
UNIT 21 STATUS OF DALITS

Structure

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21.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- Define Dalits;
- Give total number and percentage of their population;
- Understand their status in traditional caste hierarchy;
- Know various social movements for their emancipation; and
- Recall constitutional provisions, and know their changing position.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this unit is to understand who are the Dalits and what is their status in the contemporary Indian society. It is a fact that the Indian society consisting of numbers castes and sub-castes, and religious and ethnic communities has remained highly stratified. The Hindu social system of which the Dalits are largely a part is stratified on the basis of caste hierarchy. The Hindu social order made the distinction between high castes and lower castes, pure and impure castes. In common parlance, the former untouchables or the lowest castes are labelled as Dalits. The constitution of India has termed these castes as Scheduled Castes. But the social activists started calling them as Dalits and now the term is widely used by scholars in their writings.

According to the 1991 Census Scheduled Castes is 16.73% of the total population in the country. The population of SCs is concentrated in five states, viz. Uttar Pradesh (21.44%), West Bengal (11.77%), Bihar (9.21%), Tamil Nadu (7.84%) and Andhra Pradesh (7.76%). At all India level the major Dalit castes are Chamar and Bhangi, while certain castes are numerically greater in their states, for example, Mahar and Mang in Maharashtra, Mala and Madiga in Andhra, Namashudra in West Bengal, Pulayan in Kerala and the like.

21.2 STATUS OF DALITS IN TRADITIONAL CASTE HIERARCHY

The status of Dalits in the traditional caste system was at bottom in the social hierarchy. A number of social restrictions were imposed on them. They had no choice of occupation. Their entry into temple was barred. They had to live on outskirts of the village. The social restrictions varied region to region. But those were more rigid in the southern states.

Activity 1

Try to ascertain the numerical strength of Dalits in your home state with the help of relevant census documents. Make an entry in your notebook in this regard.

In post-Independence period, the Constitution guaranteed various social, economic, educational and political rights to Dalits. By article 17 of the constitution the untouchability is abolished and its practice is forbidden. The Dalits are identified as lowest castes in traditional caste hierarchy who were former untouchables who were socially exploited by the caste Hindus.

Check Your Progress 1

1) State whether the following are 'True' (T) or 'False' (F)

- i) Dalits are referred to lower castes.
- ii) Dalits are exploited only economically.
- iii) Scheduled Caste are called Dalits.

2) Complete the following statements:

- i) Dalits are at the of society.
- ii) Dalits have status.



Dr. B.R. Ambedkar took up the cause of the status of the Dalits

Courtesy: Kiranmayi Bushi

The Indian society is segmentally divided on the basis of caste. The status of person is dependent on the caste in which he is born. In traditional caste system, the lowest castes were at the bottom of the social ladder. They were subjected to various caste disabilities.

They were not allowed to use public roads, wells, ghats, etc. They were forbidden from entering Hindu temples, attending public school. Servitude was proclaimed to be a permanent condition of Dalits. Dalits had to maintain distance from member(s) of the pure caste(s).

The Dalits were also not allowed to change their caste occupation. The extent of disabilities was such that they were made to live on the outskirts of villages and towns. It is recorded that under the Marathas and Peshwas in Maharashtra the Mahars and Mangs were not allowed to enter gates of Poona city during 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. because in the morning and afternoon their bodies cast a long shadow which was considered defiling.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Briefly mention the disabilities of Dalits. Use about three to four lines for your answer.

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- 2) Mention the names of some social reformers.

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21.3 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

To fight against untouchability and various forms of injustice, social reformers launched social movements in pre-independence India. Mahatma Phule's (1827-1890), 'Satyashodhak' Chhatrapati Shahu's (1871-1922) 'non-Brahmin', Maharshi Vitthal Ramji Shinde's (1873-1944) 'Depressed Class Mission' and Babasaheb Ambedkar's (1891-1956) 'anti-untouchability' in Maharashtra, Shri Narayan Dharma Paripalana in Kerala, Periyar Ramaswami Naicker in Tamil Nadu are the examples of some social movements and social reformers.

The downtrodden Dalits raised various struggles to fight their social exploitation in all forms. Two factors had made deep impact on caste system which also brought social upheaval and an awakening among Dalits. First, the western impact with its ideas and values of liberality of thought, individual freedom and equality started making inroads into the traditional matrix of the Hindu social system and the caste and other institutions. Second, the British administration with equality before law and introduction of modern technology created the necessary intellectual and psychological climate for the emergence of social reforms movements.

Box 21.01

The innovations of British system of a common code of law for all castes, the extensions of modern communications and education helped to wane the caste system. The renaissance began with Rajaram Mohan Roy in Bengal who ushered in the social and religious revival. The Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj movements started in Bengal and Punjab. In Maharashtra, movements were started by Jambhekar and Lokhitwadi, Justice M.G. Ranade, Jyotiba Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, Agarkar and Bhandarkar.

Mahatma Jyotiba Phule formed the Sayta Shodak Mandal in 1873 with the aim of liberating non-brahmins from the clutches of Brahminism. Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur started Satya Shodak Mandal in 1912 and carried forward the movement started by Phule. In the pre-independence period, the Dalit movements comprised of a strong non-Brahman movement against Brahmanism in Maharashtra, the Adi Dravidas movement in Tamil Nadu, Shri Narayan Dharma Paripalan movement in Kerala, Adi Andhras, movement in Coastal Andhra and the like. Phule tried to formulate a new theistic religion. Periyar promoted atheism. There

were, of course, reformist trends in some of the movements. In 12th century, Mahatma Basweshar launched a crusade against caste in Karnataka. Religious reformers of the 19th century were influenced by the work of Christian missionaries in India. The Brahma Samaj (1828), the Prarthana Samaj (1867), the Ramkrishna Mission, and the Arya Samaj (1875) are the examples of such institutions founded with a view to fight against social evils practised by the caste Hindus. Ambedkar, on his part turned to Buddhism. In Tamil Nadu, non-Brahmin movement tried to claim Saivism as an independent religion although both Ayyapan proclaimed no religion, no caste and no god for mankind. All the above movements led to, some extent, the social upliftment of Dalits.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Complete the following statements
 - i) introduced common code of law.
 - ii) Satya Shodak movement was started by.....
 - iii) proclaimed no religion, no caste and no god for mankind.
 - iv) promoted atheism.
- 2) State whether the following are 'True' (T) or 'False' (F).
 - a) The British started religious movement in India.
 - b) Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar led the social reform movement at all India level.
 - c) The Brahma Samaj was started in Maharashtra.

21.4 CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Constitution of India has played important role in the overall upliftment of the Scheduled Castes. In Part IV of the Constitution, certain fundamental rights are guaranteed to the citizens. Article 15(2) states that no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth be discriminated with regard to (a) access to shop, public restaurants, hotel and public entertainment; or (b) the use of wells, tank, bathing ghats, roads, and places of public resorts. Under Article 15(4), the State is permitted to make any special provision for advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

Box 21.02

According to the Article 16(1), of the Constitution there shall be equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Article 330 and 332 provide reservation of seats for scheduled tribes in the House of the People, legislative assemblies of the states respectively.

In the field of education, there is reservation of seats in admission of the Scheduled Caste and tribe students in schools, colleges and university. Also, there is a provision of scholarship for the students belonging to SCs and STs categories. All these constitutional provisions have helped the members of various scheduled caste groups to make progress in every sphere of life. Since independence, the ethos of Indian society has also vastly changed. The education as a means of achieving upward social mobility has proved to be very useful to the Dalits and there is conscious effort on their part to get their children educated. Educational institutions provide indispensable avenues of mobility to a large number of individuals from Dalit community. Without education all the constitutional safeguards including reservation in services would be infructuous. The government policy of reservation in employment has played an important role for Dalits. The policy broadly envisages representation of Dalits in proportion to their population in all the government services as well as the institutions which receive grants from the government.

Activity 2

Ascertain the grass roots perspective on reservations for people in the area where you live. Find out their views on reservation and note it down in your notebook.

21.5 IMPACT ON SOCIAL MOBILITY

The Reservation policy has been an aid for the development of Dalits in the area of education, employment, political representation, entrepreneurship, etc. But the policy has lacked effective implementation in education and employment sectors. Those Dalits who have received the benefits of reservation in education and employment are relatively better off and have emerged as a new middle class. In spite of all constitutional safeguards, the caste atrocities are an integral part of Dalit life. Atrocities are inflicted on Dalits since they have started asserting for their rights. The reality of Indian society is that caste still dominates every sphere of life and the Dalits are the worst sufferers in the caste system though, like others, they also live with it.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Briefly mention Article 330 of the Constitution. Use about three to four lines for your answer.

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- ii) Briefly mention the benefits of Reservation Policy.

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21.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit brought to you who are Dalits and what life they led in the traditional caste hierarchy. We also mentioned the various socio-religious reform movements organised in different regions of India. Further are noted the constitutional provisions for upliftments of Dalits; the reservation policy has been partial aid for improving life and has resulted in the emergence of new middle class. The caste atrocities of various forms inflicted by caste Hindus are an integral part of Dalit life.

21.7 KEY WORDS

Dalits	: refers to Scheduled Caste.
Socio-religious movement	: movement organised for social and religious upliftment and to create equality.
Constitution	: Radical document to bring social change in the post-independent India society.

21.8 FURTHER READINGS

Omvedt Gail, 1994 *Dalits and Democratic Revolution*, Sage Publication, New Delhi

Omvedt Gail, 1976 *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay

The Constitution of India. GOI Publications

Census, 1991. GOI Publications

21.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) i) True ii) False iii) True
- 2) i) Bottom, ii) Lower

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The disabilities of Dalits are that they were not allowed to use public roads, wells, enter temples, attend school, and there was severe punishment for violations of such restrictions.
- 2) The names of social reformers are Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, M.G. Ranade, G.H. Deshmukh, Mahatma Gandhi, Shahu Maharaj.

Check Your progress 3

- 1) i) British, ii) Mahatma Jyotiba Phule
 iii) Ayappan iv) Periyar
- 2) i) False ii) True iii) False.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Article 330 provides reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People (Lok Sabha).
- 2) The benefits of the reservation policy are available in education, employment and political spheres. In education institutions, seats are reserved for the Dalit student and scholarships and freeship are available. In employment, there is reservation of jobs.

THE PEOPLE'S
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UNIT 22 OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Internal Differentiation of the OBCs
- 22.3 Present Composition and State-wise Distribution
- 22.4 Sanskritization and Social Mobility
- 22.5 Backward Classes Movements and Their Politico-Economic Emergence
 - 22.5.1 The Self Respect Movement
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 - 22.5.3 Movements in the South: Andhra and Kerala
 - 22.5.4 Other Backward Classes in U.P.
 - 22.5.5 Other Backward Classes in Bihar
 - 22.5.6 Education and Values
- 22.6 Caste, Classes and Power
- 22.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.8 Key Words
- 22.9 Further Readings
- 22.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

22.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit you should be able to:

- describe what is an Other Backward Class;
- indicate internal differentiation of OBCs;
- have an idea as to the present composition and state-wise distribution of the OBCs;
- give information regarding OBCs and Sanskritization; and
- the politico-economic emergence of the Backward Classes Movements.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

'Other Backward Classes' refer to a constitutional category and comprise socially disadvantaged shudra castes. Castes located in the middle of the traditional stratification systems are the constituents of this section of the population. It is thus a social layer intermediate between the twice born and the untouchable. Put in other words it is a stratum of non-untouchable Hindu Castes located low in the traditional stratification system. Comprising a heterogeneous category these include some of the dominant castes of agriculturists as well as many socially and economically deprived groups are at least as deprived as SCs and STs.

