



**MA (Sociology)
FIRST SEMESTER
MASOC 404**



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RURAL SOCIOLOGY

RURAL SOCIOLOGY

PART -1

MA [Sociology]

First Semester

MASOC-404



RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY

Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112

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About the University

Rajiv Gandhi University (formerly Arunachal University) is a premier institution for higher education in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and has completed twenty-five years of its existence. Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone of the university on 4th February, 1984 at Rono Hills, where the present campus is located.

Ever since its inception, the university has been trying to achieve excellence and fulfill the objectives as envisaged in the University Act. The university received academic recognition under Section 2(f) from the University Grants Commission on 28th March, 1985 and started functioning from 1st April, 1985. It got financial recognition under section 12-B of the UGC on 25th March, 1994. Since then Rajiv Gandhi University, (then Arunachal University) has carved a niche for itself in the educational scenario of the country following its selection as a University with potential for excellence by a high-level expert committee of the University Grants Commission from among universities in India.

The University was converted into a Central University with effect from 9th April, 2007 as per notification of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The University is located atop Rono Hills on a picturesque tableland of 302 acres overlooking the river Dikrong. It is 6.5 km from the National Highway 52-A and 25 km from Itanagar, the State capital. The campus is linked with the National Highway by the Dikrong bridge.

The teaching and research programmes of the University are designed with a view to play a positive role in the socio-economic and cultural development of the State. The University offers Undergraduate, Post-graduate, M.Phil and Ph.D. programmes. The Department of Education also offers the B.Ed. programme.

There are fifteen colleges affiliated to the University. The University has been extending educational facilities to students from the neighbouring states, particularly Assam. The strength of students in different departments of the University and in affiliated colleges has been steadily increasing.

The faculty members have been actively engaged in research activities with financial support from UGC and other funding agencies. Since inception, a number of proposals on research projects have been sanctioned by various funding agencies to the University. Various departments have organized numerous seminars, workshops and conferences. Many faculty members have participated in national and international conferences and seminars held within the country and abroad. Eminent scholars and distinguished personalities have visited the University and delivered lectures on various disciplines.

The academic year 2000-2001 was a year of consolidation for the University. The switch over from the annual to the semester system took off smoothly and the performance of the students registered a marked improvement. Various syllabi designed by Boards of Post-graduate Studies (BPGS) have been implemented. VSAT facility installed by the ERNET India, New Delhi under the UGC-Infonet program, provides Internet access.

In spite of infrastructural constraints, the University has been maintaining its academic excellence. The University has strictly adhered to the academic calendar, conducted the examinations and declared the results on time. The students from the University have found placements not only in State and Central Government Services, but also in various institutions, industries and organizations. Many students have emerged successful in the National Eligibility Test (NET).

Since inception, the University has made significant progress in teaching, research, innovations in curriculum development and developing infrastructure.

SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

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Syllabi

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INTRODUCTION

Rural Sociology is a subject of sociology. It comprises two terms—rural and sociology, which implies that it is the study of sociology of life in the rural environment. Rural society is basically an agrarian society. Rural Sociology is a mirror of rural social life. According to A. R. Desai, '...the basic task of rural sociology...is to discover the basic laws of development of rural society.' Rural Sociology provides knowledge of such laws and makes possible the planning of a strategic approach for desired changes.

India is a country with rural or village area covering over 70 per cent of the total area. Villages are predominant in our country as they affect the country's economic and social conditions. Rural society is characterized by a homogeneity in all the fields like social, cultural and economic, where people lead almost the same kind of life with simple dressing and food habits, culture and traditions.

Each country has its own social and political traditions, which are typical to it. Similarly, India too has its own unique system of government. The organization of political system took place over a period of time to reach its present shape and structure. The rural power structure came into being with the discovery of village panchayats. Rural development implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. In order to provide the rural people with better prospects for economic development, increased participation of people in the rural development programmes, decentralization of planning, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit are needed. The Department of Rural Development is implementing a number of programmes in rural areas through the state governments for poverty reduction, employment generation, rural infrastructure development, provision of basic minimum services and so on. This book will discuss all the above discussed areas like rural society, rural social institutions, rural power structure and rural development.

This book, *Rural Sociology*, is written in a self-instructional format and is divided into five units. Each unit begins with an *Introduction* to the topic followed by an outline of the *Unit Objectives*. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with *Check Your Progress* questions to test the reader's understanding of the topic. A list of *Questions and Exercises* is also provided at the end of each unit, and includes *Short-Answer Questions* as well as *Long-Answer Questions*. The *Summary* and *Key Terms* section are useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

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UNIT 1 RURAL SOCIOLOGY: INTRODUCTION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Etymologically, the word 'rural' means all the aspects related to the village. The word 'sociology' has Latin and Greek origins. The Latin word *socius* means companion and *logy* means the 'study of'. After combining the two words together we get the definition of sociology, which means the 'systematic study of society'. These definitions together prove that Rural Sociology deals with each and every concept of village society. As has been rightly observed by A. R. Desai, '... the prime objective of rural sociology should be to make a scientific, systematic and comprehensive study of the rural social organization, of its structure of development and on the basis of such study to discover the laws of its development.'

From the above words it is clear that Rural Sociology is the mirror of rural life which covers the various aspects of rural life ranging from culture, religion, economic to political aspect of villages. Also, when one studies all these aspects one becomes aware of the facts and principles which govern the planning of rural reconstruction. *Rural Sociology* is therefore the scientific study of rural society. It involves a systematic study of rural society, its institutions, activities, interactions and social change.

In this unit, you will get acquainted with the meaning, scope, nature and significance of Rural Sociology and the emergence of Rural Sociology as an academic discipline.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss in detail the meaning of the term 'rural sociology'
- Understand the emergence of Rural Sociology as an academic discipline
- Evaluate the nature of Rural Sociology

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- Assess the similarities between Rural Sociology and other fields of study
- Explain the scope and significance of Rural Sociology
- Discuss the different forms of rural social institutions

1.2 MEANING OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY

India is a country with rural or village area covering over 70 per cent of the total area. Villages are predominant in our country as they affect the country's economic and social conditions. The glimpses into history through the eyes of literati like Munshi Premchand, Maithili Sharan Gupt, and others show beautiful images of rural India. The characters of their classics are life-size and form indelible impressions on the minds of the readers. Rural India is the backbone of India.

Mahatma Gandhi too was a great naturalist. He lived close to nature and strongly advocated rural life. He was in favour of using the most natural fabric, *khadi*, and that too hand-spun so that we become self-reliant. He strongly and very aptly stated, 'Nature has enough for man's need but not his greed'. His philosophy and theory of closeness to nature brings us closer or nearer to rural India.

Development starts from the smallest or lowest level in villages which develop to form towns, which gradually transforms into cities, and then into metropolitans. The initial stage is at the village or rural level. We first need to take heed of the situation and then find the best possible way to utilize the resources in the villages and then make its best utilization.

The youth is considered to be the biggest human resource of any country. They say that the population of Indian youth is the highest in the world. It means that India has the biggest human resource reserve today. But it is quite paradoxical that despite such large resources, our position in the global market is not a very favourable or profitable one. The youth power is not harnessed well and their talent is not tapped in the best way so as to make them a profitable asset to the country. On the other hand, the youth is the cause of major problems like unemployment, beggary, theft, crime and so on. Greater attention needs to be paid towards this glaring issue of the youth. More policies or programmes need to be urgently developed specially for these youngsters who have immense potential and the power to shape India's future. Youth of India today needs freedom from unemployment, crime, unhappiness, frustration, and all other negative feelings.

Rural and Sociology: Meaning

Rural means anything that is not urban. 'Rural' according to the Oxford Dictionary means connected with or like the country-side.

Sociology according to the Oxford Dictionary means the scientific study of the nature and development of society and social behaviour.

Society means people in general or living together in communities.

Putting all these definitions together we understand that in simple words, **Rural Sociology** means the systematic and scientific study of the people living in a country or the village areas. It includes the study of the traditions, customs, and cultures of the villages as well as the social interactions of people among themselves, the economic conditions of rural folk, their ways of living, and other patterns of life.

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Thus, the study focuses on the social conditions of people in rural areas, their living, and every other aspect of their lives.

1.2.1 Emergence of Rural Sociology as an Academic Discipline

Rural Sociology is a science that originated in the United States of America. It is an authentic American creation. It was in the United States that the basic infrastructure of Rural Sociology was developed and initiated.

It was in 1862 that President Lincoln signed the Morrill Land Grant Act so as to form the institutional infrastructure to establish Rural Sociology. According to the Act, federal land in each state had to be set aside so that public colleges could be built for the study of 'agriculture and the mechanical arts'. This step was taken so that education could not only remain limited to the elite and the rich, but also reach the commoners and ordinary people. This step was further strengthened by the Hatch Act of 1887, according to which Agriculture Experiment Stations were created in each state which provided federal funding pipelines. These programmes provide scholarships and funding to students for higher studies especially in rural areas.

In 1914, the Smith Lever Act was passed according to which academic research was brought to public use. The common public also got direct access to research institutions, which hitherto was limited to only the elite or the moneyed people. In 1890, the second Morrill Act created seventeen black land-grant colleges, and in 1994, twenty-nine Native American tribal colleges were given the land-grant status.

The situation at that time was that out of the total population in the United States, about one-third lived in farms. The country farmers played an important role in politics and social movements. Though farm families started moving out from their farms and villages to cities, it was important for the government to keep the farmers on their farms.

It was in 1908 that President Theodore Roosevelt created the Country Life Commission (CLC). The purpose of this Commission was to find out the problems faced by farm families and document them by launching investigations nationwide. Surveys were conducted and information was compiled. Based upon all this information, a report was prepared which formed the basis of the subsequent National Policy. The purpose of this Commission was to find ways to control or stop farmers from migrating.

The Commission focused on various relevant issues like individual's human capital, cultural values, weaknesses of rural schools, and churches. The main focus of the Commission was to improve the deficits or the drawbacks that the rural people faced. This led to a widespread awareness among people which in turn enhanced their well-being. The field was developed very conscientiously and a lot of effort was devoted on the improvement of the situation of rural people, so that they were provided with all the facilities in the villages itself, thereby encouraging them to stay on in the villages and not migrate.

It was in 1925, with the passage of the Parnell Act, that Rural Sociology was formally recognized as a separate field of study. After this, federal funds were provided to carry out sociological research, teaching, and outreach. It was during this time that America faced agricultural depression (1920). It was in response to this that the Parnell Act was passed to devise ways and means to overcome the problematic situations. During that time, Rural Sociology became part of agriculture colleges. Though Rural Sociology was more of an interdisciplinary subject, it became part of the mainstream studies (mostly related to biology).

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In 1915, Cornell University created separate departments of Rural Sociology. In other universities, Rural Sociology was part of other disciplines and subjects. Later, the Rural Sociology faculty was appointed in agriculture colleges, as part of multi-disciplinary departments.

The report of the Commission was published in 1911. This report was an outline of Rural Sociology as a new field of study. This study not only presented the rural problems, but also gave suggestions for remedial measures towards improvement of rural problems.

Studies of Rural Community in India

The earliest works on Rural Sociology is considered to belong to Robert Redfield. Research studies were carried out on large scale in the US, which is basically the place of origin of Rural Sociology.

In India, Rural Sociology is a rather new subject. There was a great thrust in this field in India post-Independence. The government took keen interest in the field and a lot of work on rural communities was conducted.

The Point Four Programme and America's Ford Foundation encouraged lot of research on the subject. The Ford Foundation provided financial assistance to Professor D. N. Majumdar, who directed the study of Mohana village in Lucknow. Later, some more assistance came from the Planning Commission as well. The result of this research project was published in the form of a book titled *Caste and Communication in an Indian Village* in 1958. On similar lines, the Chairman of the programme evaluation organization of the then Planning Commission, Dr D. G. Karve, invited Oscar Lewis to study Rampura, a village close to Delhi. The results of this research task were published in the form of a book titled, *Village Life in Northern India* (1958). This book was published by Illinois University.

Dr A. R. Desai wrote *Introduction to Rural Sociology in India*, which was published in 1935. This book provided a lot of information about the rural community. He emphasized the need for conducting research in this field. Dr Desai published another book, *Rural Sociology in India*, when the previous one was no longer available. In this book, he put together all the latest studies related to Rural Sociology.

Another eminent scholar who contributed immensely to the field was Dr S. C. Dubey. He conducted a study of Shamirpet village near Hyderabad, which was titled, *Indian Villages* and was published in 1955. In the year 1956, Dr Dubey's research paper was published in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, 'Cultural Factor in Rural Community Development'. In 1958, another book by Dr Dubey was published, which was titled *India's Changing Villages*.

Professor M. N. Srinivas has also contributed much to the field of Rural Sociology. In 1961, he edited a book, *India's Villages*, which was a collection of studies of various villages in different states of India. Another epoch making book by him was published in 1962 under the title *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*.

Other important research papers which were published during that time were not plentiful. However, the following compilation gives us a fair knowledge of the work done in this field:

1948: 'The Division of Labour in an Indian Village', *A Reader in General Anthropology* by M. E. Opler

1950: *Village Life in North India* by M. E. Opler.

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1950: *Occupational Structure of a Malwa Village* by K. S. Mathur.

1951: *Caste Survey in a Model Village with Stereotyped Discriminations* Sridhar Misra.

1951: *An Indian Outcast* by Hazari.

1952: *Village Administration in India* by N. G. D. Joarder.

1952: 'Village Structure in North Kerala' by E. J. Miller, in *Economic Weekly*.

1952: *The Misal: A Structural Village Group of India and Pakistan* by M. Smith, in *American Anthropologist*.

1953: *Change in the Leadership of a Mysore Village* by A. R. Beals.

1954: *Some Aspects of Urban Migration from a village in North Central India* by Edwin Games.

1955: *Interplay Among factors of change in a Mysore Village* by Village India .

1955: *Leadership and Groups in a South Indian Village* by A. S. Dhillon, Govt. of India.

1955: *Population and Economic Structure of an Indian Rural Community* by Edwin Games in *Eastern Anthropologist*.

1955: *The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village* by E. K. Gough.

1955: *Intercaste Relations in Cohana Kallah: A Village Near Lucknow* by Majumdar, et al in *Eastern Anthropologist*.

1955: *Western Medicine in a Village in North India: Health, Culture and Community* by Mckim Marriott.

1955: *Functional Relations of Lohars in North India Village* by N. S. Reddy.

1955: *The Social System of a Mysore Village* by M. N. Srinivas in *Village India*.

1955: *Some Aspects of Social Organization in a Mohova Village* by K. S. Mathur in *Journal of Research, Agra University*.

1955: *Economic Study of a Malabar Village* by T. Sher in *Economic Weekly*.

1956: *Development Projects in an Indian Village* by A. C. Mayor.

1956: *The Unity of an Indian Village* by R. D. Singh in *Journal of Asian Studies*.

1.3 NATURE OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY

Rural Sociology is a branch of sociology dealing with all the different aspects of village life. Since sociology falls under the category of social sciences, rural sociology is also taken as a subject under social studies. Basically, it deals with the systematic investigation about society and its nature and how man is placed in it. Subjects like sociology, civics, political science, anthropology, etc., are by and large included in it.

The above mentioned different subjects deal in a systematic manner employing different techniques and scientific methods to study different aspects of society. Though different subjects covers different topics to be studied, yet there is a certain amount of overlapping among these subjects. The common point or thread which runs through all

Check Your Progress

1. Define rural sociology.
2. Where did rural sociology as a science originate?
3. State the reason for the creation of the Country Life Commission (CLC).

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the social science subjects is its essence. In order to understand this there is a need to understand the methodology employed in both scientific and social methods.

Rural Sociology categorically deals with problems and complications associated with village life and for this a well-organized system is needed. This takes us to the crux or root of the problems. This branch of Rural Sociology is quite a new field of social sciences and has evolved from other disciplines. Therefore, the subject matter which we study under Rural Sociology comes from other subjects related to sociology, and so there is an association among the methods and techniques of social sciences. Rural Sociology draws its content from general sociology, urban sociology, social anthropology, history, political science, and also economics. Therefore, the techniques followed in Rural Sociology are mostly borrowed from other disciplines.

Though sociology is a social science, it borrows all its basics from pure sciences. C.W. Right Mills, Peter Berger, and others feel that sociology is only an 'imagination', an art. Initially, it was taken as a branch of philosophy and also a part of positivistic science. But after some time it was decided that due to its subject matter or content, it could not be taken as a subject of natural science. Pierre Bourdieu strongly points out that, 'Sociology seems to me to have all the properties that define it as a science. All sociologists worthy of the name agree on a common heritage of concepts, methods and verification procedures.'

After analysing the various aspects of sociology, one concludes that the subject matter is very systematic and scientific in nature. It is a diversified subject focusing on various different areas of study, ranging from demography, caste, villages to economics. However, the variety of subjects is studied in a scientific way. The different points to support this aspect can be understood by analysing all the points in detail. These aspects are:

1. Empiricism

Empiricism refers to the method of conducting experiments so as to reach a particular conclusion. This method is in line with the studies in subjects like physics, chemistry, and biology which are science subjects. In sociology also, the methods of experimentation, observation, and verification based on collected facts and data are used. The subjects covered in sociology show that the data collected are verified and rechecked and is based on logical findings and observation.

