
UNIT 24 MARGINALISED GROUPS AND THEIR CHANGING STATUS

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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

marginal groups to the various aspects of society is much less in comparison to that of the groups located at the core of the society.

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 break up the hard earth, make it ready for the plough, sow 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

- Desai N. and Krishnaraj, M. (eds.) 1987. *Women And Society In India*. New Delhi.: Ajanta.
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- Kohli, A.S. 1996. *Social Situation Of The Aged In India*. Delhi: Anmol Publications.
- Kulshrestha, J.C. 1978. *Child Labour In India*. Delhi: Asia Publishing House.
- Ram. 1995. *Beyond Ambedkar: Essays On Dalits In India*. Chapters 7,8,9 and 10. New Delhi: Har Anand Publications.

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.