These sections are educationally and occupationally inferior to the traditionally privileged castes. Untouchability and isolation were never their problem, their inferiority to the upper castes however used to be traditionally legitimised. Status disabilities afflicting them used to be inherited restricting their progress and prosperity. In a limited number of cases a few non-Hindu communities are also included under this category. Marc Galanter maintains that its composition varies from state to state.

22.2 INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION OF THE OBCS

It is therefore to be noted that the entities included under the term 'other backward classes' are not homogenous. The category is heterogenous. Sharp distinction tends to be elusive. Comprising section of society between the higher castes and the scheduled castes the description includes diverse socio-economic entities. Such social permutation on account of the diversities encompassing it remains a loose configuration. The elements comprising it tend to be differentially located in the stratification system and are economically heterogeneous. Land ownership remains the prerogative of a few selected castes among them. Distribution of land among the sections comprising it is skewed in favour of a few leaving the more numerous poor and deprived. Deprivations of the marginalised among the force them to work for others as share croppers, landless labourers and performers of traditional functional services. D.L. Sheth maintains that the category includes these deprived groups whose condition in some cases is even worse than the scheduled castes. The top stratum among them is constituted of the owner cultivators.

Activity 1

Discuss the internal differentiation of the OBC's with friends and other students in the study centre. Put down your findings in your note book.

Lower to them are the landless tenant cultivators, artisans and service castes who remain under the economic and political control of the landowning castes. In past such marginalized sections among the other backward classes worked as forced labourer, domestic servant and palanquin bearers for those to whom they were dependent for their survival. Landlords used to receive customary payment from them on festive occasions.

22.3 PRESENT COMPOSITION AND STATE-WISE DISTRIBUTION

The other backward classes were reported to have 31.8% representation in the population according to the first commission for the other backward classes. According to the second commission for them that is popularly known as the Mandal Commission their representation in the population is of the tune of 52%. The following details the number of castes included as other backward classes in different states of the country.

TABLE 1

Number of Castes included as OBC		
Sl. NO.	State	No.
1.	Andhra Pradesh	292
2.	Assam	135
3.	Bihar	168
4.	Gujarat	105
5.	Haryana	76
6.	Himachal Pradesh	57
7.	Janmu and Kashmir	63
8.	Karnataka	333
9.	Kerala	208
10.	Madhya Pradesh	279
11.	Maharashtra	272
12.	Manipur	49
13.	Meghalaya	37
14.	Nagaland	0
15.	Orissa	224
16.	Punjab	83
17.	Rajasthan	140
18.	Sikkim	10
19.	Tamil Nadu	288
20.	Tripura	136
21.	Uttar Pradesh	116
22.	West Bengal	177
23.	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	17

24.	Arunachal Pradesh	10
25.	Chandigar	93
26.	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	10
27.	Delhi	82
28.	Goa Daman and Diu	18
29.	Laksha Dweep	0
30.	Mizoram	5
31.	Pondicheri	260

Report of the Backward Classes Commission (Second Part), 1980

It would be inappropriate to treat such groups as class. In fact these constitute aggregate of closed status groups. Status in such permutation is inherited and not acquired. It comprises castes that are prosperous and dominant but does not exclude those that are poor and deprived as these diversities are proximately located in the traditional stratification system.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Describe in about five lines what is an Other Backward Class.

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- 2) Say True or False.

The entities included under the term Other Backward Classes are homogenous

True

False

- 3) Which state has the highest number of castes included in the OBCs?

Tick the right answer

Karnataka

Haryana

Kerala

22.4 SANSKRITIZATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Castes located in the middle of the stratification system sought mobility by orienting themselves to emulate upper caste behaviour ideologies and ritual. In such endeavours seeking elevated status in the prevalent stratification system the aspiring categories were required to give up their traditional marks of inferiority especially such practices that were supposedly polluting. Such aspirations for cultural mobility tended to foster and traditionally ordained framework of the 'Great Tradition'. The low in hierarchy of caste in order to seek upward mobility emulates the life style of the traditionally high. This strategy for cultural and social mobility in the traditionally legitimised ascriptive social order is termed as 'Sanskritization'. M.N. Srinivas who used the term first defines it as a process whereby a lower caste begins to imitate the lifeways of a higher caste with a view to claiming a higher status for itself in the traditional caste hierarchy. Thus the claim is over a position within the caste hierarchy and is not a structural threat to it.

Box 22.01

Sanskritization represents the aspiration of groups to higher status and an attempt to prepare behaviour wise for such an event. In order to assert for such claims, support is sought of invented legends legitimising elevated location of such sections in the past. Shah has quoted studies to indicate that resort to sanskritization as a strategy for status elevation has found favour among the intermediate castes in different parts of the country. The Maratha the Sagar, the Dhangar of Maharashtra, the Kurmi and the Yadava of Bihar, the Koli of Gujarat, the Kaibartta of West Bengal, the Lingayat of Karnataka and the Teli of Orissa are reported to have adopted sanskritization as a strategy to seek elevated corporate status.

This endogenous and culture specific source of social change found favour mostly with the economically prosperous and politically conscious sections among the intermediate castes. Improved economic condition and increased political inspire low castes to aspire for commensurate elevation in other spheres also. Srinivas emphasises that sanskritization presupposes an improvement in the economic status and political strength of the group staking claims. Such urges are product of intimate rapport of Great Tradition of Hinduism. Inferiors in order to raise themselves up in the hierarchy have to be economically prosperous and politically dominant and assertive. Sanskritization it has to be noted facilitates positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change. It is incapable to change the system. It may further be noted that efforts at appropriation of "traditional symbols of honour" by those not otherwise entitled to it were opposed by those who constituted the reference model for emulation. Sanskritization however soon lost its sheen as it failed to reduce relative deprivation. Emulation of twice born status appeared irrelevant to reduce the inequality between the entrenched and the aspiring. Symbolic satisfaction mattered least to those seeking substantial location in the prevalent opportunity structure. Soft and conciliatory stirrings left the dominance of the privileged castes untouched.

22.5 BACKWARD CLASSES MOVEMENTS AND THEIR POLITICO-ECONOMIC EMERGENCE

The rise of the non-Brahmins under the leadership of crusaders against social injustice mainly from the intermediate castes represents a landmark development. It was reflective of a determined resistance to perpetuation of the traditionally legitimised inequality. Jyoti Rao Govind Rao Phule made the first attempt to form a Bahujan Samaj in Maharashtra to challenge the supremacy of the Brahmins who constituted the privileged few dominating the socio-economic political contours of the state. Phule himself a Shudra questioned the dominance of Brahmins in the colonial dispensation. His opposition to the caste system found articulation in his efforts to raise a new social order based on truth reason and equality. He initiated a movement to discard the services of Brahmins in the religious ceremonies of the non-Brahmins as he regarded them to be the unwanted middlemen between the people and the God.

Activity 2

Discuss with friends and students the backward classes politico-economic emergence. Put your observations down in your notebook.

The non-Brahmanical movement was accorded institutionalization in the programmes of the Satya Shodhak Samaj founded by Phule. He considered Brahminism as cunning and self-seeking and condemned it as intolerable imposition to ensure the perpetuation of the high in the caste hierarchy. The "dominant agricultural castes" that formed the core and support of this movement subsequently ushered were very pro Congress. Phule's interpretation of lower caste exploitation ignored the economic and political contexts. Exploitation was interpreted in terms of cultural and ethnicity. Phule however stressed the need for return to pre-Brahmin religious tradition. Organisation and education were considered essential for attainment of such goals. He opposed the exploitation of Indian peasants and wage earners. Similar outbursts appeared elsewhere also.

22.5.1 The Self Respect Movement

In the south the "other backward classes" and the untouchable launched the self-respect movement to oppose the dominance of the Brahmins. In its infancy it tended to be a social reform movement questioning the ritual dominance and cultural preeminence of the Brahmins. It soon found itself enmeshed in the ethnic politics having its focus fixed on extracting concessions and benefits in lieu of its loyalty to the British. Such concern made it even unfavourably inclined to the independence movement as it was perceived to be the affair of the Brahmins. The Brahmins of Tamil Nadu who constituted the 'chosen few' to control politics, bureaucracy and professions constituted the target of attack of such forces. Unable to find accommodation in the Brahmin dominated social system the non-Brahmin

section in the population with the aid and support of the Britishers took resort to extensive mobilization of the lower castes and were successful in capturing power in 1920. Once in power the leadership made effective endeavours to seek a rise in their representation in other spheres of dominance. Such movement has a spread that included all the Tamil districts. Among its supporters were included the low in the caste hierarchy. The included untouchables to whom the movement had appeal. Initiated as a social reform movement to seek redemption from ritual dominance and cultural preeminence of the Brahmins it subsequently used its strength to arrange concessions and reservation for the backward classes from the colonial power and princely rulers as quid pro quo to their opposition to the nationalist movement. Success in ensuring political representation was followed by claims of backward classes for reservations.

Its leadership subsequently shifted its orientation to programmes promoting the interests of the middle and lower castes leaving the untouchables to fend for themselves. Such aspirations of the lower castes later found support of the Congress party that was keen to broaden its support by facilitating induction of the non-Brahmin elites within its fold. The non-Brahmin movement in the south tended to be more coherent than those in other parts of the country.

22.5.2 Praja Mitra Mandal: Karnataka

In Karnataka the caste associations of the dominant landed interest federated themselves under the auspices of the Praja Mitra Mandali expressing opposition to dominance of the Brahmins. Under the pressure of the forces that thus emerged steps to ensure adequate representation of the non-Brahmins in the public service ensued. Successful mobilization of the backward classes contributed effectively in weakening the hold of the Brahmins in politics bureaucracy and professions. The prejaksha that emerged as the replacement for the prajamitra after the latter's disintegration led to the further strengthening of the position of the intermediate Castes in general and the lingayats and the Vokallingas in particular. The two castes emerged as the lead castes in the state politics after independence. Between the two, the Lingayats consolidated themselves more effectively in the power structure. Such permutation of power that constituted the other backward classes as its locus after independence oriented itself more seriously to take measures wedded to benefit the owner cultivator's interests. Legislations were enacted to facilitate transfer of land from the landed castes of Brahmins to the actual tillers of such land belonging mainly to the intermediate castes. The Brahmins of Karnataka were thus forced out of the village to find livelihood in the white collar jobs. The power equilibrium thus raised disintegrated subsequently in the wake of the emergence of the smaller backward castes who opposed the dominance of the power full in the intermediate castes. The excluded among the other backward classes resisted such dominance and organised themselves to emerge as strong contender for power.

22.5.3 Movements in the South: Andhra and Kerela

The Brahmins were opposed also in Andhra Pradesh. Their location as elite in the traditional as well as emerging secular stratification system left many at the margin of the opportunity structure. Perpetuation of the old and appropriation of the new by them found stiff resistance from those benefited through commercial revolution in agriculture. Castes inferior to the traditional Brahmin elite soon questioned their supremacy. People from these castes in support with other castes lower to them in the traditional stratification system turned themselves against the Congress demand for the Home rule suspecting it to be a ploy seeking to facilitate the perpetuation of the old order. The apprehensions of Brahmins preeminence led these non-Brahmin sections to oppose Visalandhra movement that had the aim of a separate state of the Telgu-speaking people of the Madras Presidency. The dominance of a few prosperous non-Brahmin peasant castes unwilling to favour castes lower to them prompted the latter on occasions to assert for their interest. The Munnuru Dapa movement and the Padmasali movement are examples of such assertion in the pre-independence phase. Individual backward classes associations federated themselves after independence to claim reservations. Such sponsored mobility of the deprived notwithstanding, in the bureaucracy the Brahmin dominance is not over and the dominant peasant castes on account of their economic advantage and political manipulations are poised to preserve their overriding influence.