2. Accumulated Facts

Just like other sciences, the findings in sociology are based on data collected from different areas and periods. Rural Sociology, especially is a field which is based on accumulated facts. These facts are based on the data which are collected from different villages in remote and unreachable areas along with easily accessible areas.

Different research methods are employed to collect primary data as well as secondary data. These genuine data enable the researcher to reach logical and correct findings and conclusions.

3. Objectivity

Objective approach means the ability to record things or observations as they actually are. This involves the clear study of facts and is unbiased. Any personal desire, attitude or attribute should not affect the study. Science which is objective deals with the honest collection and interpretation of data. The data which is collected by the sociologist has to

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be within the objective approach, but it is quite possible that subjectivity enters the field and is permissible to that extent. This subject involves detailed investigation and study. But like other sciences, sociology has an objective approach. The study or problem starts with a specific purpose and this is followed objectively.

4. Precision and Accuracy

The important characteristic of scientific study is the precision and accuracy of values with minimum deviation. The measurements have to be based on meticulous studies and recordings. This is the meaning of precision and accuracy. Similar properties of precision and accuracy are found in the field of sociology as well. When data are collected in the villages and remote areas, it is very carefully analysed. The methods of study are meticulous and extremely precise and scientific in nature. Accuracy in the observations is an essential part of Rural Sociology. This is one of the reasons why sociology is scientific in its approach.

1.3.1 Methodology

Science is a field which follows a well-authenticated methodology. It follows a particular procedure of obtaining results from the collected material or data under study. The research methods involve validity and reliability. Sociology involves very accurate methods and procedures to reach final results. Each step can be verified and cross-checked by any person in the world.

Science is a subject which is based on theoretical as well as implied considerations. Laboratory as well as field experiments play an essential role in the study of various sciences. All new theories are based on lot many years of rigorous theoretical as well as practical work. To support the truth of the above statement, C. Wright Mills claims that 'theory without data is empty but data without theory are blind.'

Social sciences too, especially Rural Sociology, is the subject which bases all its findings on the data collected from the rural areas. The survey method employed to get raw data regarding caste, family and other rural aspects is very accurate and is based on scientific procedures and methods.

1.3.2 Similarity between Rural Sociology and Other Fields of Study

Since sociology borrows a lot from all subjects which are essentially of scientific nature to the humanities, we get a taste of both in this subject. Rural Sociology shares common points with a wide variety of subjects like general sociology, economics, and archaeology. Some similarities are explained in the following section:

• Rural Sociology and General Sociology

Rural Sociology is a branch of sociology which specifically deals with the village or rural life. The problems are specific only to this branch. Both the rural and urban societies are influenced by the similar factors which may be geographical or organizational, financial or whatever nature. Still there are some unique or specific aspects of both the rural and urban societies and so both cannot be measured with the same yardstick. Though initially both were conceived as two sides of a coin but gradually one could understand the specific limitations. Due to this, Rural Sociology was recognized as an independent discipline. Let us take an example of the growing menace of vehicles and limited parking lots. This problem is common only in urban areas and does not affect the rural people. Each problem needs to be sorted out differently.

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Though general sociology deals with both urban and rural sociology, the latter is specific only to the rural or village life while general sociology also includes rural sociology as one of its branches of study.

• Rural Sociology and Urban Sociology

The rural and urban areas are distantly identified by the density of population in both the areas and also by major professions followed. The rural area is less dense and the profession is mainly agriculture. On the other hand, urban areas have more dense population and work is more industry based. However, both groups complement each other as one acts as a reference to the other. The urban areas are studied with reference to the rural and vice versa.

The lifestyle of both these areas can be studied by relating one to the other. The subject matter of urban and Rural Sociology is inter-linked and inter-dependent. Both these are in continuance or in consistency with each other. This means that life in the village and cities can be fully analysed and understood by their comparison. The urban areas can be related well and compared and contrasted with each other. Both the aspects are studied in relation to each other, contributing economically and socially to each other.

• Rural Sociology and Social Anthropology

Anthropology deals with the study of the human race, especially its origin, development, customs and beliefs. When we speak of social anthropology, we analyse all the aspects of the human race, i.e., the preventive societies and the behaviour of human beings. Their arrangement forms the essential aspects of social anthropology. The subject matter of sociology and anthropology is essentially overlapping and common. Both subjects study the same aspects of society and man, the interaction between man and his surrounding society. Though both these involve the same part of society, yet there is hairline difference between the two. Rural Sociology would involve study of the village life, people and their innovations in relation to man's behaviour in primitive society.

• Rural Sociology and Economics

Economics is the field of study that deals with money. All activities or aspects of work in society, related to generation of money, in cash or kind, is dealt with in economics. The needs and production in a society are also related to economics. Economics also studies the trends of demand and supply of commodities and explains how a balance between these two can be struck and maintained. The social and political factors greatly influence this balance. These factors need to be studied by the economist. It is observed that rural society also plays a definite role in logical economics.

Rural areas provide economy from agricultural produce and other small cottage industries which in a country like India contributes towards the country's economy. This has led to the development of a new field called rural economics. Rural economics deals with all the aspects of rural economy like how agriculturists can increase their production with the help of better agro-techniques and high quality seeds, how they can generate more employment by self-sustaining business and their limitations, all these new innovative ideas and techniques can be put into action by understanding the psychological attitudes of the village people. Therefore, economics is closely related to Rural Sociology. It studies the basics of rural society, its people, their lives and all aspects related to them. Similarly, a rise in economic activities in rural areas also leave a great impact on its

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people's actions. For example, when the village becomes aware of different schemes, loan system and subsidies, it helps them to make best use of these facilities and draw benefits from them.

All peasants, labourers working in the fields of others, all other aspects which are characteristic of the villages, are covered in rural economics and are an inevitable part of Rural Sociology. Both the subjects are so deeply inter-twined that it is not possible to study one without referring to the other. The subjects are related to each other as two sides of the same coin, both being indispensable.

• Rural Sociology and Archaeology

Archaeology deals with both the ancient civilizations and the prehistoric civilizations. It is the science of carrying out excavations to find out more about ancient civilizations like how people lived, what kind of organization of villages they led and so on.

Having studied the above mentioned portion we can now conclude that Rural Sociology is a mixture of science and the arts subjects. Its components are of dual nature.

1.4 SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RURAL SOCIOLOGY

The subject matter or the scope of rural sociology is not narrow, as revealed by the definitions, especially in those countries where the majority of the people reside in rural areas. The subject matter of rural sociology has been changing from time to time. They can be classified as under.

When we talk about rural sociology, we get to know that it is deeply interested in understanding the rural people and the social organization of the villages. Rural sociology studies various aspects of the society like social stratification, caste system, social institutions and many more. Rural sociologists are greatly involved in the betterment of the rural life and the sociologists are responsible of collecting data concerning the rural life and analyse them keeping in mind the development of the rural areas.

Further, the goal of the rural sociologist is to come in contact with the rural people and analyse their behaviour. They have to also assess the factors that determine the behaviour of the rural people.

Recently, Rural Sociology has taken up as independent study of the social sciences which has its own features and characteristics. They also possess their own characteristic ideology and viewpoints. According to Nelson, the subject matter of Rural Sociology is the assessment and account of the advancement of the numerous societies that exist under the purview of rural environment. Moreover, Bertrand too has considered Rural Sociology as the study of human relationships in the rural environment. Hence, this viewpoint stresses the importance of all social relationships that exist in a rural society, i.e. in the village.

There exists two schools of thought regarding the scope of Rural Sociology. The first school propounds that Rural Sociology offers only scientific knowledge of the villages and also provides a complex image of the villages. The second school of thought concerns itself with the study of rural-urban continuum, rural-urban contrast and also acts as a tool for bringing about rural reconstruction.

Check Your Progress

4. Why is it said that the techniques followed in Rural Sociology are mostly borrowed from other disciplines?
5. What is the objective approach?
6. State the difference between general sociology and rural sociology.
7. What does rural economy deal with?

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Despite the differences between the two schools of thought, there is one point of similarity between the two schools that is they both are of the view that Rural Sociology deals with the various aspects of rural life in a scientific and systematic manner. The scope of Rural Sociology can be summed up as follows.

1.4.1 Rural Social Organization

Social organization in rural and urban areas is the arrangement of people from different strata or levels. When we study the sociology of villages, we come across different dimensions of the rural society. We find that great importance and value is given to caste and class in rural India. In urban areas of course this impact is not so profound. Since the roots of rural India are found in agriculture, we find that agriculture forms the axis of all activities in villages.

Stratification or classification in rural India is based on two approaches. These are:

- Marxist approach
- Non-Marxist or Weberian approach

Marxists analyse society with reference to production. It is the historical approach which keeps in mind the factors related to production.

Weberian approach keeps in mind the concepts of wealth, power and prestige. In simple terms, wealth means the occupational category. It would include assets like real estate or any other ability to produce income or money. Power means the ability to dominate the course of events in life. Prestige means the style of living and the honour one has in life. All these variables are the factors which determine a person's position in society.

Whatever the criterion of stratification, it shows the inequality of society. This inequality is depicted in the form of class, status and power of people in all societies. Each society follows a pattern of inequality.

Forms of Social Stratification

- **Slavery:** Slavery refers to the owning of workers by the landlords. The slaves are supposed to do all the work for the owner/master just like a bonded labourer which is no longer practiced.
- **Caste:** Caste system is prevalent in India. Indian system has a wide and complex system of castes which is diverse in its belief, systems and culture. Each caste practices a different system of cultural activities and values.
- **Estate:** Estates are referred to as the feudal clusters having powers in their respective areas. These were found mostly in Europe, the United States and Asia. On similar lines, in India we found the Zamindari and the Jagirdari systems. In India, these systems of covers are extinct, however, the estate holders earlier had a lot of power and till today are the most powerful people.
- **Class:** Classes are the categories which have no firm division in societies. These are fluid in nature having no specific boundaries. Individuals are assigned a class on the basis of their achievements, social mobility, economic status, and contribution to society. In other words, a class is a large scale grouping of people who share common economic resources. The lifestyle is influential and it has a strong effect on the lifestyle of others. In India, the main classes that exist are:

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- o Upper class
- o Middle class
- o Working class or the lower class

According to Yogendra Singh, a noted Indian sociologist, caste is a major form of stratification. He writes, 'Sociologists who look across the cultural view of caste, have right from the beginning, associated it with an autonomous principle of stratification. The basis of which are institutionalized inequality, closure of social system in respect of social mobility, an elementary level of division of labour legitimized on ritual bases of reciprocity, and emphasis on quality (ritual purity or racial purity) rather than performance. In other words, caste is associated with an anonymous form of cultural system or worldview.'

Caste as the Major Form of Stratification

It is an inequality that exists in all the different communities. Caste structure is a phenomenon which is not a permanent feature, it keeps changing. According to Yogendra Singh, caste is not only a cultural phenomenon but also a structural one. When caste is considered as a structural phenomenon, we analyse it as a system of social organization, an institutionalized system of interaction among groups of people. This would include the concepts of marriage, occupation, division of labour, cultural norms and values and the performance of rituals based on the lines of purity and pollution.

The structural properties of caste include endogamy, hierarchy, caste and occupation, which have a direct influence on social stratification. The cultural aspect of stratification includes the value system.

Functions of Caste in Rural Society

The Indian society is dominated by the caste in different situations. The functions it performs are as follows:

- **Phases of life:** In all phases of life, from birth to death, one needs people of specific caste to perform particular functions. Different phases of life such as birth, tonsure, marriage, engagement and even death requires a Brahmin to perform various religious ceremonies. At every stage of life it is essential to have a Brahmin perform these rituals. In cities, the role of the Brahmin is somewhat ignored but it is definitely not in rural areas.
- **Exogamy and endogamy:** Marriage within one's *gotra* is called endogamy. This is strictly prohibited. Marriages have to take place outside one's own *gotra*. Exogamy which means marrying outside one's own village or *gotra* is practiced in rural areas as well. But in some tribal areas, if a person marries within his village, it is taken as a loss of status.
- **Caste associations:** Ghanshyam Shah, author of *Social Movements in India*, emphatically states that caste plays a decisive role in political matters. Researchers have maintained that the caste plays a very important role in rural India. Political decisions, even today, are governed by caste, though this may not be the case in urban India.

With the Indian Constitution providing reservation provision for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the villages have been divided into two parts. The caste war has become multi-dimensional. Another category of caste has developed which is called as *avatar* by M. N. Srinivas. This has also influenced the hierarchical

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relations among the members of different castes. The caste system has become weak in some areas while it has become strong in others.

- **Occupational interdependence:** When the caste system began in ancient India, it was mainly based on division of labour. People were divided according to the work they did in order to carry out the smooth functioning of society. Also the money which came in, was entirely dependent on the Jajmani system. Jajmani system includes a system having jajmani or clients. These clients look for the services from the villages, i.e., the *kumbhar*, *nai*, *mochi*, *dhobhi* or even *chamar* and paid them in kind.

This way one realized that each caste had a special role to play and was respected and valued for that. This led to an interdependence of castes. But today, that to in urban societies, such arrangements are missing. People today are moving away from rural roots and taking up professions according to their qualification and choice irrespective of what the family had been doing for years.

- **Caste is the mirror of rural society:** Villages are occupied by people of different castes. Mostly we find that each village has a majority of a particular caste. There are villages that are Brahmin villages or Jat villages.
- **Hierarchical set-up:** In the villages, caste set up dominates the social interaction. Caste forms a kind of pyramid of relations with the Brahmin occupying the top most position. The Rajput and Bania occupy the lower positions in the pyramid. This trend existed not only in villages of north India but in the south as well.

According to A. R. Desai, 'Caste has fixed the psychology of the various social groups and has evolved such minutely graded levels of social distances, and superior-inferior relationships that the social structure looks like a gigantic hierarchical pyramid with a mass of untouchables at its base and a small stratum of elite, the Brahmins, almost unapproachable, at its apex.' The Hindu society is composed of hundreds of distinct self-contained caste societies piled one over the other.

- **Economy and caste:** The economy of rural areas is directly related to the caste dominant in that area. Even today, the traditional work or profession contributes to the income of that particular area. In Kashmir, we find that a lot of economy is generated by the handicraft industry. Even today, this is their major source of income like the previous years. The traditional work is still being done and providing economy to the area.

However, a caste strongly dominates the economy pattern of a certain area. For example, in central Gujarat, the areas occupied by big landlords are now being replaced by the *patidars* as the dominant caste provides a source of belongingness and boosts the morale of the people.

- **Joint family system and caste:** The caste factor also determines the family structure. The nature of the family, i.e., joint or nuclear, is also determined by the caste structure. In rural India, caste is a cluster or group of joint families.

In rural areas, one finds that the joint family system is still prevalent. Parents, brothers, families of brothers, all live together under the same roof. But with modernization and mobility, people have ventured out and so trends are changing now. By and large, we find that the system of joint families still exists in rural India.

Change from Caste to Class System in Rural India

Social scientists have observed another trend in the rural areas. They are witnessing a transition from caste to class. There is definitely a close association between the two.

We find from the works of Pauline Kolenda, the author of *Caste in Contemporary India*, that the village caste system is changing fast into village class system.

In her study of the five hamlets of Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, Kolenda brings out very vivid observations. She states that in a lot of villages, people have lost their small pieces of land. The reasons for this, she observed, were either some investment in business which eventually failed, some sold off their land to contest elections, while others sold it off to meet household expenses. The main losers were the Brahmins and Velalars while the Thevars, Kallars, and Nadars became the new landowners.

The urban people have started investing in land in the villages. The villagers are now losing their land. So this observation from Kanyakumari district clearly indicates that the caste system is soon fading while class system is establishing itself in rural areas.

Kolenda claims that in rural India, the caste system is being replaced by the class system. The class which is emerging is the middle class. The class changes take place when the youngsters of the villages move out of the villages and do well professionally in jobs. It is observable not only in south India but in the north as well, that a strong and large amount of middle class are emerging and engulfing the castes.

Factors for Transformation of Caste into Class in Rural Societies

The factors for the transformation of caste into class in rural societies are as follows:

- **Government policy:** According to Jan Breman, a Dutch sociologist, most of the policies of the government have gone in favour of the big farmers. Green Revolution, White Revolution, facilities of irrigation, electricity supply, and other facilities have benefitted the big farmers more. All policies mostly benefit the rich farmers since they have the resources to buy new and modern implements.
- **Correlation between caste and class:** Gail Omvedt, an American-born Indian scholar, strongly feels that there are feudal forces in the caste system and as a result of this, the zamindars and jagirdars have come out to be the capitalistic peasant. Breman and Kolenda say that the intermediate classes have become classes, while Omvedt observes that the former high castes have become higher classes.
- **Dominant class replaced:** M. N. Srinivas, who has done extensive work on the caste systems of India, gave the concept of dominant caste. Dominant caste are the lower caste people who start adopting the mannerisms of the higher caste and try to imitate them. But this concept is a rather old one and is losing its relevance in today's world. Dominant caste no longer exists in the present rural settings. The lower castes have been empowered with the help of various provisions of the Constitution.

