and 200 State labour laws, and established Ministries and Departments of Labour for protecting the interest of the workers, established the ESI hospitals ensure health of the industrial workers, labour unions are recognised to see that the workers and the management work together. Since a large number of workers are employed in mining industry, Mining Act 1952 has been in place for safeguarding the health and keeping good working under the ground as well as above the ground. There is a large section of workers in the home-based work such as *bidi* work who are covered under various labour protection laws.

Industry of Information Technology is the recent addition to cities in 20th century in developing information societies providing employment to substantial number of women compared to any other industry so far. It also brought in the work-home culture. The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) establishments not only generating employment but also brought the international connectivity to India, and both IT and BPO set up India firmly on the global map as fast developing country with strong economy.

The new development in megacities of India or elsewhere relate to growth of gated communities, the enclaves of neo-rich. These are replications of Western suburbs, and new residential isolated as well as insulated communities. Several of the IT professionals, skilled diasporic returnees and their rich relatives, top rank officials and of business class are the residents of these gated communities. These are bestowed with total security, eco-friendly environment, modern shopping and health facilities that include pharmacy and gym and other recreational facilities such as swimming pool, indoor stadium, etc. This is a vibrant community with the vigour of interconnectedness of local, regional, national and international with reference to physical, social, cultural, and economic concerns of the society. Individuals show great civic sense and activism relating to national as well as international citizens' concerns. The new nationalists across the party lines talk politics and enter dialogues with civic officials for clean roads, good drainage and waste management to keep up clean local environment. They do often face problems of relationships with subaltern neighbourhoods, class conflicts and service workers. Some of these gated communities are conscious of caste, class, religion and other considerations.

An important character of urban life is impersonal relationships and solitude of individuals and families. Global changes affect it at a faster rate and more dependency on technology; urban also shows symptoms of anomie easily. Urban life is politically volatile and there is exhibitionist attitude of economic inequality. The politics is organised through social networks and quasi-groups. The landscape is marked with economic prosperity, cultural and religious structures, parks and leisure time activities. There is growing health consciousness, and recently the citizens of gated and affluent who organise programmes for fitness such walkathons, marathons and cross-country

running, etc. Hyderabad Runners, Mumbai Runners Club, Vizag Runners Club etc., and other health organisations are indicators of this phenomenon.

Check Your Progress

4) How are urban lifeways different from rural life patterns?

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5) Can you differentiate between urban problems and rural problems and why differences exist?

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9.9 CHALLENGES

India continues to face old problems and new challenges in light of persistent old issues and new developments. The old problem are of organised gangs often involved in riots and violence, lack of civic facilities, growing slum with poor civic amenities and facilities. The new challenges include the security for women, loss of commons to the huge residential or institutional complexes, cybercrimes, addiction to drugs and so on. Since urbanisation is taking place at a greater speed, anthropologists need to change their focus and reconsider and refine their research designs, methods and priorities.

9.10 SUMMARY

This Unit focusses on urbanism in India that has a unique historical beginning unlike sociology; nevertheless, it has borrowed several concepts and ideas from other disciplines and has made its own approach to the urban issues and questions. The modernisation that marks the urbanisation and city is approached through civilisational perspective unlike the sociological, political and economic theories of modernisation that focused on tradition and modernity. Attempts have been to study the impacts of industrialisation and urbanisation on the traditional anthropological concerns of culture, caste, kinship, common properties, and landscapes and so on. Now there is a growing anthropological interest on the urban problems and impacts of new

developments such as IT industry and gated communities, and health consciousness on the urban populations.

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9.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 9.3
- 2) Refer to section 9.4
- 3) Refer to sections 9.3, 9.4, 9.5, 9.6 and 9.7
- 4) Refer to section 9.8
- 5) Refer to sections 9.8 and 9.9