Box 22.02

In Kerala the Izhavas led the intermediate caste movement against the dominance of the upper castes in the opening years of the present century. Appropriation of resources unleashed under the colonial schemes of expansion by the upper castes especially the Nayers and the empowerment of the scheduled castes with the aid and support of the mission distressed the deprived Izhavas who had largest share in the state population. Under the leadership of Dr. Palpu the Izhavas were mobilized to claim their due representation in bureaucracy and professions.

22.5.4 OBCs in U.P.

The intermediate castes or the OBC, did not emerge that assertive in non-peninsular India. Brahminism perpetuated itself in the sanskritik heartland of India the Uttar Pradesh drawing sustenance from the tradition embedded. In the pre-independence Uttar Pradesh protest against the dominance of the upper castes tended to be mild. Caste associations floated during this period in addition to foster inter-caste solidarity and inter-caste fraternity among the proximately placed intermediate castes were oriented to seek occasional redressal against the excesses of the upper castes. Thus in the annual conferences of the Yadava Mahasabha opposition used to be whipped against the upper castes. These upper castes were seen as exploiting and blocking their progress. The well off among the middle range castes found themselves favourably inclined to sanskritization as the strategy for status elevation. Competition within the stratum for superior location in the stratification system worked against the solidarity needed to produce an effective uprising. Situations however remained unfavourable to the rise of the other backward classes. They failed to mobilize themselves for effective gains. Consequently the intermediate castes remained appendage to permutations dominated by the upper castes even in the years immediately after independence. With the ushering of the famous Green Revolution and the subsequent emergence of the other backward classes as a political force under the leadership of Charan Singh the equilibrium of power favouring the status quo was disturbed. Fraternity thus fostered remains the locus for initiatives oriented to claims of equality with the upper castes. Success eludes such aspirations in absence of cohesion and mobilization.

22.5.5 OBCs in Bihar

In Bihar the educated elite from the other backward castes sought to federate themselves to claim elevation in their traditional social status by taking resort to sanskritisation. The Kurmis and the Yadavas especially those who turned out to be prosperous and conscious formed caste associations to usher reform from within and to exert pressure outward for improvement in their condition. Attempts to unite the powerful among the middle range castes were also made under the auspices of the Triveni Sangh that was sought to emerge as a federation of the Yadavas the kurmis and the koeris. Such initiatives on their part tended to be least effective as they lacked support of the upper caste leaders who constituted the locus of power. The leadership mobilizing masses during the freedom struggle thought it prudent to ignore them in order to serve the interests of their own caste who would have been losers in the event of such relief to this sections of the society.

Even the Kisan sabhas in Bihar ignored its proclaimed intent to help tenant from the cultivating intermediate castes as the upper caste leadership in such stirrings were opposed to it. Parochial outlook of such outfits ignored this. Independence and some of the measures of land reform triggered fall outs conducive to the rise of the middle range castes. Landlords from the upper castes lost their dominance as Zamindari was abolished. Privileged among the middle range castes asserted for their increased representation in bureaucracy and professions. Socio-economic development appeared facilitative to their social elevation, economic prosperity and political development. Sanskritisation however soon ceased to be the strategy for their mobility. Claims for rank precedence in the traditional stratification system did not find articulation as an effective concern. Protest against conditions of relative deprivation emerged to be the dominant theme in the ideology of the other backward classes movement.

22.5.6 Education and Values

Exposure to egalitarian values and attainment of higher levels of education provoked

awareness of the negative discrepancy between the legitimate expectation and actuality. This realisation of their dominant political status made them capable of initiating a process of struggle to ensure distribution of resources in a highly egalitarian manner. Appropriation of resources through bureaucratic manipulation that favoured the privileged upper castes received stiff opposition. The rise of the middle range castes in its wake has sounded the death knell of permutations favouring dominance of the traditionally high. The emergence of these forces reflect an endorsement to the strategy of allocation of resources, opportunity and honour in favour of the intermediate castes. However such sections among the middle range castes as are not so favourably placed in resource endowments tend to lag behind. Once important surrogate to upper caste dominated parties the dominant owner cultivators placed in the middle of the traditional stratification system constitute the locus of power.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write a note on Jyoti Rao Phule and the Bahujan Samaj. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- 2) Discuss briefly the effect of the caste associations in Karnataka. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- 3) Describe the condition of OBC's in U.P. Why were they not so assertive? Use about five lines for your answer.

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22.6 CASTE CLASS AND POWER

Thus the non-Brahmin movement may be characterised as the initiator of the process that subsequently led to evolution of a corporate identity among the deprived and excluded. Increasing economic differentiation seems to have induced the lower caste people to emerge as corporate entities of state claims in the emerging opportunity structure. Urge for the upper caste status in the status structure led the numerically dominant and politically articulate middle range castes to initially resort to sanskritisation. Unable to lift themselves from their intended location and eagerness for larger representation in the emerging opportunity structure produced from among the other backward castes such leadership that were best positioned and were well educated with fierce opposition to sanskritik culture. Low caste Hindus thus emerged for the first time as a political category. The opposition to traditional centres of dominance came from powerful rural castes which were themselves dominant. Once these castes and other identically dominant middle range castes in other states found themselves elevated in the power structure they tended to ignore those from among them that occupied the periphery. The ascending configuration were unfavourably inclined to downward percolation of power. Split soon ensued to isolate dominant communities from among the OBCs and claims for special preferential treatment for the marginalized intermediate castes were made. In the present structure of power the weak and marginal do not have chances for survival as an independent entity.

22.7 LET US SUM UP

Under the provisions of the constitution of India the state is required to provide special care to the problems of the weaker sections including the other backward classes. Special responsibility is placed on the Government to make provisions aimed at their protection so that they are capable to complete with those who had an early start and had done better in life and whose mobility was not restricted on account of their inherited deprivation. The provisions for their upliftment include reservation of appointments or posts in favour of the scheduled castes Tribes and other backward classes, reservation of seats in schools colleges and professional institutions and financial support to pursue studies. Such steps of protective discrimination are oriented to restrict the liberties of the privileged in order to provide greater opportunity to the underprivileged.

22.8 KEY WORDS

Dominance	:	Comprises vital, numerical, economic and political superiority.
Other Backward Class	:	Classes low in the traditional hierarchy, the most of all castes including SCs and STs.
Sanskritization	:	A process of imitation by a lower caste of higher caste attributes and lifestyle with a view to positional upward mobility.

22.9 FURTHER READINGS

Satyamurthi, T.V. (ed.) 1996 *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*. Delhi. OUP

Panandiker Pai V.A. (ed) 1997. *The Politics of Backwardness*. New Delhi. Konark Publishers.

Zelliot E. 1992 *From Untouchable to Dalit*, New Delhi. Manohar.

22.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Other backward castes are a constitutional category and comprise socially disadvantaged shudra castes. They are a social layer intermediate between the twice born and the untouchable.
- 2) False
- 3) Karnataka.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Jyoti Rao Phule first tried to form a Bahujan Samaj in Maharashtra to challenge the Supremacy of the Brahmins despite their numerical minority. Phule initiated a movement to remove Brahmins from rituals of the non Brahmins and he regarded them as dispensable for their religious ceremonies.
- 2) In Karnataka the caste associations of the powerful dominant caste joined together under Praja Mitra Mandali in opposition to the Brahmins. Successful mobilization led to a weakening of the Brahmin hold in politics, bureaucracy and politics.
- 3) The intermediate castes or the OBC's did not emerge as very strong and assertive in U.P. The middle castes favoured Sanskritization as a strategy for upward mobility. The situation remained unfavourable for the intermediate castes and their mobilization. This situation continued even upto Independence, after which some political leaders have tried to make a difference.

UNIT 23 SCHEDULED TRIBES

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Tribal Population
 - 23.2.1 Regional Concentration
 - 23.2.2 Rate of Growth
- 23.3 Internal Social Differentiation
 - 23.3.1 Structure Differentiation
 - 23.3.2 Control of Land
- 23.4 Tribal Social Movements
 - 23.4.1 Tribal Movements Since Independence
 - 23.4.2 Motive Forces of Struggle
- 23.5 Constitutional Provisions and Movements
 - 23.5.1 Tribal Welfare Measures
 - 23.5.2 Policy for Tribals
- 23.6 Socio-Economic Improvement
 - 23.6.1 Micro-Level Surveys
- 23.7 Role of Tribal Elites
- 23.8 Tribals and Emergent Social Stratification
 - 23.8.1 Recent Studies
 - 23.8.2 The Marxist Conception
 - 23.8.3 Tribes as Peasant Societies
- 23.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.10 Key Words
- 23.11 Further Readings
- 23.12 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

23.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- give a description of Scheduled Tribes;
- provide a view of internal differentiation within Scheduled Tribes as a whole;
- outline various important tribal Social Movements;
- delineate Constitutional Provisions and measures for tribal welfare;
- record the role of tribal elites; and
- describe the position of tribals in the emergent social stratification.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

Despite its wide currency in social science literature, the term tribe has not been defined with any scientific rigour and precision, and continues to be used to describe certain categories of pre-literate cultures covering a wide range of forms of social organizations and levels of techno-economic development. It is both identified as a stage in the history

of evolution of societies and as a type of non-state society organized on the basis of extended kinship network that enables it to be a multifunctional grouping.

Some superficial and empirical characteristics are attributed to the term. These are: (i) homogeneity (ii) isolation and non-assimilation (iii) territorial integrity (iv) consciousness of unique identity (v) animist (now defunct) but religion is all pervasive (vi) absence of exploiting classes and organized state structure (vii) multifunctionality of kinship relations (viii) segmentary nature of socio-economic unit, and (ix) frequent cooperation for common goals. Besides, there are many other ambiguous empirical external attributes which have remained unchanged for over a century, though during this period the non-tribal societies have radically changed. This lands us in the endless dilemma of the exception and rule. Small wonder, several serious critiques have demonstrated how the term tribe is at a theoretical dead end and is ideologically manipulative.

Any way, the question of homogeneity and the idea of equality among the tribes have been increasingly found to be of little significance for everywhere women, slaves and strangers are excluded from this equality. Even in lineage based societies, there are economic and political inequalities in terms of control of marriage, exchange of elite goods and the redistribution process. In the Indian context where the equivalent of the term tribe was non-existent before colonial domination, several studies have shown the differential control of land, contribution of labour, surplus extraction, occupational diversity, etc. Similarly, geographical isolation is myth; for instance, the Gonds in India are found in eight states, Bhils in seven, Kandha and Saora each in six, Munda and Oraon in five states and 20 others each in four states. Historically, there has been a continuous process of interaction between the tribes and the larger society particularly in the said states, albeit, at an unequal level. About state formation, there were many early states, other than that of tribals, in the late medieval period in central India tribal belt and in the North-East. Thus, the assumption of a historic and static tribal society surviving as a cultural lag is misleading.