K. L. Sharma finds out the reason for this. He says, 'The idea of "dominant caste" or group dominance is based on certain assumptions, and since these are not found valid, group dominance tends to be a nightmare rather than a reality. The new power wielders are not the same as they were in the past. However, quantitative difference between the old and the new power elites has been much.

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The basic difference between the two is in the fact that rank of a group as a determinant of elite position has withered away. Today, elites are an aggregation and not an active functioning primordial group as the members lack group homogeneity, equality or status and rank, and equal distribution of power and prestige.'

In simple words, it means that in the earlier times caste formed a very important part of the rural set up. With the changing times, the importance is getting undermined. Today, with increase in resources and opportunities, caste dominance is surely becoming less evident.

- **Capitalist mode of production:** The production in agriculture has undergone a great bloom post-independence. Modern techniques and technology have brought about an improvement in the agricultural production. The high yielding varieties of seeds and chemical fertilizers, which bring about a higher production are only within the reach of the rich and big farmers. Again this benefit goes to the big farmers irrespective of their caste.

1.4.2 Rural Social Institutions

P. B. Horton defines an institution as, 'An institution is an organized system of social relationships which embodies certain common values and procedures meets certain basic needs of society.' The system of civilization followed in rural places is same as followed in urban areas. Family, marriage relationships, relatives, all form the essential organs of society. The basic unit of sociology is institution. Institution is that aspect of society that does not change.

J. H. Fitcher has defined an institution as 'a relatively permanent structure of social patterns of roles and relations that people enacting certain sanctioned and unified ways for the purpose of satisfying basic social needs.' These institutions are everlasting. Men come and go while these institutions are permanent features of society.

Patterns of relationship revolve around status and roles of people forming the society. The needs which have to be fulfilled may vary in rural and urban areas.

Rural Institutions and Types

When we study rural institutions, we need to specifically analyse family, marriage, and kin (relatives and relations) as an essential part of the community. Family is given prime importance in the community. Family is also given prime importance in the village, much more than urban areas. In villages, people are identified through their families. There is no place of individualism. While in urban areas, since most people have come to the cities for jobs or business, they are more individualistic.

Let us now discuss the different aspects of social institutions of villages which are as follows:

- Ecology
- Family
- Marriage
- Religion

1. Ecology

Ecology means the whole ecosystem, i.e., man and his relationship with his surrounding environment. It involves the interactions that man has with his environment. In villages, we find that life revolves around agriculture. Agriculture involves all the activities, the work, source of income, and employment of people.

We find that in the hilly areas, people live close to their farms while in plains, generally, the farms are far away from the houses. Another distinctive feature is that people belonging to same caste have their houses in close vicinity while those of different castes are placed far off.

Discussing about the ecology of villages, Irawati Karve, an Indian sociologist, speaks of villages in Maharashtra. She discusses three types of villages. These are:

- **Highly nucleated villages:** These villages are nucleated (isolated) from the fields as in Deccan plateau. The habitation area is clearly differentiated from cultivation area.

Second type of village is found on the western coastline of Maharashtra. In this area, houses are placed all along the road, lengthwise. Houses are surrounded by fruit and coconut trees. Houses are fenced from all sides and have their own fruit trees. Cultivation in villages is of two types—horticulture and agriculture. Horticulture includes growing of fruits while agriculture involves growing crops, but that is done far away from the house.

Third type of villages are found towards the north-western boundary of the Marathi-speaking region of Maharashtra. This region has the influence of the Satpura Mountains. This region has valleys in between mountains. Villages have a different and unique setting, having two or three huts clustered together. Similarly, each geographical area has a typical set-up of huts and habitation. In the hilly regions of Himachal Pradesh houses are scattered. The size of the houses are small, roofs are slanting and made of slates so as to overcome the cold during winters. Small doors and windows are attached to keep off the cold.

2. Rural Family

A typical rural family structure is based on the joint family system, wherein all the members stay together in one house with a common kitchen. Let us look at some of the main characteristics of the rural family:

- **Joint family:** The most important feature of the rural family structure is the joint family. As the term suggests, the 'joint family' includes the eldest male member of the family, who is looked up to as the head, his wife, children, parents, aunts, uncles, nephews, and sometimes other members as well. Not only do all the members stay under the same roof, they eat together too. The food is cooked in a common kitchen.
- **Great respect for women:** In the rural areas, women enjoy a lot of respect. Manu, the great law giver emphasized the fact that even God prefers to dwell in a place where women are respected. In rural society, men and women share the same work, which is why it is not unusual to find women working in the fields alongside the men. However, in the case of women belonging to very superior/high castes, stepping out of the house and appearing before the general public, especially men, was taboo.

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- **Religiousness/duty/discipline:** Rural families are founded on spirituality and religion. The members are governed by religious principles. The focus is always on duty, which is why, there are rarely any conflicts as each one performs his/her duties without questioning. The elders are the role models for the younger ones. Nobody bothers about rights. Family members fulfill their duties with great sincerity and discipline. As a result, general harmony and peace prevails in the house.
- **Homogeneity/Harmony:** Rural families function as homogeneous units. All members maintain cordial and harmonious relations with one another. Relationships are characterized by mutual cooperation and affection. The families are close-knit and homogeneous, with each member lending support to the other.
- **Mutual affection/love:** In rural Indian families, which are mostly agrarian, all members contribute to the income of the house by doing their share of work. With such economic cooperation, it is not difficult to ensure that each family member, including the children is properly looked after. The young children take the cattle out to graze, while women manage the kitchen and household chores and at times help out in the fields too. The men folk handle all the heavy work, such as tilling, maintaining the house, and protecting the fields and cattle from wild animals.
- **Family honour:** In rural areas, the name and honour of the family has to be preserved and protected at all times. Family honour is given top priority, and is the most important thing for all. Since all members of the family together function as one single unit, the slightest threat to the honour of any one member is seen as a threat to the entire family's name and honour. There is a group/community feeling, which is very strong. The head of the family ensures that no member does anything that would bring disgrace or a bad name to the family.
- **Hospitality:** Guests are treated like gods in the Indian rural setup. They are welcomed with open arms, greatly respected, provided with the best of food and comforts and showered with affection. This concept of hospitality is very typical of any Indian rural household.
- **Family discipline/control:** The 'family' has a very strong hold over all the members. It imposes social responsibility on the members and ensures that they not only follow the rules and regulations set by the elders but also discharge their individual duties properly. Therefore, the family plays a significant role in ensuring law and order. It is because of the control of the family and its elders that members abide by social laws and respect the rules of the society. The family is a social, religious and economic unit. The family's status determines the social status of its individual members. No rules are broken as these form the strong foundation of the family structure.
- **Customs and traditions:** In rural society, customs and traditions are highly valued and followed sincerely. People adhere to traditions even when times change and there is advancement in science and technology. That is why, we find that rural families are not as impacted by technological changes as their urban counterparts. In the family too, all the relationships are governed by age-old traditions. Family relationships are maintained and preserved as they are founded on traditions.
- **Patriarchal system:** The father is the head of the family in the rural Indian setup. He has the last say in all the economic and social matters. In the absence of the father, it is the eldest male member who is considered the head of the family, taking all major decisions. His authority is not questioned by anyone. The children, no matter how old they are, always obey the father's orders.

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- **Discipline in family:** In rural families, there is a great degree of discipline and a feeling of sharing. There is a sense of duty towards the family head. Even marriages are fixed by the elders.
- **Deity worship:** In rural India, it is a common practice to worship ancestors on specific days of the year, such as 'Pitripaksh'. Special ceremonies are held during these days. Idol worship is popular. It is believed by the rural folk that one can live a happy life only with the blessings of the gods, especially deities like Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati and Lord Ganesha. Mass participation with immense enthusiasm is seen in these religious ceremonies and festivals.

Relationship in Rural Family

The main patterns of relationship in rural family are as follows:

- **Male family head:** The eldest male member is the head of the family, whose name the family bears and who enjoys a lot of authority. The responsibility of the entire family rests with him. Even the property is in his name and without consulting him, no important decisions are taken, even in matters like marriage.
- **Marital life:** When it comes to the relationship between husband and wife, in most rural families, especially the middle class, both enjoy equal rights. In the poor families, both the husband and wife go out to work and the income is usually shared. Generally, the husband is considered superior and his orders are expected to be followed by the wife. However, the wife does get to express her opinions and have her say in matters. There is mutual respect for each other. Women are considered to be Goddess Lakshmi personified, that is, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Therefore, they are respected.
 - In the upper caste families, the women observe *purdah*, that is, they do not show their faces to outsiders. Even in the poor rural families, the women generally observe *purdah* in front of the elder/senior males. While in most households, the wives are financially dependent on the husbands, if women do earn some money they have the option of keeping their earnings with them, or handing it over to their husbands or keeping just a part of it with them. Husbands take care of all the needs of the wives and children. The wives, in turn, perform all household chores and respect their husbands, so much so that they do not even call them by their names. It is a common practice for wives to eat only after the husbands and the rest of the family have eaten.
- **Relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law:** In the past, the mother-in-law enjoyed the supreme position amongst the women in the house. Her authority was never questioned. But things are changing for the better now. As the eldest woman in the family she still enjoys the respect of the daughters-in-law but she is no longer a figure to be feared. Gone are the days when the daughter-in-law used to obey all the instructions given by the mother-in-law without asking any questions. Today, even though the daughters-in-law may touch the feet of the mothers-in-law as a mark of respect, the relationship is more casual. Instances of cruelty towards the daughters-in-law on the part of the mothers-in-law have greatly reduced, giving way to cordial relationships.
- **Relationship between father-in-law and daughter-in-law:** In rural areas, the daughter-in-law respects the father-in-law just like her own father. She touches his feet every morning, as a sign of respect. *Purdah* is also observed in some

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areas, where the daughter-in-law avoids the presence of her father-in-law, even though she takes care of all his needs—providing food, doing his laundry, etc.

- **Parenting:** In rural India, parents take care of the needs of their children and bring them up well, providing them good education, food and clothes. However, the sons are given more freedom than the daughters. While the boys help their fathers in the fields and lend a hand in all the heavy work, the girls assist their mothers in household chores and also carry food for the men of the house working in the fields. While most are allowed to go to school and study, the practice of getting them married at a young age still prevails. By and large, the relationship between parents and children is quite cordial except in the rare cases of property disputes.
- **Relationship between husband's brother and his wife:** Mostly the relationship is very cordial. The wife and husband's elder brother have a very formal relationship. She treats him like her own elder brother and respects him like the father-in-law. She even observes *purdah* in his presence. In the case of the younger brother, the relationship is not so formal. Rather it is one of affection and informality. He can meet the brother's wife at any time and she does not observe *purdah* in his presence. It is not uncommon for a woman, following her husband's death, to marry his younger brother. The practice is encouraged in many communities.
- **Pathetic condition of widow:** In rural India, while the wife is regarded and respected like Goddess Lakshmi, on becoming a widow, she is considered inauspicious. Widowhood is a curse for women in rural India. Widows are not allowed to participate in any religious or auspicious ceremonies. They are expected to wear white always and abstain from using cosmetics or anything to beautify themselves. In many households, they are treated as maids. Since they are financially dependant on their husband's family, their condition is rather pathetic. Some of the narrow-minded communities believe that widowhood is a curse for the woman, from the Gods.
- **Illegitimate relationships:** While the marital vow is considered very sacrosanct in rural areas, sometimes on the death of the wife, the man keeps another woman without marrying her. There are cases where even in the presence of a wife, the man keeps another woman without marrying her. The second woman is also considered as his wife and the man provides for her upkeep. The second woman may or may not belong to the same caste. There are instances of wives being bought too. The practice of keeping a woman as a wife without actually marrying her is not uncommon in rural areas, nor is it considered wrong.

Joint Family

Joint family is a group of kins of several generations, ruled by a head, in which there is joint residence, hearth, and property and whose members are bound with each other by mutual obligations. The chief characteristics of the joint family are common residence, common kitchen, joint property, and common worship. This will be clear from the following definitions of the joint family.

- Iravati Karve believes, 'A joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common, who participate in common worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred.'

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- Julius Jolly says, 'Not only parents and children, brothers and step-brothers live on the common property, but it may sometimes include ascendants, descendants, and collaterals upto many generations'.
- I. P. Desai says, 'We call that household a joint family which has greater generation depth (i.e., three or more) than the nuclear family and the members of which are related to one another by property, income and mutual rights and obligations.'

Advantages of Joint Family

The chief advantages of joint family are as follows:

- **Economic advantages:** The joint family system has proved to be a very advantageous institution from the economic viewpoint. It prevents property from being divided. Land is protected from extreme sub-division and fragmentation. When divided into many small pieces, land becomes an uneconomic holding. Besides keeping the land intact, the joint family also assists in economic production. In a joint agriculturist family, the male members do work such as furrowing, sowing, and irrigation. Women assist at the harvest. Children graze the cattle, and collect fuel and manure. In this way, cooperation from all the members helps to save money which would otherwise be paid to labourers. In the rural areas, the joint families are such in which men, women, and children collaborate. Even among the middle and upper classes, the family can obtain capital and reliable assistance from the joint family for establishing and expanding a business.
- **Protection of members:** Jawaharlal Nehru was much in favour of the joint family. Nehru had said that the system of joint family is an insurance for the family members which carried a guarantee for those who are mentally and physically weak. In times of crisis, the joint family can provide assistance to the children, the women, the old, the insane, the widows, and the helpless. The joint family is capable of providing much assistance at such emergencies as pregnancy, sickness, and if a person dies, his wife, and children are looked after properly in the joint family. In a joint family, a place is provided for all members to which they can retreat at all times and their honour, wealth, and prosperity are protected collectively.
- **Initiation of good qualities:** The joint family system makes possible the idea of development of the good qualities of man. In the care of elders, the undesirable, and anti-social tendencies of the young are checked, they are prevented from straying from their path, and they learn to exercise self-control. In the joint family, young men and women learn the lesson of generosity, patience, service, co-operation, and obedience. A sense of sacrifice replaces selfishness. All members learn to obey family control and to respect those older than themselves.
- **Cooperation and economic help:** The joint family fosters cooperation and economic help to an extent achieved by few. A sense of cooperation exists among the members. There can be much economy in expenditure. The joint family can be rightly called an ideal centre of cooperation and mutual aid.
- **Socialism in money matters:** According to Sir Henry Maine, a joint family is like a corporation, the trustee of which is the father. He is known as *Karta*. D. N. Majumdar has written, 'The *karta*, of the joint or extended family has the right to make the decisions for his family, he is the working head, the judge and the jury, he decides family quarrels, he is the political head as every family has a place and

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is represented by the head of the family in the social, ceremonial, and community activities, and in the local Gram Panchayat.' According to Jathar and Berry, everyone in a joint family earns according to his capabilities but obtains according to his needs and in this way to a large extent achieves the socialistic ideal; from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.

Disadvantages of Joint Family

The following are the main disadvantages of the joint family system:

- **Hindrance in the development of personality:** The most glaring defect of the joint family system is the hindrance in the development of the personalities of its members. In the joint family, the head is the absolute ruler. He is usually the oldest member of the family who looks after and treats men and women as children even when they attain adulthood. In this way there is very little opportunity for the fostering of individual autonomy or self-dependence.
- **Deplorable condition of women:** The bad condition of women is also a major defect in its disintegration. In a joint family, the daughter-in-law does not get an opportunity to develop her personality. She looks after her children. She hardly ever meets her husband during the day and even when he returns late at night, he gratifies his sexual desire with her and falls asleep. There is no limit to the injustice done by mother-in-law, and the other relatives do everything to add to that suffering. In some cases, this oppression is so inhuman and unbearable that the women often commit suicide.
- **Domestic violence:** If the daughters-in-law contradict the bad behaviour or if their husbands speak or act in their favour, the house becomes a battle ground. When the daughter-in-law retaliate to their mother-in-law, they are abused, and even beaten by their husbands who are provoked by their mothers. Hatred and jealousy between the wives of brothers can lead to a conflict between brothers which can assume dangerous proportions. There is continuous strife and fighting over the doings of children. Most of the time of the adult members is consumed in finding solution to petty problems.
- **Laziness:** Due to common responsibility, many people take their minds off their work and become completely lazy. In this state, the condition of those who literally break their backs and those who are very lazy is, more or less, the same. Hence, laziness is encouraged. When a person can eat comfortably without exerting himself, he is unlikely to indulge in effort and hard work. The wives of the hard working people tell them to desist from such toil as they do not benefit from it. Mostly, in the joint family it happens that some people have to exhaust themselves while the lazy ones lead a life of utter lethargy. There is no dearth of such people in big and rich joint families whose entire routine consists of eating, sleeping, and begetting children.
- **Large number of children:** In a joint family the responsibility for the upbringing and education, of children is shared. Thus, no individual considers it necessary to lay stress on controlling procreation. In the family, no distinction in the status of the family member is made on the basis of their respective earnings and the corresponding number of children. The offspring of one member is treated in the same way as that of the others irrespective of the level of earning and the number of children that one has. In this way, in a joint family, no direct benefit is acquired

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by any individual by family planning or by earning more. Consequently, people lose much of their family planning ideology.

- **Poverty:** As a consequence of almost daily strife, the bad condition of women, absolute rule, lack of responsibility and blind procreation, the economic condition of the joint family becomes very unenviable. If the conflict is strong enough to bring about division of land and property the condition becomes even worse. The property of the family, being jointly owned is sometimes allowed to go waste and it is gradually lost through constant neglect.
- **Other problems:** In addition to the above-mentioned major shortcomings, the joint family system is further blemished by many other minor defects. Family strife leads to litigation. Customs and traditions are strictly adhered to in the joint family and superstition reigns supreme because the guiding hand is that of the oldest member. Due to the strict administration of the old men, the younger people do not gain self-confidence and self-dependence, and they fail to adopt new currents of thought. Thus, the disadvantages of the joint family far outweigh the advantages. Consequently, the joint family is in fact, becoming disorganized. It is impossible to save the institution of joint family from disorganization, though its advantages can, with efforts, be reinstated in novel form in small families.

Role of New Social Legislation

In India, joint families have been influenced by certain new social legislations. These have some direct bearing on the characteristic features of joint family, joint habitation, joint kitchen, joint property, and the authority of the head. The following are the major ones among the social legislation:

- **Hindu Married Women's Right to Separate Residence and Maintenance Act:** This legislation was enacted in 1946. According to this Act, under specific conditions a wife can demand alimony while living separately from her husband.
- **Hindu Marriage Act:** According to para 13 of this Act, any husband and wife, who have been married either before or after the enactment of this legislation can, under specific conditions, apply to the court for divorce. This law was enacted in 1955.
- **Hindu Succession Act:** This Act became a law in 1956. According to this, the daughter was given equal rights to the property of the father and the women also got the right to dispose off, mortgage, and use property in any manner they pleased.

The above mentioned Acts or legislations have influenced the solidarity of the joint family. As a result of the Hindu Marriage Act, the number of divorces are increasing. Earlier, the women silently suffered many injustices and outrages. In joint families the status of women was extremely low. Sometimes the mother-in-law behaved badly towards her daughter-in-law. Their husbands also treated them in the same way. Now having got the support of the law, women have revolted against this oppression which is leading to a disorganization of the joint family. Upon being maltreated they can now leave their husbands, live separately, and demand money from them in order to meet their expenditures. This provision has given a sharp blow to the joint family system.

Another feature of the joint family is the joint property. The Hindu Succession Act has influenced it adversely. Now that women have the right to sell their property, and the girls too share equally in the property of their father, it is almost impossible to maintain the family property conjointly. Hence, the result is that the joint families are

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disintegrating at a rapid rate. Modern legislation has put an end to male ascendancy. This too has profoundly influenced the organization of the joint family. The daughters-in-law in the joint family come from other families. Thus, it is obvious that they should resent having to give up their own pleasure for the well-being of the family. Earlier, they had to suffer silently the doings of their husbands, but now having got equal rights in almost all respects, they can fight for their rights. As a result of modern legislation, the women whose husbands earn more can now force their husbands to break off from the joint family and set up an independent establishment. The parents-in-law also realize their power. The husbands too cannot behave indiscriminately with them. They also have the same rights over the children as their husbands. Due to all these reasons even small misunderstandings can result in a situation where separation can take place. Actually, the causes of the disorganization of the joint family are not constitutional but mainly social. But there is no doubt in the fact that the present legislation has also played a part in its disorganization.

3. Rural Marriages

Marriages in India are mostly arranged by parents and elders. The boy and girl meet each other with the family consent. These days youngsters choose their life partners themselves. This trend is common only in cities. In rural areas it has remained unchanged.

Patterns and Restrictions

In rural India, marriages typically take place in two patterns:

- Village exogamy
- *Gotra* exogamy

In village exogamy, marriages take place outside one's own village. These marriages are the most common, wherein the boy and girl who are to marry must not belong to the same village. *Gotra* exogamy means that the boy and girl who are to marry must not belong to the same *gotra* (clan). In villages, marriages take place between boys and girls from different villages and different clans (*gotras*), but never from different castes. The bride and the groom must belong to the same caste. Inter-caste marriages are uncommon in rural India and never encouraged.

Marriage between cousins does not take place at all. But in southern India, certain areas do witness such alliances. There are instances of hypergamy (when a high-caste boy marries a girl from a lower caste) and also hypogamy (when a low-caste boy marries a girl from high caste). Hypergamy cases are more common than hypogamy cases.

This is because, villagers believe that the village from which a girl has been accepted is lower in status than their own. Therefore, if A is a girl from village X who has got married to a boy from village Y, then B, a girl from village Y, will not be easily accepted as a bride for any boy from village X. The status and reputation of a family is given a lot of importance in rural societies, especially when it comes to match making. But slowly and steadily, the focus is shifting to the competence and capability of the boy instead of the family's status. Earlier, even distance was a criterion for choosing a match. While a distance of about 5 to 10 miles was taken to be comfortable, anything less than 40 miles was never considered. But this criteria varies from village to village and community to community. For some families, no matchmaking is done within 100 miles of the village. Mostly, marriages are arranged by the elders of the family—father or grandfather—and their decision is taken as final. The boy and the girl have little say in the matter.

Stages and Steps of Marriage

The marriage ceremony in rural India is a long and complicated affair involving several steps and rituals. India is a huge country with different cultures and rituals. Therefore, the customs associated with weddings also differ from place to place. Each region has a different set of ceremonies.

Some common steps involved in a typical wedding in rural India are as follows:

- Search for a suitable groom/bride
- Formal engagement/betrothal
- Wedding preparation
- Reception (of groom/*baraat* and the bride)
- Consummation of marriage

(i) Search for Suitable Groom

The families of boys and girls of marriageable age look for prospective matches within their own caste but definitely not in the same *gotra* or clan. The hunt may take them outside their own village. The match is finalized by the eldest member of the family.

(ii) Engagement/Betrothal

This is a formal ceremony, like a pre-wedding event. Rings are exchanged between the prospective bride and groom. Gifts are also exchanged between the two families, and the date of the wedding is finalized.

(iii) Wedding Preparation

The formal day of the wedding is announced, invites are sent and preparations begin in earnest. On the day of the wedding, many ceremonies take place, some of which are as follows:

- **Lagan:** The ceremonies begin on the auspicious time. The priest comes and starts the ceremony.
- **Sehrabendi:** The groom dresses up (usually wearing a *shervani*) and wears a head gear with a veil of flowers, which covers his face. This is called the *sehra*.
- **Ghurchari:** Once the groom is ready, the family leaves for the bride's house on a mare. This is called *ghurchari*, a process of climbing onto a mare. The whole marriage party or group moves in a procession, called '*Barat*', along with the groom on the horse, to the bride's house.
- **Milani:** Once the *barat* reaches the bride's house, the *milani* takes place. This ceremony involves a meeting between the fathers and mothers of the bride and groom respectively. The bride's family gives gifts to the groom's family after garlanding them.

(iv) Reception of Barat

The whole *barat* or procession is received by the bride's family. The groom is welcomed by the bride's mother, who performs a prayer at the door and guides the groom into the house. In some places, she pulls the groom's nose and brings him in. After this the other ceremonies take place. The auspicious fire is lit around which the '*phasas*' take place. This ceremony is the most important and involves the bride and groom taking the marital vows while doing seven rounds of the holy fire. The groom applies *sindoor* or vermillion

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on the bride's forehead. With this action, the marriage is considered complete. The groom also ties the *mangalsutra* around the bride's neck—the holy thread which signifies the marriage. Once all these ceremonies are over, and the *barat* is served an elaborate feast, the groom leaves the bride's house along with his bride/wife. This ceremony is called 'Vidai'. All the relatives of the bride hug her and send her off with tears in their eyes.

(v) Reception of Bride in Bridegroom's Village

The *barat* returns to the village along with the bride. A number of ceremonies take place in the groom's house as well.

- **Dwar rokna:** In this ceremony, the groom's sisters stop their brother from entering the house with his wife, until and unless he fulfills their demand for some gift. Only when the brother gives money or some other gift to the sister(s) is he allowed to enter.
- **Mukh dikhana:** Once the bride enters the house, the groom's mother welcomes her by performing a welcome ceremony, and then arranges a *mukh dikhai*. This is a function in which all the women of the village come and see the bride's face by lifting her veil or *ghoonghat*. They place money in her lap, one by one, as a welcome gift.
- **Kangan khelna:** After the *mukh dikhai* is over, the women of the family gather all the relatives together and arrange a game to be played by the newly-weds. In a huge pan containing a mixture of milk, water and rose petals, a finger ring of the groom is dropped in. Both the bride and groom are asked to locate the ring, whoever succeeds is declared the winner. Then another game is played where the groom holds the ring in his fist and the bride tries to force open the fist. The same is repeated with the bride. The bride and the groom are asked to untie the *kangana*, which is tied to their wrists. All this while, a lot of jokes are exchanged. There is a lot of singing, dancing and merry making. Sometimes, the younger brother of the groom (if he is small) or his nephew, comes and sits in the lap of the bride demanding some sweet. The bride offers him a *ladoo* before taking him off her lap. This is supposed to bring her luck and make her capable of bearing a male child.

(vi) Visit to Temple

Once all these ceremonies are done the bride and groom are taken to the temple(s) in the village to seek the blessings of the deities.

(vii) Gauna

This is the final step of the marriage, the time when the bride finally goes to the groom's house and starts living with him as his wife. In olden days the brides and grooms were rather young—kids who hardly understood the implications of marriage—and so the bride continued to live at her parents' house after the marriage ceremony. Once she became older, her parents fixed a date and sent a message to the groom's family. The girl would then dress up in ceremonial attire and be bedecked with jewellery. She would be allowed to accompany her groom (who comes to fetch her) to his house on the *gauna* day.

The bride's parents shower her and the groom with gifts—cash, clothes, jewellery and household items. The couple is given a warm send-off by the bride's parents, friends

and other villagers. Once the bride and groom reach the groom's house, the women of the groom's village gather to welcome the bride, sing songs, and sit around to see the gifts that the bride's parents have given her. The groom's sister(s) are allowed to take anything they fancy from among the gifts brought by the bride. This is how, the bride finally comes to her husband's house.

1.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- India is a country with rural or village area covering over 70 per cent of the total area. Villages are predominant in our country as they effect the country's economic and social conditions.
- Development starts from the smallest or lowest level in villages which develop to form towns, which gradually transforms into cities, and then the metropolitans.
- Rural Sociology means the systematic and scientific study of the people living in a country or the village areas.
- Rural Sociology is a science that originated in the United States of America. It is an authentic American creation. It was in the United States that the basic infrastructure of Rural Sociology was developed and initiated for.
- It was in 1908 that President Theodore Roosevelt created the Country Life Commission (CLC). The purpose of this Commission was to find out the problems faced by farm families and document them by launching investigations nationwide.
- Rural Sociology is a branch of sociology dealing with all the different aspects of village life. Since sociology falls under the category of social sciences, rural sociology is also taken as a subject under social studies.
- Empiricism refers to the method of conducting experiments so as to reach a particular conclusion.
- Though general sociology deals with both urban and rural sociology, the latter is specific only to the rural or village life while general sociology includes also rural sociology as one of its branches of study.
- The rural and urban areas are distantly identified by the density of population in both the areas and also by major professions followed.
- When we talk about, rural sociology, we get to know that it is keenly interested in understanding the rural people and the social organization of the villages. Social organization in rural and urban areas is the arrangement of people from different strata or levels.
- Jajmani system includes a system having jajmani or clients. These clients look for the services from the villages, i.e., the *kumbhar*, *nai*, *mochi*, *dhobhi* or even *chamar* and paid them in kind.
- The caste factor also determines the family structure. The nature of the family, i.e., joint or nuclear is also determined by the caste structure. In rural India, caste is a cluster or group of joint families.
- M. N. Srinivas, who has done extensive work on the caste systems of India, gave the concept of dominant caste. Dominant caste are the lower caste people who start adopting the mannerisms of the higher caste and try to imitate them.

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Check Your Progress

8. Name the forms of social stratification.
9. What is the Jajmani system?
10. What are the chief characteristics of the joint family?
11. What are the two kinds of marriages that take place in India?

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- The most important feature of the rural family in India is the practice of joint family system.
- Joint family is a group of kins of several generations, ruled by a head, in which there is joint residence, hearth, and property and whose members are bound with each other by mutual obligations.
- The joint family fosters cooperation and economic help to an extent achieved by few. A sense of cooperation exists among the members.
- The first kind is village exogamy and the second is *gotra* exogamy. In village exogamy, the boy and the girl who are to be married must not be from the same village; and in the *gotra* exogamy, the boy and the girl marrying must not be from a single clan but must belong to different clans.
- *Phere* means going round the sacred fire amidst chanting of the sacred mantras by the bride and the bridegroom: tied together, that is, coupled.
- In India, since time immemorial, it has been observed that the peasant has been poor and always depends on others, sometimes the zamindar, the moneylender, or the government.

1.6 KEY TERMS

- **Rural Sociology:** Rural Sociology means the systematic and scientific study of the people living in a country or the village areas.
- **Empiricism:** Empiricism refers to the method of conducting experiments so as to reach a particular conclusion.
- **Anthropology:** Anthropology deals with the study of the human race, especially its origin, development, customs and beliefs.
- **Social organization:** Social organization in rural and urban areas is the arrangement of people from different strata or levels.
- **Dominant caste:** Dominant caste are the lower caste people who start adopting the mannerisms of the higher caste and try to imitate them.
- **Joint family:** Joint family is a group of kins of several generations, ruled by a head, in which there is joint residence, hearth, and property and whose members are bound with each other by mutual obligations.

1.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Rural Sociology means the systematic and scientific study of the people living in a country or the village areas.
2. Rural sociology is a science that originated in the United States of America. It is an authentic American creation.
3. The purpose of this Commission was to find out the problems faced by farm families and document them by launching investigations nationwide.
4. Rural Sociology draws its content from general sociology, urban sociology, social anthropology, history, political science, and also economics. So the techniques followed in Rural Sociology are mostly borrowed from other disciplines.

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5. Objective approach means the ability to record things or observations as they actually are. This involves the clear study of facts and is unbiased.
6. Though general sociology deals with both urban and rural sociology, the latter is specific only to the rural or village life while general sociology includes also rural sociology as one of its branches of study.
7. Rural economics deals with all the aspects of rural economy. How agriculturist can increase their production with the help of better agro-techniques and high quality seeds. How they can generate more employment by self-sustaining business and their limitations.
8. The forms of social stratification are:
 - Slavery
 - Caste
 - Estate
 - Class
9. Jajmani system includes a system having jajmani or clients. These clients look for the services from the villages, i.e., the *kumbhar*, *nai*, *mochi*, *dhobhi* or even *chamar* and paid them in kind.
10. The chief characteristics of the joint family are common residence, common kitchen, joint property, and common worship.
11. The first kind is village exogamy and the second is *gotra* exogamy. In village exogamy, the boy and the girl who are to be married must not be from the same village; and in the *gotra* exogamy, the boy and the girl marrying must not be from a single clan but must belong to different clans.

1.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What does the study of rural sociology include?
2. State why rural sociology is taken as a subject under social studies.
3. Differentiate between social anthropology and rural sociology.
4. Who are the dominant caste people?
5. List the characteristics of the rural family.
6. What is a joint family?
7. Write a note on the role of new legislations that have influenced joint families.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss in detail the meaning of the term 'Rural Sociology'. Also discuss the emergence of Rural Sociology as an academic discipline.
2. Evaluate the nature of Rural Sociology.
3. 'Sociology has an objective approach.' Explain.
4. What are the similarities between Rural Sociology and other fields of study?
5. Explain the scope and significance of Rural Sociology.
6. Discuss the different forms of rural social institutions.

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UNIT 2 RURAL SOCIETY AND RURAL SOCIAL INSTITUTION

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Rural Society and its Features
- 2.3 Rural-Urban Differences and Continuum
 - 2.3.1 Urban Influence on Rural Life
 - 2.3.2 Folkways and Urban Continuum
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 Key Terms
- 2.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.7 Questions and Exercises
- 2.8 Further reading

2.0 INTRODUCTION

India, being an agricultural country finds villages at the top of its priority list. Rural society includes all the people living in the villages. The socio-cultural environment of the village along with the norms, way of life and traditions followed in rural areas form the basis for the rural social life.

Rural society is characterized by a homogeneity in social, cultural and economic aspects of village life, where people lead almost the same kind of life with simple dressing and food habits, culture and traditions. Family is an important unit in these societies where the joint family system is still preferred. There is lack of individuality in these societies and there are hardly any turmoil amongst the members of the society. A society is never static, it keeps changing. Similarly, a rural society too undergoes a series of changes due to development at a great speed. In this unit, you will be acquainted with the features of the rural society, the differences between rural and urban areas, the institution of family, caste, religion and economy, and the features of village studies.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the rural society and discuss its features
- Analyse the rural-urban differences and continuum

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- Evaluate the institution of family, caste system, religion and economy
- Discuss the various features of village studies

2.2 RURAL SOCIETY AND ITS FEATURES

A rural society is a society which is thinly populated. Agriculture is the main occupation of villagers. People living in rural societies lead a very simple life with simple traditions and culture surrounded by a natural environment. There is homogeneity in their professions, ways of living, dress and traditions. In such societies, the rate of change is very slow as there is lack of facilities like transportation, technology and communication.