For Indian researchers, it is almost a taboo of defining the term. However, any attempt from whatever criterion or criteria would inevitably exclude a large number of Scheduled Tribes from being called as tribes. Hence, tribe simply refers to those included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. While this juridical terminology and categorization has been uncritically accepted in Indian social research, the term is nowhere defined in the Indian Constitution. Only Article 342 (1) provides that the President, after consulting the governor of state, may designate the "tribes and Tribal communities or part of groups within tribes or tribal communities" to be the Scheduled Tribes for each state.

Accordingly in 1950, the President promulgated a list of the Scheduled Tribes apparently by making some additions to the 1935 list of Backward Tribes. No uniform test for distinguishing the Scheduled Tribes had ever been formulated. The amendments of 1956 and 1976 to left out some tribes despite their meeting the assumed tribal characteristics. In fact, the Dhebar Commission (1961) felt no need to devote any attention to the problem of identifying the tribes. And this seems to have remained unchanged at both legal and academic levels.

Nonetheless, as most concepts are often imprecise prone to change though they largely carry instrumental and operative values, the notion of tribes cannot be otherwise. For our purpose, a working definition would suffice. The tribal peoples in general are historically evolved entities.

They are biologically self-perpetuating and are marked by certain common cultural features. Being subordinated in several ways to the dominant society and its institutions, they have been for long engaged in struggles to preserve and promote their distinguishable features as well as territorial survival resources.

23.2 TRIBAL POPULATION

According to the 1991 Census, India's tribal population was about 68 million, that is about 8 per cent of the country's population. This number is large and is much more than the population of many a country round the world. As some tribes were temporarily

accommodated in the other Backward Classes Category, there were only 19 million persons distributed among 212 tribal communities in 1951 Census. Their strength increased to 38 and 52 millions in 1971 and 1981 respectively, constituting about 7.0 and 7.8 percent of the total population. Today, there are between 258 to 540 communities, depending on whether synonymous and sub-tribes are treated separately or not. Hence, these numbers should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive.

Moreover, their population varied widely. For instance, the Jarwa had a strength of only 31 persons whereas the Gond had over 7 million persons enumerated in 1981. Other small communities like the Andamanese, Onge, Shompen, Toda et. al. had less than thousand persons whereas the Bhil, Santal, Oraon, Munda, Mina, Khond, Saora, etc. had more than a million persons each.

23.2.1 Regional Concentration

Similarly, the regional concentration is of great diversity. About 55 percent of the tribals live in central, 28 percent in Western, 12 percent in North-East and 4 percent in Southern India, and only 1 percent elsewhere in country. But it is interesting to note that, with minor exceptions, there is a continuous belt of tribal habitat from Thane district of Maharashtra to Tengnoupal district of Manipur. Also, the tribals are mostly found in the meeting points of dominant Lingua States. In the 1960s, one-third of the tribals lived in the districts where they were in majority. Infact, over sixty percent lived in the districts where they composed of 30 percent or more of the total population. Even now, the situation may not be very much different.

23.2.2 Role of Growth

It is a fact that the tribal population has been growing faster at a higher rate than the general population. During the 1981-91 decade, the general population grew at the rate of 2.1 percent a year and the tribal population grew at the rate of 2.6 per cent a year. The growth is, however, much higher in the North-East, i.e, at the rate of 4.6 percent per year as against 2.5 percent in Central Indian belt and barely 1.5 percent in southern tribal region. The growth in the North-East must have to consider immigration from outside the country, and elsewhere particularly in the Central and the Western Indian tribal belt the inclusion of new or non-tribal communities in the list of the Scheduled Tribes owing to political compulsions.

Box 23.01

Further according to 1991 Census, the sex ratio among the tribals was higher (972 females per 1000 males) than the general population (929 females for 1000 males). But over decades there is decline, even at time, more than the general population. About literacy, only 23 percent of tribals were literate as against 43 percent among the general population. For female literacy, only 15 percent tribal women were literate against 32 percent females of population. Perhaps a review of the concept of literacy and strategy of tribal education after 50 years of independence is called for. Similarly urbanization : population living in urban areas is as low as 7 percent for tribals when 26 percent of general population live in urban areas.

The averages, however, do not completely comprehend the gamut of differentiations in the tribal milieu. There is enormous heterogeneity not only in terms of the numerical strength, rate of demographic expansion, regional concentration, gender composition, literacy, urbanization but also occupation, ecology, linguistic affiliation, racial composition, kinship systems, history of movements and vast number of other variables.

23.3 INTERNAL SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

It is difficult to conceive of a society which is completely egalitarian. Every known society in the world contains differences in status carrying different privileges and prerogatives in economic, social, political and ceremonial activities. In Indian context, most of the bigger tribal communities had a tribal aristocracy and warrior nobility. There were landlords and serfs / tenants among the Munda, Shedukpen, Korku, Bhilala, Gond, etc. Often, the smaller tribes served the dominant classes of the powerful tribes. Small wonder that the Hindu

Kings and Mughal rulers recognized several tribes like Bhil, Gond, Koli, Meena, etc. as the dominant communities of the respective regions. The Gond, Chero, Tripuri, Bhuyan, Kachari, Khasi, Binjhal, Koli and others had developed independent kingdoms out of the tribal matrix. The British too strengthened the feudal crust of the tribal society by introducing the Zamindari and Malgauri systems in tribal regions. But it alienated other's lands and forces the peasants onto plantation and mine labour both inside and outside the country. Consequently, there were innumerable protests against such systems.

23.3.1 Struggle Differentiation

Following Independence of the country, the structural differentiation among most of the tribals has become incontrovertible. The inequality among almost all tribes in the country is striking in terms of land control, occupational distribution, income employment of labour, spread of education and urbanization, intensity of outside contact, access to productive resources, life style and so on.

Let us discuss the question of land which is vital for over 80 percent of the tribals in the country. In an agrarian system where land is scarce, the uneven distribution of land will normally speak for the agrarian relations. The bigger the landowner is, the greater will be need to employ outside labour to cultivate the farm. Conversely, the smaller is the peasant let alone the landless, the propensity to sell labour in order to subsist will be greater. The exploitation is in-built into the scheme operative in almost all tribal belts in the country.

23.3.2 Control of Land

The available land control data suggests striking differences among the tribals. For instances in the 1970s 43 percent of tribals owned less than a hectare whereas 9 percent controlled more than four hectares each. The highly skewed land ownership indicates not only internal economic differences but also socio-political differentiation. Several regional studies in Gujarat, Orissa, Tripura, West Bengal and other states have also supported that. For instance, 37 percent of the tribal households have so little land that they cannot survive on land whereas 7 percent with more than 20 acres each, need not participate directly in the production process to generate surplus. Higher the size of the land, there is also greater control of livestock, marketable surplus, employment of wage labour, income consumer goods, better house, and greater access to education and institutional credit. The land inequality is however, more striking among the relatively developed tribals. The smaller tribes have rather lesser differentiation than the bigger ones.

Having mentioned serious differentiations among the tribal people of the country in terms of economic, social and political aspects, it has to be asserted that all tribals experience the dispossession from their customary survival resource bases, recurrent assault on their history, culture and institutional structures. They also face marginalisation in the spheres of decision making. And, therefore, the tribal people are emerging as a unified social category of despised, exploited and marginalized ones.

23.4 TRIBAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Before the 18 century, the tribal people appeared to be rather passive to their own centralized power as well as Hindu and Muslim rulers. The only exception was certain regions and tribes under the Maratha rulers. The tribal rulers rarely extorted more than acceptable for the reproduction of the system. In a sense, legitimization of their power was decentralized.

It was colonialism, for the first time which forced them into the centralized repressive state. Consequently, the dispersed and relatively unorganized tribes and their divisions got united and rose in revolts of course at the local level. During the 19th century, most of the numerically strong and settled tribal communities like Santal, Oraon, Kol, Koya, Bhil, Saora, etc. fought against colonialism and feudalism as was perceived in their immediate context. Apart from a few reformative, messianic or emulative movements, most of their revolts and agitation were related to land alienation, forest reservation, forced and indentured labour, oppressive, taxation, loss of culture and religion, and replacement of their traditional power.

The anti-colonial perspective, however, was not well articulated precisely because the British interests were pursued through the local and regional powers. The intra-tribal contradictions were overshadowed by the onslaught of non-tribals, and the ethnic bonds and common heritage spared their own exploiting members from attack. With the rise of the nationalist movement in the early 20th century, anti-colonial perspective percolated to the tribal struggles of Kandha, Koya, Oraon, Munda, Saora, Warli, Gond, and others.



The Bhil Tribe of India. Women collecting firewood

Courtesy: Kiranmayi Bushi

23.4.1 Tribal Movements Since Independence

However, since independence, the tribal movements have become more diverse. Despite their heterogeneity at large, the common grievances of tribals is their dispossession and indignity, and aspirations form a common platform with some subjugated non-tribals and thereby, consolidate pan-regional loyalties and consciousness. Yet, almost all tribal movements organized so far have been intrinsically associated with the ethnic or nationality question. Small wonder, the current tribal movements in terms of socio-cultural mobility towards the twice-born cultural complexes have become insignificant. Instead, the reverse trend is becoming more and more conspicuous.

Activity 1

Find out about tribal movements since Independence from friends and students. Make a note on the same in your diary.

The organized struggles mostly appear among the relatively large population with some level of literacy, awareness of national democratic process and internal socio-economic differentiation. Evidence suggests that the tribals that are more differentiated provide greater resistance to subjugation; and the elite structure serves as the rallying point for struggles. Their struggles or movements are concentrated expressions of the socio-economic, political and cultural expressions of the tribal peoples at large.

23.4.2 Motive Forces of Struggle

The tribal struggles are essentially rooted in three interrelated motive forces namely, the epistemology of individualism, statist ideology and capitalist model of development. The movements are, therefore, for recognition of collective rights over the survival resources

and internal self-determination in the legitimate cultural, linguistic spheres as well as a dynamic strategy for sustainable development. Unfortunately, however, the militant nationalist struggles of the tribals their political autonomy in the North-East and the radical agrarian struggles against the obnoxious methods of surplus appropriation in parts of the obnoxious methods of surplus appropriation in parts of central India tribal belt are simply treated as a law and order issue and dealt in military terms. The demands for political autonomy and extension of the 6th Schedule to tribal areas are perfectly legitimate and constitutional deserving appropriate democratic handling of the issues.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Provide a working definition of Scheduled Tribes in about five lines.

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- 2) Write a note on tribal social movements in india in about five lines.

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23.5 CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AND MEASURES

There are as many as 20 Articles and two special Schedules in the Indian Constitution concerning the welfare of the tribals and development of the Scheduled Areas. This constitutes a unique distinction in the whole world. Besides the Articles of the Fundamental Rights to Equality (14, 15, 16, 17), rights against exploitation (23, 24), special rights of the tribals (15, 16, 19), there are several Articles in the Directive Principle of the State Policy - not enforceable by law which are related to the Scheduled Tribes (38, 39, 41, 43, 46, 47, 48). The most important is thought to be Article 46 which commits that the state "shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation." The ideal is laudable. But no mechanism or guidance is provided on how the weaker sections can achieve their exploitation free existence in an overall exploitative complex.

23.5.1 Tribal Welfare Measures

In additional, there is a provision for a minister of tribal welfare in some states (164), administration of the Scheduled and Tribal Areas specially with respect to land alienation and money lending (244), development grants to states (275), identification of the Scheduled Tribes (366) and reservation for tribals in legislatures, education and employment (330, 332, 334, 335, 338, 339). Though the provision of reservation is considered one of the most meaningful provisions, it may be noted that it is not the tribal collectivities but only the individuals belonging to them who are entitled for such benefits.