Little Community is a group of people inhabiting a definite locality bound together by the feeling of oneness. E. S. Bogardus defines Little Community as 'a social small group with some degree of "we feeling" and living in a given area'. David Osborn and Martin Henry Neumeyer has defined community as a group of people living in a contiguous geographic area, having common centres of interest and activities, and functioning together in the chief concerns of life. Thus, in the definition of Little Community, greater emphasis is laid on unity of its regional aspect. The community includes the whole life of its members and is marked by the expression of community sentiment. It is the first sentiment which joins a group of people with either the same community and is also the first to differentiate 'the people belonging to different communities'.

Thus, community sentiment may be defined as the feeling of unity among the members of a community. In absence of such a unity, no group can claim to be a 'community'. Community sentiment naturally arises among the 'people who share common ways of living and live together for a long period.' People who speak a common language or share a common goal or have common interest, naturally possess a feeling of oneness which binds the members of the community. The 'people living in a village home. They take part in all important occasions which occur in a neighbour's home. They are 'present when marriages, deaths, births take place in any family'. They celebrate the festivals together and jointly face the calamities which descend upon the village.' Thus, community sentiment provides the following three elements:

- **We-feeling:** The most important element in the community sentiment is the 'we-feeling'. As a result of this feeling, individuals consider themselves a part of the group and empathize with the pain or pleasure of any section of the group.
- **Role-feeling:** In a community, individuals have their own status and they must play their role for the benefit of the community at large. People should shoulder their responsibility towards the community and consider themselves as a part of the community.
- **Sense of dependency:** In a community, individuals believe themselves to be dependent upon the community and deny themselves existence separate from the community. Due to this dependence, they abide by the regulations which the society imposes on them. It may be noted that class consciousness differs from community sentiment. MacIver brings out this distinction as, 'If the latter admits no grades, the former is rooted in the principle of hierarchy and the sentiment of class is essentially a sentiment of disparity'. Although it unites those who feel distinct from other classes, it unites them primarily because they feel distinct. Above all, it unites the superior with the inferior. Hence,

class sentiment involves entirely different attitudes with respect to one another within the hierarchical system.

Following are the features of a rural society:

- **Family:** Family is the basic unit of Indian social structure. It has an important place in the rural society. Apart from performing various basic and important tasks, the family is also involved in socialization, social control and performs various economic activities. The family controls the behaviour of the individuals. It controls the religious activities of the family members in the rural society. Another characteristic feature of the rural society is the joint family system. Generally, the father is the head of the family and is also responsible for maintaining the discipline among members. He manages the affairs of the family. It is the family, which introduces the members to the customs, traditions and culture of the society.
- **Agriculture is the main occupation:** Agriculture is the main occupation of the rural people and forms the basis of rural economy. Farmers need to perform various agricultural activities for which they need the cooperation and help from others. Usually, these helpers are from their families. Thus, the members of the entire family share agricultural activities.
- **Caste-system:** The second most important feature of rural society is the caste system. Caste system in the rural areas determine the status, occupation and social position of the rural people in India. The caste system is based on endogamy and sometimes has common economic position or linkage. In rural society, social stratification is a traditional characteristic which is based on caste. In rural areas, mobility is rigid as all the occupations are based on caste. Shifting from one occupation to another is difficult as caste is determined by birth. Thus, caste hierarchy determines the social status of the rural people.
- **Social solidarity:** The degree of social solidarity is greater in villages as compared to urban areas. Common experiences, purposes, customs and traditions form the basis of unity in the villages.
- **Homogeneity of population:** The village communities are homogenous in nature. Most of the inhabitants are connected with agriculture and its allied occupations, though there are people belonging to different castes, religions and classes.
- **Internal rural organization:** Internal organizations govern and determine the social and individual life of the rural people in India. Normally all villages have Panchayats, head of which is elected with the consent of all the adult members of the village. Generally, there is a village Panchayat, a village Nyay Panchayat, Panchayat of different castes and certain voluntary groups of different social, religious and political organizations.
- **Religion and religious organization:** Religion is an important unit of the village social structure. Worship of the supernatural power and deities form an important part of village life. Villages have their own gods and goddesses. Social functions are also mostly based on religion. Religion plays a veritable agency of social control in the countryside. Rural people are mostly god-fearing. This fear motivates them to lead a pious life. Therefore, religion exercises social control over the villagers through customs, traditions and conventions. In rural India, fairs and festivals are organized on a large scale in the name of religion.

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- **Economic system:** In village society different castes have different occupations and functions. In other words their economic activities are determined by their social conditions. For example the social group or the caste known as 'dhobi' are responsible for washing clothes only; no one from other caste can take up the profession of washing clothes. This system is still stringently followed in villages though it is not the same in the urban areas.
- **Political life:** In rural India, the political behaviour of every individual is mostly governed by religious considerations. Mostly the political leaders launch their election campaigns from the religious places in the villages. Politicians seek the cooperation of the religious leaders to win elections and the religious leaders extend their cooperation on certain conditions keeping their interests in view.

2.3 RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES AND CONTINUUM

The rural and urban areas are very difficult to demarcate. Both have their own typical lifestyles. The major differences between rural and urban society are as follows:

1. Difference in Social Way of Thinking

Some differences which are distinctly observed in the urban and rural society are as follows:

- In the urban areas, people take more interest in politics. They like to participate more in politics and other such related events.
- Religious ideas and thinking is more deep and strong in rural areas than in urban areas. The rural people base their thinking on faith while religion in cities is based on reason.
- The urban people have scientific knowledge, tools and techniques at their disposal to counter any calamity or natural catastrophe. But in case of the rural people, they accept natural calamity as wrath of god. This kind of thinking is developed due to the superstitious attitude of the village people.
- The outlook of urban people is more wide and open. In the words of Ross, 'The city is cosmopolitan whereas the country is nationalistic and patriotic'. In this way, the rural people are more progressive than urban people.
- Urban people are not genuine. They may cover up and present themselves as someone who they are not. In the words of Bogardus, 'Rural people are frank, open, and genuine; they scorn the artificiality of many phases of city life'.

2. Difference in Social Organization

Social organization is the main aspect which brings out the difference in the rural and urban set up. Major differences are seen in the following aspects:

- **Family system:** In urban areas, the families are not as close-knit as they are in villages. The urban life style witnesses the nuclear family set up while the rural areas have joint family set up where all members of the family, like father, mother along with their married son and his children, live together as one unit. This type of set up is practically non-existent in towns and cities today. Family ties in rural areas is much stronger in comparison to urban families.

Check Your Progress

1. What is a rural society?
2. What are the three elements provided by community sentiment?

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- **Marriage:** There are a number of differences found in rural and urban societies with respect to marriage as well. In urban areas, there is more freedom in choosing a life partner, while in rural areas such freedom is not allowed. In urban areas, divorce cases are much higher than in villages.
- **Condition of women:** In urban areas women command a good position in society as they are educated. In villages woman have low social status as they are mostly uneducated.
- **Sense of belongingness:** In towns and cities, because of the cosmopolitan culture there is no sense of belongingness among the people. But in rural areas there is a 'we-feeling' in the people.
- **Inequality:** In towns we do not find any concept such as inequality on the basis of caste, but in rural areas a lot of class inequality is practiced. People believe in the caste system which causes disparity among them. Urban people on the other hand do not believe in this inequality as the society is more open.

3. Difference in Social Interactions

The social interactions of people in rural and urban areas are different from each other in many aspects. The points of distinction are as follows:

- The relationships in villages are among a smaller group of people, so they are more direct and personal. Whereas, in cities and towns relationships are numerous and also indirect and impersonal.
- In towns and cities, we find different people trained specifically for different jobs. This brings about more cooperation among town people than in villages.
- In villages the conflict or differences among people is direct. In urban areas this may not be the case because people are not so close to each other. Their interaction with each other is artificial and not personalized. The cases of conflict are direct in case of rural community but not in urban context.
- Urban areas show a high sense of competition compared to rural areas. They are more technologically aware and advanced, so they have more information and are competitive in nature.
- Towns show a higher speed of assimilation because they have a wider variety of cultural differences. People from different areas and places come together and stay in towns so there is a higher sense of assimilation as compared to villages.
- Town people show high level of tolerance as compared to village people. The rural people live in their own setting throughout their lives while in cities a wide cultural difference is observed which makes people more tolerant towards each other.

4. Difference in Financial Capacity

Urban and rural community contrast with each other on a number of aspects, especially on economic matters. This is because the most important factor which affects the lifestyle of people is money. The aspects in which we find a marked difference are as follows:

- Since the earning capacity is low in villages, the standard of living is also low. The standard of living is higher in urban areas as modern amenities are readily available.
- The source of income in villages is mainly agriculture or for some it may be animal or poultry business. In cities, the sources of income are from industries or

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- **Economic system:** In village society different castes have different occupations and functions. In other words their economic activities are determined by their social conditions. For example the social group or the caste known as 'dhobi' are responsible for washing clothes only; no one from other caste can take up the profession of washing clothes. This system is still stringently followed in villages though it is not the same in the urban areas.
- **Political life:** In rural India, the political behaviour of every individual is mostly governed by religious considerations. Mostly the political leaders launch their election campaigns from the religious places in the villages. Politicians seek the cooperation of the religious leaders to win elections and the religious leaders extend their cooperation on certain conditions keeping their interests in view.

2.3 RURAL-URBAN DIFFERENCES AND CONTINUUM

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- Since the earning capacity is low in villages, the standard of living is also low. The standard of living is higher in urban areas as modern amenities are readily available.
- The source of income in villages is mainly agriculture or for some it may be animal or poultry business. In cities, the sources of income are from industries or

factories. More so, there is a wide variety of jobs in cities that help urban people to earn more in comparison to people residing in villages.

5. Difference in Mobility

Life in villages is slow and laid back in comparison to cities. In cities there is higher movement or mobility as compared to villages. In the words of Sorokin and Zimmerman, 'The rural community is similar to calm water in a pail and the urban community to boiling water in kettle. Stability is the typical trait for the rural one, mobility is typical for the other.'

6. Difference in Cultural Life

Cultural life shows marked differences in urban and rural lifestyle. Following are the differences:

- Culture in villages is an amalgamation of traditions and customs. People in villages follow these customs whole-heartedly. On the other hand, in cities and towns customs and traditions are not so sincerely followed or practiced. The reason for this is that in towns and cities, people are from different areas and therefore have varied culture and traditions.
- The culture in villages is of static nature whereas the culture in urban areas change constantly. The city people have more exposure to new and latest happenings, so their cultural ties do not remain static and rigid.

2.3.1 Urban Influence on Rural Life

The fast development and progress in the present times has had a strong influence not only on urban but rural life as well. This influence is visible by the new 'mall culture'. All latest brands which hitherto were not available in India are now easily available in big shopping malls. This consumerist attitude is fast spreading from big metropolitan cities to small towns, and from there to villages as well. This strong influence is visible in the style of dressing up, 'brand consciousness' and use of latest fashionable things and gadgets. It is a common sight to find the younger generation crowding at junk food or international food chains. The areas around metropolitans are under very strong influence of this new culture. Let us now discuss the city or urban influence and its effect on rural life. These are as follows:

- **Change in family organization:** Earlier, rural families used to be joint families. Elders were the ones who ruled the roost. They took all the major decisions and the family obeyed all these without questioning them. All the relatives of the family from the paternal side cooperated with each other. The decision of marriage was always taken by the elders of the family. But now-a-days the situation has changed drastically. Today, the interference of elders is not liked by youngsters. They want to be independent and responsible for their own life and actions, and do not want anybody to instruct them. The youngsters decide whatever course of action they want to take for themselves, whether it is right or wrong. They are much influenced by the urban culture which is free and unrestrained. Young women, also want to copy their counterparts from cities. They copy the latest fashion in clothes, cosmetics, gadgets like mobile phones and so on. All this

is having a strong negative influence on the family system. They also want to assert their own freedom and likings.

In the process, individuals are becoming self-centred. The tendency to non-cooperation is fast taking toll over the simple ways of life of rural people.

- **Change in social life:** In earlier times, it was a common trend that work or profession was governed by the caste of the person. The person whose father followed a certain profession or business also followed the same. It was taken as the acceptable trend that was generally followed by all.

With the influence of urban culture, the old traditions and the usual way of life has changed. Youngsters are taking up new professions according to their capabilities and opportunities available. This is not according to the old customs or traditions but due to the urban influence and modern outlook.

With modernization and urbanization has come a new era of tolerance. Old traditions are slowly being replaced with new liberal thoughts due to the new system of education and job opportunities. Urban and modern influence have made people broad minded and modern in their outlook and thinking.

- **Reduced influence of panchayats:** With the urban influence in rural areas, it is found that the way the village panchayats exerted their influence on the rural people is now no longer the same. As people are getting influenced by the modern developments and thinking, village panchayats are losing their hold on common people.
- **Change in the style of living:** The urban culture has its influence on the lifestyle of rural people. The villagers are greatly influenced by the latest trends in fashion. The food items also are of the urban style. Items such as aerated drinks, coffee, and cigarettes, which were not liked or consumed by villagers earlier, have now become popular amongst them. Modern gadgets like mobile phones and televisions are also increasingly being used in the rural areas. The utensils of earlier times which were mostly earthen have now been replaced with glass, steel, and other metals. Traditional dishes which were cooked on the *chulhas*, are now being replaced with fast instant food like instant noodles and burgers, a favourite of rural children. In short, all the culture of urban areas are being now increasingly followed by the rural people.
- **Change in the modes of entertainment or recreations:** In the earlier times, one found limited modes of entertainment in the villages, but today things have totally changed. Television is a common electronic item seen in almost every household. The villages also have cybercafés which keeps them in touch with the rest of the world. Mobile phones seem to have contracted the whole world into these gadgets. Newspapers and magazines have become a common feature in villages.
- **Social interaction:** Mostly in villages, people had a primary group in which their interaction was very intimate. But due to changing times and spread of urban culture, interactions within the group is becoming limited.
- **Rural migration:** Migration between rural and urban areas has led to a connection between these two ends. People move from rural areas to urban for work. This movement between rural and urban areas has brought both these ends close to each other.

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This movement or mobility has been instrumental in bringing urban influence in rural areas. The rural people who work in cities are working at very low profile jobs. They are mostly working as labourers, salesmen, or running small shacks. But whatever the type of job or work, they are exposed to urban lifestyle and grandeur which lures them towards urban lifestyle. Some rural people even shift to towns where they work and visit their native places once or twice a month. Some do not go back to their villages at all as they find village life backward and slow paced. Working in cities is seen as a matter of pride and high social prestige.

In some cases, the process of urbanization has some negative influence as well. Wherever an industry is set up in a village area, it needs to be evacuated. This causes the native villagers to get uprooted from their own land.

It is also observed that the areas which are close to metropolitan cities have a great influence of the urban culture. People from rural areas who come to cities for work carry back a lot of information to their counterparts in the villages. This creates a hankering among them to come to cities and experience visiting places like cinema halls, parks, and shopping malls. Influenced by all these, others also start moving to the cities away from rural setting.

- **Role of transport:** Rural and urban areas are the two ends of a continuum—a stage of transition from one end to another. While the rural setting deals with a natural habitat and environment, the urban setting is more to do with development and progress. The two may be contrasted yet have a common link. While the rural areas are still in an underdeveloped stage, the cities are more developed and advanced.

People from rural areas move towards bigger places in search of work. A major role in this is played by transport and the different means of communication. It has helped to bridge the gap between the rural and urban areas. It has brought new awareness among the rural people.

Economy of the villages has also got a boost due to a rise in transportation. Rural areas are mostly agricultural areas, but the marketing of the produce is a problem for the rural people. With good transportation facilities, they can easily get their produce to the cities to sell. Similarly, big companies like Reliance come to the doorstep of rural people in areas like Himachal Pradesh, the biggest producer of apples. Reliance picks up the crop from the orchards itself saving the village people the expenses of packing, transportation, etc.

Similarly, flower cultivation in Himachal Pradesh has got a boost due to good transportation facilities. Flowers are perishable and needs to be transported quickly. Therefore, good transport system is needed to boost this business as well.

Transportation provides a good opportunity for work and employment to villagers and to people who may not be academically qualified. This gives them a financial independence. When people from rural areas start moving out, they learn more and start looking for ways to improve themselves. This helps them to progress and raise their standard of living.

All the above factors show how the rural areas have been influenced by the urban culture. The modernization has helped the people from rural areas to move out and explore the whole world. The increase in modes of transport and communication has made life easier and faster.

2.3.2 Folkways and Urban Continuum

According to Reuter and Hart (1933), 'The folkways are simple habits of action common to the members of the group; they are the ways of the folks that are somewhat standardised and have some degree of traditional sanction for their persistence'. Maclver and Page (1949) defined it as: 'The folkways are the recognized or accepted ways of behaving in the society.'

In simple terms, folkways are the customary, normal and habitual ways of a group to meet certain needs or solving day-to-day problems. Sumner writes in his book *Folkways* that folkways are the product of the 'frequent repetition of petty acts, often by great numbers acting in concert, or at least acting in the same way when face to face with the same need'. They are unconscious, spontaneous and uncoordinated adjustments of an individual to his environment. Folkways include innumerable ways of behaviour that have evolved about social living. They are the customs and usages which have been passed from generations and to which new elements are added according to the changing needs. As said by G. A. Lundberg, 'folkways designate those uniformities in the behaviour of a group which develop relatively spontaneous and even unconsciously in adopting common life conditions and which become established through repetition and general recurrence.' Folkways differ from customs; in that the former are of a more general and wider character than customs and cover all those modes of behaviour or spontaneous usages which are not included in the term 'customs'. Thus, for example, shaking hands, eating four meals a day, dividing responsibilities so that the husband is the supporter of the family and the wife is a dependant, not killing the holy cow, or taking drinks after dinner are examples of folkways rather than of customs. However, the difference between folkways and custom is largely a matter of degree.

Variety of folkways: Folkways are numerous, their number is infinite. The folkways of eating are interesting. The Hindu Brahmins do not eat meat. The Bengalis prefer rice to bread. The Jains do not take garlic and onion. Horse meat is eaten in continental Europe, but not in the United States. In regard to the manner or style of consuming food, the folkways also make an interesting reading. People from Madras eat rice with their hands in a peculiar way while those in Uttar Pradesh prefer to have it with spoon. The Brahmins eat food in the kitchen while other castes may prefer to have their food outside. Similarly, ideas about marriage, death, sex, worship, birth, kinship, dress and art show a wide variety of folkways.

Changing character of folkways: Folkways are not static but change with changing social conditions. As said by Sumner, they are like products of natural forces 'which men unconsciously set in operation, or they are like the instinctive ways of animals, which are developed out of experience, which reach a final form of maximum adaptation to an interest, which are handed down by tradition and admit of no exception or variation yet change to meet new conditions'. So folkways undergo comparatively continuous and rapid change. Folkways connected with the beliefs and practices regarding family, property and marriage resist change more than those connected with the economic functions of a group. An individual starts an innovation, others finding the innovation better than the old one accept and follow it. When accepted and followed by many individuals of the group, it spreads exerting pressure on every member within the group to adopt or conform to it. When adopted by all, it becomes a folkway. If you ask an individual why he behaves in a particular way, his reply would be that he is following others' ways or that this is the accepted way of behaviour. As in the case of folksong or folktale, similarly in the case of folkway it is difficult to trace its origin or originator.

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During the course of time, the folkway undergoes numerous changes that it is almost impossible to credit any single individual with its origination. Folkways are not the result of any deliberate planning or conscious design, though some of them may be so, but arise unconsciously and automatically in society.

The primary forms of human association are far older than the secondary. The family, band, class, tribe and small village long antedate urban society, with its masses of people divided into many special interest groups. The very early forms of human society and culture, however, can only be inferred. Earliest men apparently lived in relatively small bands, which formed the basis of family and blood ties. Their economy consisted of seed and roof material gathering, hunting and fishing. At that time social organization must have been very rudimentary. Today, two-thirds to three-fourths of the world's people live in 'what may be called folk or peasant' societies. Their cultures is intermediate between that of the band or tribe and urban patterns. Folk culture has much in common with tribal culture, solidarity of family life, place of religion, forms of moral control, and simple social order, generally.

Mores

Sumner applied the term *mores* to those folkways which are considered by the group to be of great significance and, therefore, rather indispensable to its welfare. He writes, 'I mean by mores the popular usages and traditions when they include a judgement that they are conducive to societal welfare, and when they exert coercion on the individual to conform to them although they are not co-ordinated by any authority'. *Mores* is a Latin word for customs and just as customs cannot be violated by any individual, so also *mores* cannot be violated without incurring severe punishment. *Mores* are in fact the folkways considered as regulators of behaviour. They express the group sense of what is fitting best, right and conducive to social welfare. They imply a valuable judgement about the folkways.

Distinction between Folkways and Mores

A distinction can be made between *mores* and folkways. Sumner says when the folkways take on a philosophy of right living and a life policy of welfare, they transform to *mores*. Thus, when the folkways have added to them, conceptions of right and wrong and group welfare, they are converted into *mores*. While if an individual disobeys any folkways, he/she cannot violate the *mores* because it represents group standards. Although it may be sometimes difficult to differentiate between *mores* and folkways, there being a few border-line cases, the line dividing them is clear and definite. Folkways may or may not be conducive to societal welfare but *mores* are always so. The *mores* represent the living character of the group or community. They are always considered right by the group that shares them.

Variety of mores: From the above analysis, it is clear that *mores* determine our conceptions of what is proper or improper; right or wrong. *Mores* are not the result of deliberate design or, conscious planning. Nor are they universally alike. Chance and accident play greater role in their creation. The westerners take off the hat to show respect, the Hindus touch feet of elders as a mark of respect. One group prohibits the marriage of its members with outsiders, another allows it. One group does not condemn polygamy, another condemns it. One group condemns the remarriage of widows, another recommends it. One group has a strict sex code, another does not have any. Thus, we come across great variations in the *mores* as we move from one group to another.

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Changing character of mores: *Mores* can make something appear right at one time and wrong at another. Not long ago slavery was allowed and was sanctioned by church and state, but today this is condemned; some time ago polygamy was in the *mores* but today for a woman to have two husbands at the same time is hardly conceivable. Similarly, try to perceive and compare the range of approved activities of women of three generations with that of today. At the beginning of the century it would have been prohibited for an Indian woman to work in office but today, it is allowed. One may also compare the present attire of women with that of the costumes worn by women of only a few decades ago.

Mores can make anything appear right or correct. The power of *mores* is so strong that according to Sumner there is nothing which the *mores* cannot make right. The *mores* in the United States made slavery a punishable practice hundred years ago. The *mores* in Nazi Germany condemned democracy. The *mores* made it right for the Eskimos to kill their old people. In ancient Sparta, infanticide was an established custom. It follows, therefore, that all our moral or ethical ideas are relative to time and place and that there is universal or absolute system of *mores*.

Importance of Mores

Mores play a significant role in society. MacIver enumerates the following functions of *mores*:

- They determine much of an individual's behaviour. *Mores* both compel and forbid behaviour. They are effective instruments of social control.
- They identify an individual with the group. By following the *mores*, the individual identifies with his/her group.
- They are guardians of solidarity. The *mores* hold the members of a group together.

Urban Continuum

Urban communities differ from folk communities both in their structure and in their culture. The simplest summary of the differences between the two types of social organization is that they tend to be opposites; whereas the folk community is homogeneous, the urban is heterogeneous. City and village are two distinct communities. According to MacIver, 'the difference between two varying ways of life, the urban and rural way of life, represents in a very revealing way'. One of the widely prevalent social contrasts is the contrast of the social environment. It also permits us to distinguish between two types of community organizations. The city is an environment created by society, in which for the purpose of community living, many aspects of natural environment are modified or entirely eliminated. Under rural conditions, social attitudes and social institutions present characteristic differences from those developed within the city. There is a sharp difference between the city and village life, though with the expansion of urban influence on the villages this difference is becoming more and more a matter of degree. However, in spite of the recent trends of urbanization, the villages still retain many of their traditional features and present a sharp contrast with the urban life.

- **Force of traditional mores:** In rural community, the force of traditional *mores* and bonds of family solidarity are more dominant than in the urban ones. The village family is generally patriarchal in nature in which the status of the individual is the status of his family. There is less individual questioning and rebellion. The family determines as to where and when a family member should marry and so

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on. Not only marriage but also religion, recreation, occupation are determined by family traditions. In the words of Biesanz and Biesanz, 'In the rural, community custom is king, the folkways and *mores* control most of behaviour'.

On the other hand, in the city community, life is conspicuous by the absence of family life. Social control becomes the activity of specialized agencies. Family control is less. Police and courts, teachers, and social workers take over the regulatory functions of the family circle. If a person violates family marriage customs, he/she is not boycotted by the urban community.

- **Primary contacts:** A village community is marked by immediate contacts between its members. We find members in a village community helping each other and sharing the joy and sorrows of each other. In the village everybody knows each other. There is greater 'we feeling' in the village than in the urban community. In city life, on the other hand, it is not so. The inhabitants of a city hardly know each other. Sometimes they do not even know their next door neighbours. There is an atmosphere of indifference and callousness in a city. In the city, one can escape the oppressive control of any primary group when one wishes by simply disappearing into the sea of strangers.
- **Simplicity and uniformity:** Life in a village community is simple and uniform. There are few ambitious men and fewer excitements. The villagers lead a uniform life of tilling land and rearing animals. The poor turning rich overnight or the rich being reduced to beggary in a day are cases unknown in the village. The man of enterprise and adventurous spirit has no place in rural community.
- **Specialization:** Another contrast between village and urban community is concerning the modes of production. In the village as a rule, only a predominant type of occupation, i.e., agriculture prevails. The city, on the other hand, is the place for all, the semi-skilled worker, the skilled, and so on. It is a heterogeneous group of people engaged in various pursuits. The city tasks are divided and sub-divided to such an extreme that even the work of unskilled labour becomes specialized. The condition of competition has greater velocity in the town than in the villages.
- **Proper placing of all:** In the city, individuals are rated more in terms of accomplishments than one is rated in the rural community. The city shifts and segregates 'all of its members according to their ability and finds a fit place to each specialization' which is also seen in the physical structure of the city. Distinctive areas are marked for different activities. Chandigarh, the capital of Punjab has been divided into different sectors, each sector with marked peculiarities. In the Western world, specialization of areas is followed more than it is done in India.
- **Position of women:** Specialization in the city has also influenced the life of women. The city offers more and more opportunities to women. If the social life had remained predominantly a village life, women would have been the drudges in the household; Industrialization and specialization have brought women to offices and factories which has altered their outlook and habits and liberated them from the exclusiveness of domesticity.
- **Contrast of qualities:** City community evokes in man the qualities which stand in sharp contrast with those demanded by rural community. The village calls for persistence, a more stern and slogged fidelity to the way of life. Villagers are in

constant contact with nature and considers nature a friend and an enemy as well. Villagers are superstitious and religious. Whereas, cities require alertness and quick responses to changing situations. City dwellers are more tolerant in matters of religious beliefs, modes of life, tastes and opinions. In a rural community, the rural codes are fixed and strict. Any violation of these, leads to bitter estrangements and sometimes to personal tragedies. The absence of a common mode of occupation and lack of belongingness makes city dwellers self-centred and detached. They leave one city to live in another without the feeling of any loss. On the other hand, countrymen when uprooted from their villages feel lost and unhappy.

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Check Your Progress

3. Differentiate between the rural and urban areas with regard to their religious ideas and thinking.
4. How have the urban areas influenced the working of Panchayats in the rural areas?
5. What are folkways?
6. What are mores according to Sumner?

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Check Your Progress

10. What are Samitis?
11. According to Valmiki's Ramayan what are the two types of villages?
12. Who was the connecting thread between the government and the common people?
13. How were the villages categorized during Chandragupta's rule?

2.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- A rural society is a society which is thinly populated. Agriculture is the main occupation of villagers. People living in rural societies lead a very simple life with simple traditions and culture surrounded by a natural environment.
- There is homogeneity in their professions, ways of living, dress and traditions. In such societies, the rate of change is very slow as there is lack of facilities like transportation, technology and communication.
- Community sentiment may be defined as the feeling of unity among the members of a community. In absence of such a unity, no group can claim to be a 'community'.
- Family is the basic unit of Indian social structure. It has an important place in the rural society. Apart from performing various basic and important tasks, the family is also involved in socialization, social control and performs various economic activities.

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- Internal organizations govern and determine the social and individual life of the rural people in India. Normally all villages have Panchayats, head of which is elected with the consent of all the adult members of the village.
- In rural India, the political behaviour of every individual is mostly governed by religious considerations.
- Religious ideas and thinking is more deep and strong in rural areas than in urban areas. The rural people base their thinking on faith while religion in cities is based on reason.
- The relationships in villages are among a smaller group of people, so they are more direct and personal. Whereas, in cities and towns relationships are numerous and also indirect and impersonal.
- Life in villages is slow and laid back in comparison to cities.
- The fast development and progress in the present times has had a strong influence not only on urban but rural life as well.
- Migration between rural and urban areas has led to a connection between these two ends. People move from rural areas to urban for work.
- Family ties and family system are much stronger in rural areas than in urban. This means that the functions performed by families is steadily decreasing.
- The culture in villages is of static nature. It is not as fine as city culture which is changing constantly.
- In earlier times, it was a common trend that work or profession was governed by the caste of the person. The person whose father followed a certain profession or business also followed the same. Present youngsters are taking up new professions according to their capabilities and opportunities available.
- The folkways can be described as the recognized ways of behaviour and acting in society which arise automatically within a group to meet the problems of social living.
- Sumner applied the term *mores* to those folkways who are considered by the group to be of great significance and, therefore, rather indispensable to its welfare.
- Family plays a decisive role in the material and cultural life of villages and in moulding the psychological characteristics of the rural collectivity.
- The village was the only unit that was stable in spite of problems and troubles. These were stable because of the agrarian's aspect that led to a stabilizing factor in villages. The villages were autonomous in their functioning.
- According to Valmiki's Ramayana, there were two types of villages. The *ghosh* (small villages) and the *gram* (big villages).
- All through the Buddhist texts which date back to the 5th century BC, one gets a reference of agricultural systems and the village communities which were self-governing.
- During Chandragupta's rule, the villages were categorized into three types depending on their areas. The largest or biggest ones were called *jyeshtha*. The middle ones the *madhyama*, and the smaller ones were the *kanishtha*.
- Poverty can be removed when agriculture is improved. India is not only a country of villages but its economy is also mainly agriculture. Study of villages can help to formulate various programmes for village improvement and poverty eradication.

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- Solution of rural problems can bring about change in the rural society. Through village studies, we can come to know about the problems that village societies face.
- Village community has to be studied in totality in the interest of democratic decentralization. India can improve economically and politically only when decentralization of economic and political powers take place. Rural study helps to formulate programmes to do so.

2.5 KEY TERMS

- **Rural society:** A rural society is a society which is thinly populated and the main emphasis of which is agriculture.
- **Little Community:** Little Community is a group of people inhabiting a definite locality bound together by the feeling of oneness.
- **Community sentiment:** Community sentiment may be defined as the feeling of unity among the members of a community consequent upon common life.
- **Folkways:** The folkways can be described as the recognized ways of behaviour and acting in society which arise automatically within a group to meet the problems of social living.
- **Mores:** Mores to those folkways who are considered by the group to be of great significance and, therefore, rather indispensable to its welfare.

2.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. A rural society is a society which is thinly populated and the main emphasis of which is agriculture. The people living in such societies lead a very simple life with simple traditions and culture surrounded by a natural environment.
2. Community sentiment provides the following three elements:
 - We-feeling
 - Role feeling
 - Sense of dependency
3. Religious ideas and thinking is more deep and strong in rural areas than urban. The rural people base their thinking on faith while the religion in cities is more based on reason.
4. With the urban influence in other areas, it is found that the way the village panchayats exerted an influence on the rural areas is now no longer there. As people are more influenced by the modern developments and thinking, village panchayats are losing their strong hold on the common people like earlier times.
5. The folkways can be described as the recognized ways of behaviour and acting in society which arise automatically within a group to meet the problems of social living.
6. Sumner applied the term *mores* to those folkways who are considered by the group to be of great significance and, therefore, rather indispensable to its welfare.

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7. One characteristic of the rural family is that it is generally agriculture-oriented, i.e., a very large majority of its members are engaged in the agricultural occupation.
8. Daniel Thorner rejected the often-described classification of cultivators in rural areas in three categories: landlords, tenants, and labourers. This was on the ground that one and the same man can belong simultaneously to all three of the above mentioned categories.
9. Daniel Thorner has analysed agrarian social structure on the basis of three criteria, viz., (a) income obtained from the soil (i.e., rent, own cultivation, or wages), (b) the nature of rights (i.e., ownership, tenancy, sharecropping and no rights at all), and (c) the extent of fieldwork actually performed (i.e., doing no work, doing partial work, doing total work, and doing work for others).
10. Dr. K. P. Jayaswal, in his pre-eminent study, *Hindu Polity*, wrote that 'national life and activities in the earliest times on record were expressed through popular assemblies and institution'. These gatherings were called *Samitis*, meaning 'meeting together'.
11. According to Valmiki's Ramayana, there were two types of villages. The *ghosh* (small villages) and the *gram* (big villages).
12. The *gramani* was the connecting thread between the government and the common people.
13. During Chandragupta's rule, the villages were categorized into three types depending on their areas. The largest or biggest ones were called *jyeshtha*. The middle ones the *madhyama*, and the smaller ones were the *kanishtha*.

2.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. State the role played by the urban areas in influencing the rural areas.
2. State the importance of *mores*.
3. How can rural religion be studied?
4. Which three aspects govern the study of Rural Religion?
5. What do you understand by rituals?
6. What are the types of peasants?
7. How does the ancient sociology describe villages?
8. List the functions of the *gramani*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the rural society and also discuss its features.
2. Critically analyse the rural-urban differences and continuum.
3. What are the differences between rural and urban areas with respect to social interactions?
4. Evaluate the institution of family, caste system, religion and economy.
5. Discuss the various features of village studies.
6. Write a note on the Indian villages of the Buddhist era.