Article 371 upholds customary laws, justice and socio-religious practices of tribals in some states. The Vth Schedule (244) tends to be protective and paternalistic. It does not recognize group rights in land and land based resources, and the customary political institutions. Anyway, most of the protective provisions have remained ineffective or inoperative in practice. The VIth Schedule veers towards self-management, ethno development and internal self-determination through the autonomous district/ regional councils with executive, legislative and judicial powers. But the scope has been seriously diluted through

several easy amendments. Nonetheless, the Vth Schedule alone honours the customary corporate rights over resources, cultural diversity, sustainable self-development, self-management and self-reliance of tribal people in certain regions.

23.5.2 Policy for Tribals

The tribal policy or policy for tribals is rather complex; for it aims to balance improvement of their conditions, on the one hand, and a degree of assimilation with preservation of their distinctiveness and measure of autonomy on the other. It is a fact that the broad frame of operational policy was crisply put forward by Nehru (1958) which included, among others, that they should develop along the lines of their own genius, and their rights in land and forest should be respected. But in practice neither their genius is ever considered nor their land and forests honoured. In fact, the state has become major source of alienation of resources and de-recognition of the cognitive principles and practices of the tribal people

Recently, there has been an interesting development. The Panchayat Raj (extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 though still excludes tribal areas in the North-East and tribals in non - scheduled areas and urban areas, does provide for consultation with the Gram Sabha (village Council) before making acquisition of land for development projects. It considers the community as the basic building block with its firm foundation of tribal traditions and customs as the pivot of the system of self-government. The Gram Sabha is also endowed with power of management of community resources, resolution of local disputes, approval of plans and programme, ownership of minor forest produce and minor minerals, restoration of unlawfully alienated and, control over money lending and marketing, self-management according to customs and many more. Although it does not meet the standards of the Vth Schedule fully, the drive is towards that. Hence, in the Vth Schedule tribal peoples are still striving for its implementation.

23.6 SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT

In spite of the constitutional commitment and five decades of planning for tribal welfare, it is sad to observe their levels and standards of the living are conspicuously lower than the national averages. Poverty, malnutrition, mortality and morbidity are much higher among them. Nearly 85 percent of the tribal families remain below the poverty line as against national average of 38 percent. Sixty per cent of them are nutritionally deficient. With the reservation of forests, came closures of areas for military and national security purposes, large scale immigration of non-tribal population, extraction of mineral, hydrological, and environmental resources, they have been losing their land and land based endowments, and facing de-culturalization. The asymmetry of power has thus been accentuated in the post-colonial era.

Much has been said about the expenditure on tribal welfare. But actual expenditure had remained less than one per cent of the plan outlay till the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan. Since then, it did increase to about three per cent but largely due to the inclusion of infrastructural and administrative costs. Earlier, the expenditure incurred by the tribal welfare ministries and departments were accounted but now any identifiable expenditure by other including industrial and hydel projects are added. Hence, differences in the percentages conceal more than reveal the fact. In any case, suffice to say that it has never been commensurate with the proportion of their population. If we take into account the inflation, the per capita annual expenditure of the Tribal people upto the mid - 1970s was as little as one and half rupees at 1951 price level. After that, it increased to about five rupees at that price level by adding many other costs including administrative costs of 194 Integrated Tribal Development Projects, 268 Modified Area Development Approaches in tribal pockets below the block level, and 90 cluster areas of primitive groups covering 69 percent of tribal population. Not simply the amount spent on tribal welfare is much less conspicuous than has been made out, but whatever little spent is also biased in favour of education, instead of economic development.

23.6.1 Micro-Level Surveys

Several surveys at micro-level have noticed that between 50 to 60 percent of the sampled households had no idea of any welfare or development programme, let alone receiving any

benefit from any schemes and projects. Rather, they pointed how their miseries have increased in the recent decades due to the current notion of development and invasion of unequal market forces into their midst. Of course, some welfare measures and development plans and schemes around 10 percent did receive the specific benefits. They mostly belonged to the big landowners, traditional leaders and educated elite of the advanced regions and dominant communities. The only exception to this are 74 "primitive" groups who have got some benefits of these plans and schemes. This may be so as in process, there are some contingent benefits to the common tribal masses.

Thus, the tribal welfare system is primarily a product of the tribals' struggles; and represents a quid pro quo in exchange for political quiescence. It has, however, strengthened the structure of mediation, varying from a few leaders to a cross section of the populace, depending on the levels of internal contradiction, the imminent threat of struggles, contribution to labour and commodity market, electoral calculations and the relative autonomy of the State. Obviously, welfare's are not meant to accomplish redistribution of socio-economic and political power. The indiscriminate extension of the benefits to a structured society would logically mean that the higher the class and social status, greater is the share of those benefits percolated down to the village level. The primary focus then is to co-opt a few members to act as a buffer to make the articulation easier and the maintenance of the existing unequal system guaranteed. But the crystallization of alliance between such privileged sections of the tribals and the all India ruling classes still remains a very feeble one. Anyway, the tribal people have achieved little and not to their expectations as citizens of the country.

23.7 ROLE OF TRIBAL ELITES

In the colonial period, most of the struggles for justice were led by the disposed traditional elite with great consequence. Independent India has taken serious note of it and provided several avenues for ameliorating their conditions of living. But as the resources are limited or rather improperly distributed, the spread of benefits are very much limited. Accordingly, the system of granting special facilities has generated a small modern elite among the tribals in terms of education, politics and economics, whereas the large majority of the tribal people have remained where they were before Independence, if not worse.

Box 23.02

Some have argued that the tribal elite articulates its own interests and not of the common masses and, therefore, in the development planning focus should be directed to the weaker sections among the tribals. But the argument misses the fact that when Indian society as a whole is class divided (and also on the basis of caste and religion) and when exploitation marks the social relations in the almost every field, how can the emerging tribal elites be very much different? Moreover, by being simultaneously members of indigenous community and the national society, the tribal elites generate a system of linkage to the wider system. If the process of formation of elite is accelerated, there may be a scope for building a national elite. This would considerably reduce the inter-ethnic distances within the national polity. Besides, they constitute the nuclei of the social transformation of the tribal society or societies. There may be occasional withdrawal of this responsibility but that is not specific to tribal elites rather, it is shared by elites belonging to the rest of the nation.

Being a late comer, the tribal elites are not able to compete equal terms with the non-tribal elites and this, tend to be an integral part of their community system. Tribal elites thus, cannot fully separate from their own people. The masses at times treat them as customary political elite, moneylenders, rich peasants, modern political leaders educated and government servants, agents of labour contractors, etc. The contradictions with alien market forces and their agents being so severe, the conflicts are often channelized along ethnic lines with direct and indirect support of the same internal elites.

23.8 TRIBALS AND EMERGENT SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

It is interesting to note that in the 18th century writings on India, the term caste has often been used synonymously with tribe, and later in cognate manner as in the phrase castes :

benefit from any schemes and projects. Rather, they pointed how their miseries have increased in the recent decades due to the current notion of development and invasion of unequal market forces into their midst. Of course, some welfare measures and development plans and schemes around 10 percent did receive the specific benefits. They mostly belonged to the big landowners, traditional leaders and educated elite of the advanced regions and dominant communities. The only exception to this are 74 "primitive" groups who have got some benefits of these plans and schemes. This may be so as in process, there are some contingent benefits to the common tribal masses.

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tribes. Even the Indian Constitution (Art. 341(1)) holds that a tribe may be included in the category of scheduled castes. In fact, 1951 Census temporarily accommodated over a million tribals in the Other Backward Classes category.

Be that alone, the little attention that has been paid to tribal transition in social science research is largely seen as a shift from tribe to caste. Indeed, some sociologists have even called the tribes as backward Hindus. Of course, most of the major tribal communities have had interactions with the Hindus, Muslims and others, and in the process of which, changes have appeared in the cultural as well as structural complexes of the tribes, castes and others. But the historical and contextual evidence rarely supports the thesis of the trend of transformation of tribes into castes as such. For a couple of decades, emulation of the dominant culture through sanskritization swayed the tribal people. But as these attempts hardly improved their status of material conditions of life, most have retrieved their unique ethnic identity. Historically, they were many but existentially they are tending to be one in the contemporary period.

23.8.1 Recent Studies

Some recent studies have observed peasant features among a few numerically important tribes. But the characterization of tribal peasant society varied from more or less undifferentiated communities of peasants to stratified groups and further as a class society. Again, the motive forces of change - exogenous, endogenous or both - remain still an unexplored arena in tribal research. Among these who have rejected the tribal peasantry as a single interest group, most have analysed differentiation as stratification, i.e. categories of wealth, income and status through which families move up and down. Income distribution, assets control, occupational structure, etc. may provide description of the social strata but not the social relations and how the system operates. It also cannot identify the motive forces of change. Besides, any two researchers following the same approach would arrive at different classification of the same population. Most often, these strata are commonly called as classes - upper, middle and lower, rich and poor, and so on. But these descriptive divisions may at best provide a series of approximations illustrating partial aspects of social class.

23.8.2 The Marxist Conception

The Marxist conception of class, on the other hand, is analytical and contrasts sharply with the synthetic gradation scheme so prevalent in current literature on social stratification. To put it simply, the differentiation of the peasantry in the materialist sense is tied to the conditions under which the surplus is generated, appropriated and consumed or reinvested. But the operationalisation of the concept of class in the backward economic structures, where the boundary tends to be rather ambiguous, besets with a number of problems. Control of means of production and participation in the labour process do not sufficiently indicate the class identity and structure, for most tribals experience the world primarily in the idiom of tribe.

Activity 2

Does the Marxist paradigm fit the data we have on tribals? Discuss with friends and fellow students. Put down your observations in your notebook.

Needless to mention that the land ownership among the tribals is very unequal as stated earlier. However, in the present time nearly 55 percent of landowners own less than 5 acres each whereas 11 percent control over 15 acres each. A study in Gujarat found that 25 percent of the tribal households controlled only 3.6 percent of the total land whereas less than one-tenth of the households control a - third of the land resources. The inequality in land control is equally explicit with respect to individual village, and each and every tribes. In short, the tribal world is entwined with the larger capitalistic sector. Ruling classes of both have at once contradictions and alliances, and hold the key to economic progress or stagnation.

23.8.3 Tribes as Peasant Societies

We have earlier shown distinction between tribe and peasantry but at the existential level all the major tribes are actually peasant societies existing within the broad political economy of the State. Their existence and motion and perhaps be better understood in terms of a class analysis of these societies and the level of articulation of the different modes of production within their ethnic structures. As the ethnic consciousness and practices continue, class practices have not yet become dominant at political level.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Outline some important constructional provisions and measures for tribal welfare use about five lines for your answer.

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- 2) Delineate the present position of tribals in the social structure. Use about five lines for your answer.

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Meanwhile, the recent processes of economic liberalization and globalization have further accentuated class and community divisions albeit regional and sectoral inequalities. The tribals being the most marginalized and residing in resource rich areas have suffered the most and experienced absolute decline in their living standards. Even today they face alienation of their endowments, provide cheap labour, undergo involuntary displacement, and suffer from food security and many more. This is the process of the intensification of marginalization of tribal masses. But external alien interests can only articulate through local intermediaries. Thus, a very small section of advanced tribals with some assets of wealth, education and power is used for profit accumulation of the transnational corporations and international institutions. In the process, this section also becomes prosperity but this prosperity (?) of the few is of course very temporary.