NOTES

1.9 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 RURAL SOCIETY AND RURAL SOCIAL INSTITUTION

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Unit Objectives
- 3.2 Institution of Family
 - 3.2.1 Caste System
 - 3.2.2 Religion
 - 3.2.3 Agrarian Class Structure
 - 3.2.4 Agrarian Aspect of Rural Sociology
- 3.3 Village Studies and its Significance
 - 3.3.1 Sociology in the Ancient Indian Village
 - 3.3.2 Indian Villages during the Buddhist Era
 - 3.3.3 Village System in Mauryan Period
 - 3.3.4 Administration in Villages in India during the Beginning of the 19th Century
 - 3.3.5 Significance of Village Studies
 - 3.3.6 Some Village Studies in India
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 Key Terms
- 3.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.7 Questions and Exercises
- 3.8 Further Reading

3.0 INTRODUCTION

India, being an agricultural country finds villages at the top of its priority list. Rural society includes all the people living in the villages. The socio-cultural environment of the village along with the norms, way of life and traditions followed in rural areas form the basis for the rural social life.

Rural society is characterized by a homogeneity in social, cultural and economic aspects of village life, where people lead almost the same kind of life with simple dressing and food habits, culture and traditions. Family is an important unit in these societies where the joint family system is still preferred. There is lack of individuality in these societies and there are hardly any turmoil amongst the members of the society. A society is never static, it keeps changing. Similarly, a rural society too undergoes a series of changes due to development at a great speed. In this unit, you will be acquainted with the features of the rural society, the differences between rural and urban areas, the institution of family, caste, religion and economy, and the features of village studies.

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe the rural society and discuss its features
- Analyse the rural-urban differences and continuum

constant contact with nature and considers nature a friend and an enemy as well. Villagers are superstitious and religious. Whereas, cities require alertness and quick responses to changing situations. City dwellers are more tolerant in matters of religious beliefs, modes of life, tastes and opinions. In a rural community, the rural codes are fixed and strict. Any violation of these, leads to bitter estrangements and sometimes to personal tragedies. The absence of a common mode of occupation and lack of belongingness makes city dwellers self-centred and detached. They leave one city to live in another without the feeling of any loss. On the other hand, countrymen when uprooted from their villages feel lost and unhappy.

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3.2 INSTITUTION OF FAMILY

The rural family structure is very close-knit. All members interact and bond with each other, whether it is a joint or a nuclear family. Most of the families in villages today have a joint set up where all the brothers and their respective families stay in the same house sharing a common kitchen. However, with modernization and with the youth moving out for work, changes have taken place. Despite nuclear families being formed, the connection between parents and children, husband and wife, and among children too are much stronger than is seen in the urban areas. The reason for this could be that all are associated with a common occupation—agriculture. This gives them ample opportunity to spend time together. All of them together work on a piece of land, which is commonly shared by the whole family; the elders share their experiences with the younger generations; the control of the land usually remains with the eldest member and everyone shares the same aspirations, values and beliefs. The mutual dependence brings about more closeness and affection. There is a collective consciousness rather than an individualistic attitude. The rural household always thinks of a family as one single unit and not individual members.

With modernization and spread of education, there is more awareness, among people. Members are moving out in search of greener pastures, and the central control of the family is diminishing. The members are becoming less dependent on each other. Yet, familial ties remain strong, a lot stronger than is seen in the urban areas. The institution called family continues to remain strong. Changes are taking place with the young generation moving to the cities and not wanting to return to the villages due to poor facilities and lack of job opportunities. The financial independence of the youngsters is making them less attached to the family. Yet, the family, as an institution is not falling apart or crumbling.

3.2.1 Caste System

In India, mostly before Independence, the caste system had very strong roots. It was very rigid in the rural areas and dominated their social structure. The ownership of land was totally decided on the basis of caste. But by 1950, a lot of changes were witnessed. Some castes, which were earlier very strong and enjoyed high status, gradually lost their importance. Similarly, some castes which had been dominated, came up, acquiring economic and even political powers as well as importance. Though the rural people still consider their caste as important, in the present situation, owing to economic freedom, a lot of changes have taken place. People are changing their own attitude towards the over-authoritarian influence of caste. A. R. Desai, Yogendra Singh, Andra Bateilli, B. R. Chauhan and other scholars have also spoken of these slow changes in the caste system; the disappearance of the caste divide and emergence of the class divide instead.

Check Your Progress

3. Differentiate between the rural and urban areas with regard to their religious ideas and thinking.
4. How have the urban areas influenced the working of Panchayats in the rural areas?
5. What are folkways?
6. What are mores according to Sumner?

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Caste system earlier was evident by the debt pattern of villagers. In the past, one caste comprised people who mostly gave loans or credit and the other caste predominantly comprised the poor creditors. This was a hereditary pattern and went on for years. R.K. Nehru also spoke of the pattern of indebtedness and credit and their links with the castes in villages.

Major change is sweeping over the habitat pattern too. Earlier, the area in which houses were built depended upon the caste of the person. The type of house built also strongly depended on the caste that one belonged to. However, in present times, all these factors are determined by the economic status of a person and not the caste. One reason, which has brought about this change is the mobility—social, economic and occupational. Youngsters have moved to towns in search of education and job opportunities. Also, the new generation does not think it necessary to carry on the family occupation, which is usually based on caste. They prefer to work in the cities and take up jobs based on their educational qualifications and not their caste.

Education has led to a lot of changes. The once financially strong castes have now lost their financial superiority and the castes which were economically weak have now become financially strong and more stable.

Caste played a major role earlier in the attitude of rural people, especially towards education of girls. But today, with education, this attitude has changed for the better. People from the most backward castes are now sending their daughters to schools, colleges and universities to get better education.

In rural areas, religious freedom used to be greatly determined by caste. Earlier, some castes were not allowed to enter temples or participate in auspicious occasions. But today, all castes are allowed to enter temples.

Caste, however, continues to play a crucial role in political events. People still seem to vote for or reject candidates according to their castes. However, change is taking place slowly but steadily there too. People generally vote for candidates based on their performance and capabilities, while earlier, leadership was totally influenced by caste. In the present times, people are less bothered about caste. They focus more on the changes taking place at the central level and accordingly, make their choice.

The *jajmani* system has slowly died. There are new laws in place, which have affected the old and traditional caste systems prevalent in villages. Inter-caste relations have changed for the better and become more amiable. Inter-caste marriages which were taboo earlier are now becoming common.

Some major structural and peripheral changes influencing the rural caste system are as follows:

- Modernization and Sanskritization
- Education without Sanskrit—the monopoly of higher caste
- Proletarianism
- Hegemony of the higher castes
- Increased hostility
- Shift in sources of power

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1. Modernization and Sanskritization

We will discuss both the above concepts individually. Let us first discuss modernization. Modernization means the inclusion of modern trends and ways into the presently existing system of life. This has affected each and every aspect of social life.

One major event we witness in this context is the fact that, some older or traditional occupations are now being rejected altogether because of its low-level or status in society. Some castes have totally given up their traditional occupation because it was considered lower or impure. People have taken up jobs or work which is more paying and of a high profile with reference to modern trends of society.

Modernization being a vast term takes into itself the major aspects of life. It includes education, lifestyle, dressing up, modern career options, politics, power, and prestige along with other aspects of life.

K.L. Sharma, while observing the effect of modernization on the caste occupation mentions that the upper castes always had a monopoly or total control over good income, power and prestige. He said that it was always the high caste people who got the best jobs. They were the ones who exercised all the power and prestige in society. High income was always associated with high castes.

Sanskritization is the concept introduced by M.N. Srinivas in the 1960s. He used it as a process of social change and mobility. He has described Sanskritization as a social change within the caste system. Sanskritization means when a low caste imitates and apes the customs of a high caste to prove itself to be of a higher caste. They do so by selecting some of their own traditional styles of having and copying the trends of high class people.

In villages of Jammu and Kashmir the *kumhar* caste has totally given up making earthen utensils, etc. The youngsters hate the profession followed by their forefathers and have rejected it outright. They have taken up other means of survival. They do not even consider following their traditional occupation because according to them it is low. Similarly, in some parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh, the *chamars* have given up their traditional occupation of shoe-making, removal and skinning of dead animals. This again is because they thought it to be 'impure' and polluted.

According to Srinivas the concept of modernization in India started with the coming of British in India. He states that it was because of Britishers that India became more modern and advanced in their thinking and outlook towards life. The number of convent schools which were set up at that time brought Indians up to a certain international standard which was much ahead of the standard present at that time

Sociological thinkers like Durkheim, Weber, and Marx also have major ideas on modernization. Durkheim says that the main characteristic of modernization is differentiation. He strongly supports that with more differentiation there will be more modernity and cohesiveness in society.

Karl Marx states that modernization means commoditization. Commoditisation means that all the things in modern society are reduced to the status of a commodity (these include every items of literature, arts, etc). Just like we have product manufactured in factories which are called commodities, similarly cultural things are also called commodities. Marx Weber on the other hand feels that modernization means rationality. A person will be said to be modern if he follows a rational approach in life.

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2. Education without Sanskrit — The Monopoly of Higher Caste

While on one hand we found the concept of sanskritization—where a lower caste wanted to be like a higher caste by following its customs and traditions—we come across another tradition called as desanskritization. This is when higher class people interact with lower caste people. Today, jats, rajputs, and even brahmins do not hesitate in touching an untouchable. This change in attitude is due to the education and modern outlook.

Education: The Monopoly of Higher Caste

It has been observed that the major reason or factor which changed the status is education. It is education which brings about a new awareness among people. Education makes a person aware of his rights and privileges. In most societies it has been seen that the higher castes have always had a control over higher education, i.e. high class people are more educated than the low class people.

Higher education is the factor which determines a higher standard of living and higher profile jobs. The higher castes were the ones who mostly availed these opportunities. K.L. Sharma is of the view that it is college and university education that extends the horizon of occupational possibilities by providing the formal qualifications for superior occupational possibilities which in turn are required for superior occupations and superiority to those who achieve it.

With the higher education there, immediately arose a clear class distinction. The people with higher education made a special or higher place for themselves which was above the level of ordinary people. Since the higher castes were the ones availing this benefit they have made a special status and higher place for themselves.

3. Proletarianism

There is a major change in rural society, today. Earlier, the *zamindari* system being very strong made the *zamindar* hold a very high position and status in society. The *zamindar* work for him. But today, things are changing. The low caste is aware of the worth of education and also has ventured out of the control of the *zamindar* or the *jagirdar*. They refuse to go in for manual and petty work and even lower class jobs. The Rajputs and other higher castes are also seen doing manual work, so they have themselves willingly come into the category of the proletarian.

4. Hegemony of Higher Castes

It is noticed in the country that in spite of the opportunities of development provided to the lower castes, the upper castes still have a strong hold in society. This is because they own larger portions of the land which is a very important criterion in India which is an agricultural-based country.

Jan Breman who has done extensive study on peasants and migrants belonging to Surat (in Gujarat) and its surrounding areas talks, and tells of a peculiar feature of this place. He tells that the *kanvi patidars* have occupied a higher status in the field of agriculture. They are the ones who own larger portions of land. The *halpatis* earlier called *dublas* have been reduced to very small portions of land. The fact is that the *halpatis* were once the important group of agriculturists who have now been reduced to mere proletarian status.

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5. Increased Hostility

V.S. Naipaul observes, 'People everywhere have ideas now of who they are and what they owe themselves. The process quickened with the economic development that came after independence; what was hidden in 1962, or not easy to see and was perhaps only in a state of becoming, has become clearer. The liberation of spirit that has come to India could not come as release alone. In India, with its layer below layer of distress and cruelty it had to come as disturbance. It had to come as rage and revolt. India is now a country of million little mutinies'.

After having been subjugated for so many years, the lower castes have now started retaliating against the oppression. They are up in arms against the higher castes who have hitherto tortured them. This new awakening among the lower castes can be seen in the form of strikes or even violence at times to show their anger.

6. Shift in the Sources of Power

In the earlier times it was believed that larger the size of land owned by a person, more was the power that he exercised. This is why the *zamindar* or *jagirdar* were the people of unquestioned authority and power. But today, the situation is quite changed. It is not the land possessed by a person but the power he has that determines his status. This power one gets from his position in the Gram Panchayat, Vidhan Sabha, or the Parliament. At rural level it is the Gram Panchayat which rests all the power of the village. So this position is a powerful and influential one. A person who is in a government job also commands that authority or respect. His position in government service assumes him respect and prestige.

There is a clear change not only in villages but also in bigger areas like towns or cities. The shift in power has a very clear and evident appearance at all levels of social organization.

Andre Beteille who did lot of research in Tanjore says, 'With the introduction of adult franchise and of village councils, land ownership, the traditional status has ceased to be the only basis of power in the village. The strength of organized members has now become more important than it ever was'.

The above fact is very evident in society all around us where we find the power of the traditional *zamindar* or similar system decreasing while the strength of organized leadership becoming more visible and noticeable. This is changing the pattern of rural social stratification. This is like forming the water tight compartments of castes more permeable.

3.2.2 Religion

In rural areas, religion may be analysed on the basis of the following characteristics:

- **Religion as a belief:** When we speak of religion as a belief, the discussion centres around all the beliefs including witchcraft, worship of ancestors, magic, being possessed by spirits and so on. All these beliefs or ideals are associated with a group, religion or sect. These beliefs are common and strongly adhered to by all those who are members of the group/sect or follow that religion.
- **Religion as a practice:** Religion as a practice includes all the different practices and activities associated with different religions. These include the religious prayers, sacrifices, and all the rituals associated with that particular religion.

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- **Religion as an institution:** Religious beliefs affect the society in general. In fact, it is a form of strong social control and integration. It influences the behaviour of the people and ensures a strong bond of social unity by promoting a community of thought.

All these religious forces were very strong during the pre-Independence time. People in villages are much more influenced by religion than their urban counterparts. One of the main reasons for this was the fact that India is basically an agricultural country. Crops depend on rains and other natural factors. It is believed that all these are controlled by nature gods, like Indra (god of rain), etc. So rural people firmly believed a good crop depended upon the mercy of gods.

Along with agriculture, each aspect of rural life is interwoven with religious influence. All rituals from birth to death are associated with religion. Rural life is strongly dominated by all these traditions. A set of rituals is associated with each caste in villages. All members of the rural castes or groups follow all the customs set by the religious priests and do not defy any ritual. This also shows a strong social honesty to the traditional customary ways of rural rules.

Temples were very important places in villages. These were the seats of all religious worship. Not only did temples provide education, they were also venues for cultural activities and social functions in villages. They were the seats of social and political meetings as well.

Temples housed the village deities. The gods and goddesses were worshipped there. The temple priest carried out the religious prayer every day and was also responsible for the cleanliness of the temple complex. The temple had a strong hold on all the affairs of the village. But with time, the total authoritarian control of religion and temples started to diminish.

Villagers now do not limit themselves to the dominating influence of religion. With the popularity of social media, the world is becoming a small place, and more secular ideas are being propagated. The age-old orthodox traditions are now being challenged and done away with. Whenever there are clashes between the old orthodox ways and new ideas, they are settled with the help of a democratic outlook. Though religion holds an important place in not only rural but also urban lives, the advances in science and technology cannot be ignored. These have to be incorporated, otherwise India will lag behind in scientific progress.

3.2.3 Agrarian Class Structure

The rural society in India can be divided into four main classes. According to A. R. Desai (1959) the proportions of the four main groups are as follows:

- **Group 1 (Landowners):** This group forms 22 per cent of the total group.
- **Group 2 (Tenants):** This group forms 27 per cent of the total.
- **Group 3 (agricultural labourers):** This group forms 31 per cent of the total.
- **Group 4 (non-agriculturists):** This group forms 20 per cent of the total.

The marginal cultivators form a huge majority (almost 60 per cent) and have less than two hectares of land. The small cultivators have two to five hectares of land and form 16 per cent of the total. The medium cultivators with 5 to 10 hectares of land form 6 per cent of the total. The big cultivators with over ten hectares of land have 18 per cent of total ownership. In villages, each family has less than 1 acre (or 0.4 hectare) of

land. Food crops are sown on 75 per cent of land. The farmers sell almost about 35 per cent of their total produce. The farmers in villages mostly sell almost 65 per cent of their commodities in the village, to the local traders.

The marketing of these products is mostly done by intermediaries, who buy from rural farmers and sell in the markets or *mandis*. The intermediaries play with the lives of farmers as they are the ones who dispose of the produce and they are the ones who have the money. Sometimes they exploit the illiterate farmers and give them very little money for their produce. But with education, situations and conditions are improving for the rural people.

The agrarian relationship in villages may be put into three main categories, according to Daniel Thorner (1956):

- (i) **Maalik** or the agricultural landlord
- (ii) **Kisan** or the working peasant (also tenants)
- (iii) **Mazdoor** or the agricultural labourer

The *maliks* own the land, and therefore, they get their income from the share of crops grown on their land. They may get cash or kind from the tenants who work on their fields. They may have managers to take care of the fields and the labourers or may themselves take care of their fields. *Maliks*/landlords may be of two types:

- (i) The type who are generally not present on the fields themselves.
- (ii) The type who are themselves physically present in the fields.