23.9 LET US SUM UP

Though traumatized by deculturation, acculturation, co-option and negative identity, the tribals have largely managed to preserve their self identity, values of kinship, institutional reciprocity, knowledge of shared history and territorial occupancy. They are discovering their philosophical and cultural uniqueness and potentialities. There is also an increasing trend of inter-tribal unity and consciousness undermining the internal structuration and ethnic co-optation. Their communal control of customary resources and revival of traditional institutions and values of egalitarianism may act as a defensive mechanism against the gamut of imposed ills.

23.10 KEY WORDS

- Peasant Societies** : Societies with little internal differentiation who work their land with family labour and rudimentary technology.
- Policy** : A set of measures legally backed with resolutions and funds towards a group or situation e.g. tribals.
- Social Differentiation** : Where these are clear aspects of separate identity and lack of homogeneity in a social group.

Social Movement : A string towards a collective goal having the support of the people economic and social.

Tribal : Historically evolved people with specific biological and cultural features usually subjugated to the dominant society.

23.11 FURTHER READINGS

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Sharma, B.D., 1984. *Planning for Tribal Development*. New Delhi: Prachi Prakashan

23.12 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) For all practical purposes a tribe that is listed as scheduled tribe is a scheduled tribe. Tribes as a whole are historically evolved entities, are biologically self perpetuating and are marked by certain common cultural features. Being exposed to the dominant society they often have to struggle to maintain their identity.
- 2) Prior to the 18th century tribals appear to have been rather passive, and had a decentralized system of governance. Colonialism forced some tribes to coalesce and revolt against the repression. During the 19th century most of the tribes with large number territories fought colonialism and feudalism e.g. the Santal, Oraon, Kol, Koya etc.

Since independence the movements were fewer but all were concerned with common grievance of dispossession and indignity.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) There are about 20 Articles and two special Schedules in the Indian Constitution concerning the welfare of tribals and development of the Scheduled Areas. All these try and ensure that tribal are protected from social injustice and exploitation of all types.
- 2) For the last few decades emulation of the dominant culture, through Sanskritization was witnessed among various tribes. This did not help them much. Studies discussed peasant like features among the tribes, however, this did not go unchallenged, and tribes as a single interest group was not in a tenable position. Further Marxists pointed out that land ownership among tribes is very unequal and has alliances with the larger capitalist sector. These ruling classes hold a key to the future.

UNIT 24 MARGINALISED GROUPS AND THEIR CHANGING STATUS

Structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Scheduled Castes
 - 24.2.1 Social Mobility among Scheduled Castes
 - 24.2.2 Equality and Justice among Scheduled Castes
- 24.3 Scheduled Tribes in India
 - 24.3.1 Marginalisation of Tribals
 - 24.3.2 Tribals and Forests
 - 24.3.3 Tribal Development in Post Independent India
 - 24.3.4 A Description of Schedules Tribes
- 24.4 Women in India
 - 24.4.1 Women's Marginal Position
 - 24.4.2 Raising the Status of Women in India
 - 24.4.3 Policies for Women's Welfare
 - 24.4.4 Women and Ecological Degradation
- 24.5 Children in India
 - 24.5.1 Illustrations of Child Labour
- 24.6 The Aged in India
 - 24.6.1 Illustrations of the Aged
- 24.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.8 Key Words
- 24.9 Further Readings
- 24.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

24.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- Define scheduled castes;
- Discuss scheduled tribes;
- Know about the marginal position of women; and
- Analyse the status of children and the aged.

24.1 INTRODUCTION

A marginalised person is marginal either by ascription or achievement. Sometimes a marginal person is marginal as he or she is a non-conformist in his own group and a conformist to the out group (not being member of the group of birth). This makes a marginal person live a dual life in a given social or cultural situation. A group who is socially and culturally located at the periphery of society means that it does not enjoy the same privileges or advantages as that of the group which is situated in the center or at the core of society. Therefore, a marginal group suffers from multiple deprivations. These deprivations may have social, cultural, religious, economic and political aspects. The access of the

24.2 SCHEDULED CASTES

Indian society is divided into numerous castes and sub castes numbering in thousands. One is only familiar with the broad classification of castes into three categories : (1) The *dwijas* or the upper castes, (2) The middle castes, commonly known as backward castes or classes, and (3) The lower castes or the untouchables of the earlier times.

These castes have traditionally been ranked in a ritual hierarchy. The upper castes at the top of the hierarchy were the core castes or the dominant castes. The untouchable castes at the bottom of the hierarchy can also be described as the marginal castes. For the present purpose, we shall not go into the origins of the marginal castes. For the moment we shall restrict ourselves to the fact that at some point in the history of the Indian society, the untouchable castes were confined to the degrading occupations like disposing of the dead animals, processing of skins, leather works, scavenging and work at the cremation grounds. These castes acted as menial workers, labourers, servants, watchmen and wardmen. Their housing settlements were excluded from the centre of the village. While the untouchable castes performed various menial tasks, they have always remained indispensable to the society whether rural or urban. The untouchable castes are described as marginal only in terms of the low rewards and prestige related to their occupation and the consequent deprivation. Generally, they are also lowest in income, health, education and culture resources. The low caste groups may, however, vary from place to place in terms of being labelled untouchable. A caste such as dhobi (washerman) or teli (oil presser) may be considered untouchable in one part of India but not in another.

The description of scheduled castes as a marginalised group focuses on a series of disabilities that are imposed on them. However, it must be remembered that list of disabilities applied to the so called untouchable castes is not a description of practices in any single locality. Nor it gives a complete account of various disabilities imposed on marginal castes throughout India. It is instead a catalogue of the list which have in one place or another been typically associated with untouchability. These are as follows:

- i) Denial or restriction of access to public facilities, such as wells, schools, roads, post offices, and courts.
- ii) Denial or restriction of access to temples where their presence might pollute the deity as well as the higher-caste worshippers, and from rest-houses, tanks and shrines connected to temples. Untouchables and Shudras were ineligible to become sanyasis (holy men) and forbidden to learn the Vedas (the earliest and most sacred books of orthodox Hinduism).
- iii) Exclusion from any honourable, and most profitable employment and fixity to dirty or menial occupations.
- iv) Residential segregation, typically in a more extreme form than the segregation of other groups, by requiring them to remain outside the village. Denial of access to services such as those provided by barbers, dhobis (laundry-men), Restaurants Shops and theaters or requiring the use of separate utensils and facilities within such places.
- v) Restrictions on style of life, especially in the use of goods indicating comfort or luxury. Riding on horseback, use of bicycles, umbrella, footwear, the wearing of gold and silver ornaments, the use of palanquins to carry bridegrooms all of these were forbidden in many areas.
- vi) Requirements of deference in forms of address, language, sitting and standing in presence of higher castes.
- vii) Restrictions on movement. Untouchables might not be allowed to walk on roads and streets within prescribed distance of the houses or persons of higher castes.
- viii) Liability to unremunerated labour for the higher castes and to the performance of menial services for them.

24.2.1 Social Mobility among Scheduled Castes

The social mobility among scheduled castes can be understood better in the light of some empirical data. For example, the literacy rate of the scheduled castes have increased from 10 per cent in 1961 to nearly 37 per cent in 1991. Their enrolment in schools have doubled between 1981 and 1991. The number of scheduled caste employees in the government offices and administration have increased from 2,12,000 in 1956 to nearly 6,00,000 in 1992. The number of scheduled castes employed in public sector organisations have increased from 40,000 in 1970 to 3,69,000 in 1992. In rural areas, the percentage of the poor among the scheduled castes has declined from 58 per cent in 1983-84 to 50 per cent in 1987-88.

Another indication of social change and social mobility among the scheduled castes in the rural and urban societies can be inferred from the incidents of caste tensions and caste conflicts. Most of the violence against the scheduled castes took place due to their occupations. Some of the jobs prescribed by the discriminatory caste customs have been to perform the age-old degraded occupations such as disposing off dead cattle, midwifery and begary or forced labour without wage. Increasingly, the scheduled castes have refused to obey the authority of the non scheduled castes regarding restrictions on the use of public places such as village tanks, wells, streets, temples, etc. The provision of adult franchise has also brought about political awakening and self respect among the scheduled castes. In economic matters, a scheduled caste person cannot be easily made bonded labour on nominal or no wage. Similarly, it is no longer easy to dispossess them of their land and houses. These refusals and non-conformities have created situations of caste conflicts and caste tensions.

The dominant castes that have traditionally thrived on the exploitative relationship with the scheduled castes are provoked into violence when the scheduled castes question the existing relationship. The violence against scheduled castes may be seen in the incidents of forcible snatching of properties, rape and selling of scheduled caste women, burning and killing of the scheduled caste people.

The caste conflict as an expression of social mobility among the scheduled castes can easily be observed in rural areas. This is less so in urban areas due to greater degree of modernization and social development through education, secular employment, and economic and technological change.

The improvement in the marginal position of the scheduled castes cannot be adequately described without mentioning the contribution of various reformist leaders such as Mahatma Jotirao Phule, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar's ideology is primarily an ideology of social equality, liberty and fraternity, and his strategy to get it materialised is the protest against the social inequality in the caste system. He had launched protest movements for radically altering the society which routinely degraded and dehumanised the marginal castes. Furthermore, he stressed the rights of the untouchable castes to social equality. In Ambedkar's view, equality of the lower castes is to be seen in the socio-political, religious and opportunity contexts where it is opposed to excessive inequality in the same contexts. In other words, equality for Ambedkar is relative.

24.2.2 Equality and Justice among Scheduled Castes

Similarly, justice for Ambedkar means giving a fair deal to a person according to his or her due in society. In his view, certain strategies were important for achieving the goals of equality and justice for the scheduled castes. Some of the strategies that he found vital were : (1) the state intervention, and (2) protest movements of the down trodden castes. To pursue these ends, Ambedkar contributed to the making of the Constitution of free India. He launched his crusade against untouchability, improvement in the status of women and formation of a secular party for the dalits. Ambedkar believed in the equality of men and women as is reflected in the special provisions made in the Indian Constitution for the equal rights of women. For this, he had asked the dalit women in 1942 to organise themselves to improve their own life conditions. He even introduced the Hindu Code Bill in the Parliament in 1951 to safeguard women's rights to marriage, divorce and inheritance.

property. His crusade against Untouchability and support to the countrywide dalit movements led to the adoption of the untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955. He also made several significant contributions in shaping the government's policies and programmes towards welfare, protection and development of the scheduled castes and tribes.

24.3 SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA

The scheduled tribes or the adivasis in India have remained isolated from the rest of the Indian society for centuries together, although anthropological studies tell us that the tribes were people on the margin but not always marginalised. There was not one economic activity which characterises the tribals; rather, they were food gatherers, pastoral communities, shifting cultivators, handicraftsmen, etc. The problem of marginalisation of the tribals arose when the life supporting context, for example, the forests, the grazing grounds, the agricultural land came to be alienated from them. Traditionally, tribals enjoyed and exploited forest and forest produce. But the gradual exercise of authority of the government in the tribal areas and the natural desire of the forest officials to exercise greater control over the forest and use of forest products created serious problems for the tribals. One problem in this situation is the widespread deforestation done for purely commercial purposes. In situations where the government intervened to plan afforestation, it was done in such a way that the forest products served the requirements of the outside industries or the urban areas. Usually in the government sponsored afforestation programmes, the varieties of trees that are planted have little use to the tribals.

24.3.1 Marginalisation of Tribals

The marginalization of the tribals have been aggravated by the money lenders from outside. The indebtedness has usually led to the forced or bonded labour or alienation of the tribal land. To understand the marginalisation of the scheduled tribes in a better way, let us look at their situation in the pre-independence period. The British rulers mostly followed the policy of segregation and tried to keep the tribals isolated from the rest of the Indian society. This isolation of the scheduled tribes led to exploitation of the tribal population by a section of the non-tribals like the money lenders and the contractors. The isolation also helped the British rulers to exploit and enjoy the natural resources of the tribal areas. A number of legal acts were passed by the British government to keep some areas isolated or segregated. Anthropologists like Verrier Elwin endorsed the policy of isolationism and suggested minimum contact between tribals and the non-tribals. This policy of segregation promoted exploitation of the scheduled tribes by the non-tribal population and also the state. The segregation also created a sense of separatism among the tribal groups with the rest of India.

Box 24.01

The tribal people have enjoyed freedom to use forest products or hunt its animals from time immemorial. But after the middle of 19th century people from outside began to move into the forest and the situation began to change. In 1894, the first government's policy was implemented for the administration of the forest. The policy imposed certain restrictions on the tribals for the use of forests and the forest products. In 1952, the policy of 1894 was reviewed and more rigid restrictions were imposed. This affected the tribals and their economy. Again, gradual takeover of forest land for cultivation purposes has created more problems for the tribals. The 1952 policy affected all these tribals that were not primarily dependent on agriculture but lived near the forest. This policy resulted in a tension between many tribal communities and the government officials of the forest.

In the recent past, the tribals have been fast losing the forest and agricultural areas traditionally under their possession. They have also been losing their customary right to use the forests and land for supporting their life. Poverty, indebtedness and also a rapid loss of land is salient. This situation is, however, different for different regions in India. It is less conspicuous in North East India. The problem of land alienation among the tribals is quite acute in Central India. The tribals are gradually becoming tenants or are working as labourers on the land owned by them earlier. The social and political unrest among tribals in certain areas is due to their displacement from land and the resulting state of deprivation.

Sometimes the tribals are held responsible for cutting trees in the forests particularly those who practice shifting cultivation. In this regard, one must not forget that the gradual reduction of forest area is a general feature of India. One cannot really blame the tribals for the deforestation. As a matter of fact, forests were better preserved when they were under the control of the tribals. But ever since the forests were exploited commercially by the non tribals, the tribals have been increasingly deprived of their life resource.

There is yet another problem that is responsible for marginalising the scheduled tribes. In the background of the subsistence economy of the tribals whenever money is needed for emergency purposes, the tribals are forced to depend on the non-tribal money lenders. Under this system, a person who takes a loan from a money lender or land owner is required to serve him as a bonded labour according to the terms and conditions of the loan money taken from the lender. If the tribal is unable to repay the loan, it is transferred to his son or to the several succeeding generations.

24.3.2 Tribals and Forests

The data collected under the people of India project suggests that with the disappearance of forest and wildlife, the tribal people practicing hunting and gathering have declined by nearly 44 per cent, those subsisting on trapping of birds and animals by 47 per cent, those engaged in pastoral activities by 32 per cent, and those in shifting cultivation by 33 per cent. The research material suggest that tribals are moving away from their traditional occupations and taking up occupations like horticulture, animal husbandry, casual wage labour in agriculture and industry. Many of the traditional crafts such as textile and spinning have almost disappeared except in the north east. Even though tribals remain basically a land owing community, the number of the landless and agricultural labourers has gone up. This is also due to the mounting pressure on tribal land. If tribal and non tribal villages are compared in terms of the development of institutional and infrastructural facilities then tribal areas show poor development. Relatively speaking there are fewer primary schools, dispensaries and provisions for drinking water in the tribal areas in comparison to the non-tribal areas.

Activity 1

Should tribals be allowed to use forest products without restrictions? Discuss with other people and students and note down your findings.

24.3.3 Tribal Development in the Post Independent India

After 1947, when the new Constitution was framed, the government's policy of isolation was changed. This was also in conformity with the promises made to the tribals during the freedom movement. During the movement, Mahatma Gandhi and other national leaders were critical of the segregation of the tribes by the British rulers. The objective of the new tribal policy in the independent India was to integrate the tribals in the mainstream of the Indian society. The main thrust of the constitutional provisions for the scheduled tribes is: (a) to protect and promote tribal interests through legal and administrative provisions, and (b) to raise their economic condition so as to upgrade their quality of life.

After India's independence, the government recognised three urgent tasks with regard to the tribal development: (a) reducing the communication gap between the tribals and non-tribal communities so as to promote national integration, (b) protecting the life support system of the tribals so that they can grow collectively and live up to the national challenges, and (c) attending to the immediate needs of the tribal population so that their participation in the process of development is ensured.

To meet these objectives, three strategies were adopted in the Constitution: (i) The Fifth Schedule indicated measures for the administration of tribal areas. (ii) The Sixth Schedule was meant for tribal majority states. It provided for the establishment of Autonomous District Councils which could make laws for the management of land and forest, shifting cultivation, appointments of chiefs and headmen, inheritance of property, marriage and divorce, social customs and anything related to village administration. And (iii) Article 275 of the Constitution provides financial resources to the state for promoting the welfare of

scheduled tribes and development of the administration of the scheduled area. Article 46 provides for the promotion of the educational and economic interests of the tribal people and their further protection against all forms of social injustices and exploitation.

The actual course of economic development gives a mixed picture of tribal marginalization as well as social mobility. A large number of development projects- industrial, mining, irrigation and hydel have adversely affected the scheduled tribes. Most of these mega development projects lead to forcible eviction of the tribals from their land. In the world view of development, the acquisition of the tribal land is supposed to serve the national interest. The displacement of the tribals from their land is considered as a minor cost for which the tribals could always be compensated.

The most notable development among the tribals that helps them in overcoming their marginalization is in the area of education. The level of literacy among the tribals has gone up by 32 per cent during the decade 1971-81. The enrolment of the tribal children in primary schools has also gone up, although there is a high drop out rate as well. Education has also led to the emergence of a small minority which has become a part of the administrative machinery of the government. Through education tribals are exposed to the outside world which helps them to articulate their demands and mobilise favourable public opinion.

24.3.4 A Description of Scheduled Tribes

The following is a description of a marginalised tribal in Jharkhand. It's a remote village predominantly inhabited by the tribals. There is neither a railway line nor a bus route to connect the village to the outside world. After getting off from the bus, one walks for many miles before one can reach this village.

Similarly, the tribals walk as much to reach the market of the civilised world to sell off what they collect from the forests. In order to overcome the marginalization of the tribals, the state government has decided to provide this village with a road. As the government survey team reached the tribal village, it met with a stiff opposition from the people and was driven off. After some time the survey team returned with some police protection. The tribals resisted again. This time they were little more violent than before and the survey team had to withdraw once again. Later on, one curious and sensitive engineer in the survey team decided to know the reasons of the tribal anger and protest against the making of the connecting road. The engineer was successful in talking to the tribal villages. What he found out is rather interesting.

The tribals do not want a road because this will help the merchant and the trader deprive them of the forest products. The presence of the merchant and trader always increase the incidence of violence. How could local people tolerate their exploitation at the hands of an outsider. The villagers said that the road would end up in the raj (rule) of the dikku (outsiders). It is important to note that the relation between the road and the exploitative rule of the outsiders has become so common that anything in the name of development sends danger signals to a tribal.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Write a brief note on social mobility among scheduled castes. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- 2) Describe tribal development in Independent India in about five lines.

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24.4 WOMEN IN INDIA

Women may also be considered as an example of marginalised groups. It is possible to argue that women's status was not always discriminated against. It is often said that both men and women enjoyed comparable freedom and participation in society in the past. Descriptions of vedic times show us how men and women studied together in Gurukuls. Many women specialised in the study of Vedas. Women also exercised choice in the selection of their grooms. In the area of social and religious observances, women and men acted as equal partners. Their movements were not confined to the household and they enjoyed freedom of movement in the public sphere. The married couple were called Dampati, which meant that the husband and the wife were the joint owners of the household. But this story belongs to ancient India and is remotely connected to the present situation where women are socially excluded and do not enjoy gender equality. Today, women are a marginalised group in so far as they do not enjoy equal power and privileges in comparison to men. They are ranked lower in social hierarchy and their access in decision making process in home or outside is relatively restricted. The images of women are presented as weak, timid and emotional creatures. In sharp contrast, men are pictured as strong, courageous and rational beings. These images influence everyday behaviour and justify the non-participation of women in important sectors of society. If privileges and advantages of life are distributed between men and women then our picture of society in the form of a circle will place women on its margin.

24.4.1 Women's Marginal Position

Women's marginal position can be inferred from the high incidents of female foeticide and female infanticide. Demographers show us how in the age specific death rates more females than males die at every age level up to the age of 35 years. Young girls suffer from malnutrition more than boys. This continues until adulthood and passes on to the next generation. Maternal mortality rate in India is depressingly high. It is a customary practice in Indian families that a female child gets less nourishing diet, and if she falls sick then she doesn't receive the required care. Even medical treatment is postponed. During her teenage, her special nutritional needs are constantly ignored. This state of malnutrition pushes her close to complications and mortality during pregnancy and child birth. While boys grow to their full potentials, girls hardly grow as much. They are forced into early marriage and subsequent subordination to the continued patriarchy and discrimination in the husband's home.



Women are a marginalized group. However their status is changing.

Courtesy: Kiranmayi Bushi

24.4.2 Measures for Raising the Status of Women

In the post independent India, there are two important foundations which have brought about significant changes in overcoming the marginalisation of women both within and outside the family. These foundations are as follows:

- i) The constitutional guarantee to formal equality.
- ii) State sponsored social welfare activities.

Let us briefly discuss these measures to find out their relevance to the uplifting of women's life.

- i) The Constitution guarantees gender equality. Article 14 ensures equality before Law and Article 15 prohibits any discrimination. Article 16(1) guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office of the state. There is a provision for free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14, right to an adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally, equal pay for equal work and maternity relief. The adult franchise employers women as voters. The enactment of Hindu Law guarantees women the right to divorce and remarriage. The Inheritance Act provides equal share to women in the property.
- ii) State sponsored social welfare : In 1953 the government of India established a Central Social Welfare Board for promoting women's welfare and development and those of other under privileged groups. The Social Welfare Board encouraged the growth of a large number of women's organisations and promoted emergence of a huge number of social and political women workers.

Activity 2

Can you think of some additional measures to raise the status of women? Discuss with other people and students and put down your suggestions in a notebook.

It is equally important to mention that the Feminist or Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's in the United States and Europe played a decisive role in creating awareness about the marginalised and discriminatory status of women in societies across the world. The contribution of these movements lay in the fact that they raised fundamental questions and demands regarding women's degraded life. The movements also created new visibility of women's experiences and highlighted their specific problems and concerns. The global effort for raising the status of women also received strong support from the United Nations. The year 1975 was declared by the UNO as the International Women's Year and 1975-85 as the United Nation's Decade for women. It was during this time that the women's issue was presented as never before. It was declared that "discrimination against women violated the principle of equality of rights and respect for human dignity....." The discrimination was regarded as an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social economic and cultural life of their countries. It was pointed out that discrimination hampered the growth of the society and the family, and made more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women. It was understood that the full and complete development of a country required the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields.

24.4.3 Policies for Women's Welfare

In the light of the international consciousness, Indian government adopted progressive policies for women's welfare and encouraged women studies. A notable development in the country was the appointment of the Committee on the Status of Women in India by the government in 1971. The Committee focused on the social trends and responses to the principle of equality with a view to suggest measures for their implementation. The Committee submitted its report and titled 'Towards Equality' (1974). The report brought to light the causes of women's subordination and explained their exploitation in terms of caste, class and gender inequality. For the first time in post independent India there was an upsurge of studies on women's status and life circumstances. It was noted by various scholars that certain aspects of women's degradation follow from certain negative consequences of the process of development itself. The disabilities and the inequalities

imposed on women were seen in the total context of society where other sections of the population also suffered in their own way under the oppression of an exploitative system. These studies changed the orientation of the people towards viewing the place of women in the context of development process. Rather than viewing women as targets of welfare policies they have now come to be viewed as critical category for development. This redefinition of women found expression in the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) which carried, for the first time in India's history of planning, a separate chapter on women and development. This shift asserts the principle of equality and pointed out that India's future would be incomplete without women's participation in the process of development. It also recognized as never before that social and economic transformation badly affected women. The Sixth Five Year Plan brought out three strategies as essential for women's development from the margin to the core of society. These are their: (1) economic independence, (2) educational development, and (3) access to health care and family planning.

24.4.4 Women and Ecological Degradation

Many studies on rural societies tell us that a girl child is usually a helping hand to her mother in doing household chores. When the mother's work becomes heavier due to poverty, migration and environmental degradation, the first sufferer of the increased work load of the mother is her daughter. One big casualty of the degradation of basic survival resources is the girl's education. It is possible to say that when the poverty level of the family goes down, the girl child is the first to be withdrawn from the school. We shall outline for you a story of a village called Syuta (not the real name) situated in the Himalayan region. The story of Syuta shows how the erosion of basic survival resources increases the work load of the mother. This leads to the daughter dropping out of the school even when access to the school is easy. Syuta is a Himalayan village situated near the Alaknanda river at a height of about 1600 meters in Chamoli district of Uttar Pradesh.

The burden of work falls mainly on women, who form a majority of the village's labour force. Women start working at a much younger age than men. They begin to play an active role in the household's economic activity even before they are fifteen years of age. Not all men work but all women in the village are cultivators. Women not only work long hours at home but their burden in the village's agricultural economy is also inadequately shared by men. It is the woman who breaks up the hard earth, makes it ready for the plough, sows the seed and then reaps it. She also pounds the paddy to remove its husk, carries manure from cattle shed to distant fields, does all the house work and takes care of animals. She also collects and carries huge load of grass and fuel from the forest. The burden of work and hardship of women's everyday life is reflected sharply in their ill health and often early and untimely death. There is a clear difference in the lifespan of Syuta's men and women. While nine of the men in the village were above 55, only three women had reached this age. Whether the woman is young, old or pregnant, she gets no rest on whatever is the day of the week.

24.5 CHILDREN IN INDIA

To examine the marginalised status of children, let us examine the category of India's working children in order to understand the interplay of poverty, forced employment and the child's age. One difficulty in finding out how many children work as adults is that many children work without wages in the agricultural fields or in houses as domestic servants alongside their parents or in a workplace. Large number of children work in the unorganised sector of our economy such as industries that produce carpets, matches, fire crackers, *bidis*, brassware, diamonds, glass, hosiery, handloom cloth, embroidery, bangles and other traditional handicrafts. Quite often children work for wages but some times work without wages as assistants to their parents. In tea gardens, children assist their mothers in plucking leaves, and when they reach the age of 12 or 13 years, they work independently. Children who take cattle to the field for grazing, fetch drinking water and fuel wood, and prepare meals in the home kitchen, are not classified as working children. And little is known about their actual number. Children are categorised as working only if they work for wage outside their home.

Box 24.02

Children who work for wages are not always counted for the purpose of census. There are several workplaces which hardly ever appear in the information provided by the census. For instances, children working in restaurants, tea stalls or *dhabas* and children working as hawkers, newspaper vendors, rag pickers, shoe polishers or apprentices in building construction, brick making stone quarrying etc. are not reported as employed. Such formal invisibility is also the fate of street children especially those who drift into beggary and prostitution.

Children doing adult jobs are largely illiterate. Most have never been to school and those who attend school drop out before completing class four. Since education is not compulsory and is also not recognised as a right, children begin work at very young ages. Few children working outside of agricultural work can be said to be apprentices in learning skills. In most urban settings, children work for wage. And the image of the child as an apprentice to a master craftsmen has no relation to reality. The skills acquired by the children who are forced to do adult jobs are rarely those skills that could not be acquired in their adult days.

It is usually said that working children contribute to the income of the family. However, it remains unclear as to what problems the family would have faced without the financial contribution of their children.

24.5.1 Illustrations of Child Labour

- i) Sivakasi, near Madurai, is perhaps the most publicized centre of child labour in India and is perhaps the largest single concentration of child labour in the world. Children are employed in the match, fire works, and printing industries. Children are brought to Sivakasi by bus from neighboring villages located within a radius of about twenty miles. They are loaded into buses at six or seven, and they return home between six and nine in the evening. As many as 150 to 200 children are packed in a vehicle. The children work for about twelve hours, but they are away from home for over fifteen hours. Forty five thousand children below fifteen years of age work in Sivasaki or in nearby workshops or cottages within their own village. Three-quarters of the child workers are girls. Each village has an agent who enrolls the children and ensures that they are awake when the transport arrives. The agents receive a monthly salary of 150 rupees. They may pay parents an advance of up to 200 rupees for each child labourer enrolled. The advance is then deducted from the child's salary.
- ii) Many of the children working in the potteries of Khurja in Uttar Pradesh are the children of local workers. Most are illiterate, though some have studied up to the fourth standard. The children earn up to 150 rupees a month for an eight-hour a day. Unskilled workers are paid 200 rupees a month, and skilled workers 400 rupees.

24.6 AGED

Old people also provide an illustration of a marginalised group. Old people belong to various classes and castes and reside both in rural and urban settings. Therefore, it is not proper to homogenise their problem of marginality. Due to the increase in population and modernization of society and relationships, the status of the aged has come under severe stress. In the traditional family, the elderly members were repository of age old and accumulated wisdom. They were consulted in all important matters. The roles played by aged members in the traditional society have now been transferred to various institutions outside the family. This has robbed the old people of their utility and function and rendered them useless. In situations where many old people need help and protection, they are not able to get it from their earning family members.

In a country like India where majority of the population lives below the poverty line, a large number of persons in old age are left with very meagre income. There are number of old women who have only been house-wives and have never been paid workers. There are old men who are agricultural workers or employed in low paid jobs. Also, there are old persons who have worked in the organised sector but are now retired. They now have to live on reduced income. Some studies have shown that within about five years after retirement, a

large number of old people exhausted their savings and became dependent on their children or relatives. The old people who are pensioners suffer constant crises as their incomes are gradually reduced by inflation. In the above description we have only focussed on those aged people who have a family. But imagine the condition of those aged who are destitute and do not enjoy a stable relation with any family for family members.

Old people are an example of a marginal group due to the fact that old age brings a decline in the health and vigour of the body. Studies have shown that there are some ailments which are common among elderly people. As old age advances, the aged experience difficulties in carrying out day to day activities.

The problem of the aged is not difficult to overcome. It is possible to draw out a plan of action which will enable the family to reorient itself towards its elderly members. The plan can also involve the aged in activities which the earning members of the society can hardly attend due to their busy engagements. The programme should also help the aged to be fully concerned about their health, take preventive care and adapt their lifestyle to their health status. There is also a need to overcome negative images associated with old age. The aged should not believe that old age is equal to dependency on others. Or that old age always brings ill health and weak mental and physical capabilities.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What measures are being taken to raise the status of women in India. Write your answer in about five lines.

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- 2) Describe what is meant by Child Labour: Give your answer with an example in about five lines.

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24.6.1 Some Illustrations of the Aged

- i) An elderly couple, aged 77 and 73, are settled and working in an old age home. The husband has retired from his job and owns a flat. When their only son was killed in an accident, they decided to spend the rest of their lives helping others. They sold their flat and bought a two-room apartment on the premises of an old age home. Their meals are provided by the old age home for which they pay Rs. 450 each. Apart from handling various outside chores of the old age home including marketing, the husband helps distribute hot water to the inmates for their bath. The wife looks after the kitchen, makes suggestions for improving the food, and sees that staff and inmates' needs are taken care of. In this way, the couple keep themselves busy and care for the residents of the home as if they were their own family. They have overcome their sorrow of losing their only son in the satisfaction of helping others.
- ii) An unmarried lady doctor, aged 73, was a gold medallist. Since she had lost her parents, she had looked after her two younger brothers and a sister. She had also saved for her old age. She used to get a monthly salary of Rs. 2,000. She did not marry because somebody had to take care of her brothers' and sister's education. She helped them and worked for them. But when they grew up, they no longer needed her. When she retired at 58, they drove her out of the house. She tried to live on her own for seven years, but at the age of 65 she developed a blood pressure problem. She started becoming

forgetful and lost confidence. So with her savings, she joined an old-age home. But she is very diffident now. At the age of 73, she has totally forgotten her medical degree and medical skills. Here is an example of a highly skilled educated person who totally neglected her personal life, namely marriage or love. Now, she has nobody to love nor has she any moral support except the old age home. How could she not foresee this when young? At present, she has the gold medal and savings but her life is empty and lonely.

24.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen how various marginalised groups are gradually coping with their situation with the help of government and self-help groups. These include the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. They also include women, children and the aged. It is expected that over time the marginalisation will be reduced considerably and this will be good for society as a whole.

24.8 KEY WORDS

Ecological	:	Pertaining the cycle of natural activity in the environment, in which nature retains a balance. Human beings too are a part of the natural habitat and responsible for what happens to it.
Equality	:	To guarantee unbiased treatment to all people irrespective of gender and ethnicity.
Justice	:	This comprises the law of the state where the constitution itself guarantees fair play and absence of exploitation to all.
Status	:	Denotes a degree of independence and respect for a person or a group of person. A high status or standing and respect in society is sought for by most individual and groups.

24.9 FURTHER READINGS

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24.10 SPECIMEN ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) There has definitely been social mobility among the scheduled castes. In all important areas including those of literacy rates and employment in government offices there has been a distinct rise. Poverty among them has also declined. The scheduled castes have also become more assertive of their rights. There has thus been improvement in their marginality and social mobility and these, it may be mentioned has also been due to efforts made by Phule and Ambedkar.
- 2) The government has been seized with tribal development since Independence. The government wanted to bring them in communication with the mainstream; provide them some kind of freedom to preserve their culture and to promote their welfare. However a large number of problems of economic development have actually been counter productive. These projects include irrigation, mining, hydel and industrial. However education has helped a lot in reducing marginalisation.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The Constitution of India guarantees gender equality. Further the state sponsored social Welfare Board has formed in 1953 for promoting women's welfare. Further women's movements around the globe had their echo in India too. The United Nations Decade for Women 1975-85 also made highlighted and tackled many issues pertaining to status of women.
- 2) Child labour in when children are made to jobs without their being aware of the risks involved, and when they should be studying in school. Child labour is exploited by poor wages and working conditions which are often dangerous to health. A large member of children work as domestic help, match and work for very long taxing hours and poor wages. An example in Sivakasi match works near Madurai, where conditions are appalling and work hours interminable.



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