The *Kisans* are the farmers who work on fields. They differ from the *maliks* on the basis of land owned by them. The *Kisans* themselves, along with other members of the family work on the fields. Their incomes are so poor sometimes that they have to work as agricultural labourers.

Mazdoors are the landless people who work on other peoples' lands. They are paid either in cash or in kind. Sometimes, when there is no work in their own village they migrate to other villages or cities to work. They may work as agricultural labourers or labourers at construction or industrial sites.

According to Daniel Thorner, the rural agrarian social structure should be defined on the basis of the following three criteria:

- Income from land (rent, wages, own cultivation, etc.)
- Type or nature of right (i.e. ownership, tenancy or no right at all)
- Extent of field work done (total work, partial work, no work at all, work for others, etc.)

According to D. N. Dhanagare, another model of classification also exists. He divided the rural society into four classes:

- **Landlords:** They get their income from land ownership i.e. rent from tenants or growing own crops.
- **Rich peasants:** These are the small landowners, who have enough land to take care of their own families and they cultivate their own land themselves. These are the rich tenants who have good land holdings and have to pay very little money to landlords.
- **Middle peasants:** They have land of medium size and are tenants who have good land holding but pay high rent to landlords.

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- **Poor peasants:** This group comprises landowners with very little land, insufficient to support their own family. Tenants with very small land holdings, landless labourers and sharecroppers are also part of this class.

The first two classes—landlords and rich peasants—are financially most well off, and often exploit the poor landless labourers.

However, the formation of co-operative societies and credit societies in villages has surely undermined the authoritarian control of the *maliks* but not entirely. The labourers still lead a pathetic life.

The glaring gap between the landowners and workers is an ever widening one. The *maliks* or landlords have all the money and power, and private traders flourish successfully. Though a number of land reforms have been undertaken, the condition of the poor remains more or less the same. The economic disparity between classes create all the more problems. The productive resources and financial power rest with the landlords. This uneven distribution has to be done away with before any progress can be achieved in the rural areas.

The deplorable condition of landless agricultural labourers needs perusal. They form the backbone of the rural social structure. Despite working day and night for the country they receive inadequate payment. The wages they get are meagre. Earlier, an average agricultural labourer would get something like ₹ 30–60 per day. The effective working days for labourers came to only about 200 days because of climatic vagaries. On the days that they are unemployed they have no money at all, and are forced to go hunting for work. Their annual income is hardly above 10,000 per year, which is why they fall below the poverty line.

The Agricultural Labour Enquiry dealt with only their economic problems. But their social issues owing to their position, as the majority belonged to the SC, ST or OBC group, did not get solved. While the efforts of the Government, through their reservation policies, have reduced discrimination against them but there has not been any drastic change or improvement in their condition or status.

3.2.4 Agrarian Aspect of Rural Sociology

India is an agricultural country. In spite of the fact that farmers contribute to the major economy of the country, they are the ones who have suffered the most. Agriculture provides the country its economy, but at the same time other means have also developed. Today, agriculture still remains the major contributor to the economy of the country. The importance of agriculture is evident by the following points:

1. Agriculture is the Source of National Income

Since India is an agriculture based economy, most of the income of the country depends on it. History tells that India has faced many wars and invasions. But rulers have always taken care of agriculture. This was because the main economy came from agriculture. Rulers took good care of the fields but the fieldsmen, who actually worked on these fields, always suffered. Agriculture being a totally weather dependent activity, has always been very unpredictable and uncertain. The farmers have been suffering since times immemorial.

Today also, the government takes all major steps to protect the farms and provide subsidies to farmers to make their lives easy and more comfortable.

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2. Power Provided by Land

The big landholders have been ruling the society for a long time. They are the ones who had all the power and status because of their high land holdings. The owner of land is respected while the labourer is looked down upon. He is the one who does not have anything and is the mere beggar at the doorsteps of the zamindar or landlord.

The Zamindari system has been abolished but still one who owns land is respected and treated as powerful.

3. Land Assures a High Status

In India, land ownership is a big factor which determines the status of a person. A person possessing a large area of land is respected and is considered to have a high status. He is considered rich because land is a sure means of earning an income. The most profitable asset, a person can have, is land. This is because it not only assures income to a person in the form of agricultural returns but also its value increases with time without any effort. When marriages take place, the possession of land by the groom's family is taken as a big deciding factor for prospective matches. The parents of the girl feel secure if they marry their daughter to a person who has a good amount to property, as it assures security for their daughters.

4. Agriculture Influences Lifestyle

Agriculture is the major source of income in India. It not only determines the economic position of a person, but also the lifestyle. People who have good agricultural background have a good lifestyle as well. The festivals as well as cultural functions, all revolve around agricultural activities. The way the villagers live, the food they eat, and way they dress, all is dependent on their agricultural income. Each season in India is marked with a festival and that too is associated with activities related to agriculture. Therefore, one can easily say that agriculture has a major influence on the lifestyle of a person.

5. Stratification in Rural Areas

In rural areas, stratification or categorization takes place with the help of the possession of land. Land is not divided equally among the village people. This is what brings about a major disparity and also stratification. In the villages one finds different types of land ownership. There are both large land holders and small land holders. Also, one finds the labourers who work on the farms of others. This inequality brings about a stratification or formation of different categories in rural areas.

Land ownership is based on the criterion of hereditary. Whatever land that one owns is what has been inherited from the forefathers. This disparity or inequality still continues making the stratification all the more evident and conspicuous.

3.3 VILLAGE STUDIES AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Charles Metcalf wrote,

The village communities are little Republics, having nearly everything they [may] want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolutions succeeds to revolutions; Hindus, Pathans, Moguls, Marathas, Sikhs, English, are all masters in turn; but the village communities remain the same. In

Check Your Progress

7. State any one characteristic of a rural family.
8. Why did Daniel Thorner reject the often-described classification of cultivators in rural areas?
9. How has Daniel Thorner analysed the agrarian social structure?

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times of troubles they arm and fortify themselves; a hostile army passes through the country; the village communities collect their cattle within their walls, and let the enemy pass unprovoked. If plunder and devastation be directed against themselves, and the force employed be irresistible, they return and resume their occupations. If a country remains for a (number) of years (in) the scene of continued pillage and massacre, (thereby leaving the) so that the villages (uninhabited), the scattered villagers nevertheless return whenever the power of peace(ful) possession revives. A generation may pass, but the succeeding generation will return. The sons will take the places of their fathers, the same site for the village, the same position for the houses, the same lands will be re-occupied by the descendents of those who were driven out when the village was depopulated; and it is not a trifling matter that will drive them out, for they will often maintain their post through times of disturbance and convulsion, and acquire strength sufficient to resist pillage and oppression with success.

The union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself has contributed more than for any other cause to the preservation of social structure of the people of India through all revolutions and changes which they have suffered. It is in a high degree conducive to their happiness and to the enjoyment of a great position of freedom and independence...

From the above quote, it is clear that the village was the only unit that was stable in spite of problems and troubles. It has been stable because of the agrarian's aspect that led to a stabilizing factor in villages. The villages were autonomous in their functioning.

Dr. K. P. Jayaswal, in his pre-eminent study, *Hindu Polity*, wrote that 'national life and activities in the earliest times on record were expressed through popular assemblies and institution'. These gatherings were called *Samitis*, meaning 'meeting together'.

The *Atharvaveda* has a mention of the same as is found in *Prithvi Sukta* (56). It says, 'In the villages and forests of the lands, in the various meetings and assemblies to discuss problems, I should always, O Mother [E]arth, speak for your good, for your interests.'

3.3.1 Sociology in the Ancient Indian Village

The villages in the ancient times were mainly of two types. According to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, there were two types of villages: the *ghosh* (small villages) and the *gram mahattar* respectively. The officials of both these villages were called *ghosh mahattar* and *gram gramani*, who took care of the smooth functioning of the rural affairs. The *ghosh* and small-sized while *gram* was a village of larger size. The *ghosh* which were mostly situated close to the forests were the dwelling places of cow-herds.

Manu speaks of the village official as *gramik*. He wrote that any problem regarding the administration of villages had to be reported to the *gramik*. The *gramik* was to report to his higher authority known as *dashvi* (*dashvi* was in charge of 10 villages). *Dashvi* had to report to his higher officials known as *vishanti* (*vishanti* was in charge of 20 villages). The *vishanti* was to report to the next authority referred to as the *shati* or *shat-gramadhipati* who was in charge of hundred villages. But this was not all, there was another official above the *shati* called the *sahasra-gramadhipati* (*sahasra-gramadhipati* was responsible for a thousand villages).

This is how the village community functioned, with each level of administrator having a higher authority to control him. The government functioned in an effective manner with each official doing his work honestly and sincerely.

The Gramani

The *gramani* was definitely appointed by the King. However, he had to act according to the wishes of the villagers and his own clansmen. The *gramani* had to strictly follow the advice of the village elders called *gram varidhas*, who were chosen by the village assembly. The village officials had to strictly abide by the instructions of the *gram varidhas* who were mostly the most experienced and learned. He was supposed to follow the advice of the elders and if ever he did something wrong or unsuitable, he was corrected by the elders.

Functions of the Gramani

The *gramani* was the connecting thread between the government and the common people. He was the representative of the common people and would voice their problems and issues to higher authorities. He took care of the interests of the common people. He looked after the welfare of common folks and also thought of taking all the benefits from the King.

His first and foremost duty was to look after the defence of the village, like the volunteers and guardsmen. He headed and guided them. The second duty which he performed was to find out the dues of the state and keep accounts of the same. All the important papers dealing with important issues like revenue, or other legal documents were kept in his custody. He was the overall in charge of the functioning of the village. All legal disputes which were not very serious were also handled by him.

3.2.2 Indian Villages during the Buddhist Era

All through the Buddhist texts which date back to the 5th century BC, one gets a reference of agricultural systems and the village communities which were self-governing. The books explain in detail the arrangements of villages, towns, and forts. Also mentioned in these books are the *Gama*, *Nigama*, *Kula*, and *Nagarka*.

The *Jatakas* (Buddhist Scriptures) tell us that the number of families living in villages were upto 1,000. The houses in villages were quite close to each other, they were so close that if there was a fire in one house, it would soon spread throughout the whole village. The structure of the village has been described well. It is mentioned that each village had a gate called the *gram-dwara*. Beyond the gate was the orchard in which grew beautiful flowers that made the place beautiful. Beyond the orchard was the *gram-kshetra* which was the cultivated area of the village. Fences were put all around the area to protect the crops from being destroyed by animals. There were field men who were employed to protect the crops from animals, birds and pests. The *gram-kshetra* was extended when needed. This was done by clearing out the forest land and converting it into arable land which was fit for cultivation.

Beyond the arable land was the village pasture. This was common for all the villagers. The cattle of the King and common people grazed in this area, as all had equal right over it.

In the *Jataka Tales* we get a reference of *gopalakas*, (meaning, 'the protector of flocks') who were the village officials. Their task was to take care of the flocks during the day and in the evening hand them over to their owners by counting their heads. They would leave the flocks in their respective stables.

The cultivated area of the village consisted of individual holdings. The demarcation of these areas was done in a very well-planned manner. Probably there was a cooperative

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irrigation system and the water channels divided the land. Rhys David observed that the irrigation channels were laid out by the people of the community. Its channels formed the boundaries of the individual holding. The headman was in charge of the water supply.

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3.3.3 Village System in Mauryan Period

Kautilya, in his *Arthashastra* mentioned that village boundaries should be demarcated by rivers, hill, forest ditches, tank, bunds, and trees of various kinds. He also mentioned that the villages should be situated at a distance of one or two *kroscha*, (1 *kroscha* = 2 miles) so that villagers could help the members of the other villages in case of a need. Ten villages together formed *samgrahana*, 200 villages together formed the *karnatika*. The *dronamukha* was formed by 400 villages. The higher group above this was the *mahagrama*, formed of 800 villages together. The *mahagrama* was the place of administration and termed as the *sthatmjar*. The *sthatmjar* was the centre of trade and business of all the neighbourhood villages.

Administrative Staff of Villages

Villages had their own system of administration. They had some officials who were given specific duties. They were as follows:

- The Headman with the *Adhyaksha*
- The Accountant with the *Samkhayaka*
- Village official with the *Sthanikas* of different grades
- Veterinary doctors with *Anikasta*
- Village couriers with *Jamgha Karika*
- Officer for sanitation with *Chikitsaka* of village
- House trainer with *Ashwa-Damak*

During Chandragupta's rule, the villages were categorized into three types based on their areas. The largest or biggest ones were called *jyeshtha*. The middle ones the *madhyama*, and the smaller ones were the *kanishtha*.

The other categorizations based on state revenue are:

- **Gramagras:** These were the ordinary villages which paid usual revenues.
- **Pariharak villages:** These villages were revenue free. These were those villages which were given to priests or teachers, who could collect taxes or revenue which was utilized for education, and for spreading *dharma*. These villages did not pay taxes as the money collected was used for public welfare.
- **Ayudhuja villages:** These villages were also revenue free. They were the ones which trained soldiers for army at the time of war. They were not to pay any taxes or revenue but rather train soldiers for war as and when the need arose.
- Villages which paid taxes in kind, like agricultural produce, animals, forest products, gold, silver, pearls and corals. The other items which were given were minerals extracted from the earth or in the form of labour provided when such a need arose in the kingdom.

3.3.4 Administration in Villages in India during the Beginning of the 19th Century

According to the famous Select Committee Fifth Report of 1812, Dr Mathai gave the list of officers and public servants in a Madras village. It was in the following pattern:

- **Headman:** He was in charge of general superintendence, collection of village revenue, in charge of police work, and settlement of village disputes.
- **Accountants:** He was in charge of cultivation account and maintenance of registers of allied affairs.
- **Watchman:** These were of two types, the superior and the inferior. The first one had to get information of crimes and to escort and protect persons travelling from one village to another. The activities of the inferior one were confined to the village and included, among others, guarding the crops and assisting in measuring them.
- **Boundary man:** He was responsible for prescribing the limits of the village and giving evidences in cases of disputes.
- **Superintendent of the tank and water courses:** He was responsible for distribution of irrigation water.
- **Priest:** He was responsible for the performance of village rituals.
- **Schoolmaster:** His responsibility was to teach the village children to read and write 'on the sand'.

3.3.5 Significance of Village Studies

Following are the reasons that make study of villages important:

- India lives in villages and the villages are the centers of Indian culture. It is basically a country of villages. In the first census of 1951, after independence, the rural population had a sharp shift towards urban life reducing the percentage of rural people to 82.7. According to 1991 census three-fourth of India's population (74.3%) lives in villages. This is the reason why villages are the centers of Indian culture. It is very important to know these villages to be able to know what India actually is.
- Poverty can be removed when agriculture is improved. India is not only a country of villages but its economy is also mainly agriculture. Study of villages can help to formulate various programmes for village improvement and poverty eradication.
- Solution of rural problems can bring about change in the rural society. Through village studies, we can come to know about the problems that village societies face. This knowledge can help the government solve the problems. If after independence, the rural society is changing then it is due to the various studies of the villages. Once the problems of rural life are solved the face of the country also changes. It is here that Rural Sociology can play an important part.
- Country and its society can be reconstructed only through rural reconstruction. Rural studies provide us with the knowledge of the rural society and its problems. It also helps us to solve these problems and in the process help to reconstruct the rural society.
- Village community has to be studied in totality in the interest of democratic decentralization. India can improve economically and politically only when decentralization of economic and political powers take place. Rural study helps to formulate programmes to do so.

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3.3.6 Some Village Studies in India

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Many village studies have been conducted over the years. Famous sociologists, like M.N. Srinivas, S.C. Dube and A.R. Desai has been responsible for many village studies in India. Some of their studies have been discussed in this section.

Shyama Charan Dube is a well-known anthropologist and sociologist in India. His application of the structural-functional approach for studying the Indian village community brought him great respect and reputation. S.C. Dube's *Indian Village* is a traditional account of Shamirpet. Shamirpet is located in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. Dube has written about the details of the village and concludes that despite being more than a dozen castes in the village, it still displayed integration. His study of Shamirpet provides description of social, economic and ritual structure, family level living, etc. The village had a population of 2,494 including 340 Muslims and 19 ethnic groups belonging to Hindus. The field data was collected from historical, geographical, political and sociological perspectives on different aspects of social, economic and religious practices of village in India.

According to his study, S.C Dube identified six factors that contributed to the differentiation in status of the village community of Shamirpet. They were religion and caste, landownership, wealth, position in the government service and village organization, age and distinctive personality traits. He found that it was difficult for the villagers to claim a higher ritual status. Dube pointed out the manner in which the caste panchayat of the lower castes worked as unions to secure employment and strengthen the bargaining power with the land owning dominant castes.

His work provides a reasonably adequate introduction to the historical, geographical and political setting as well as the social, economic and religious practices of a village in India.

According to Dube, no village in India is completely autonomous and independent, for it is always one unit in a wider social system and is a part of an organized political society. An individual is not the member of a village community alone; he also belongs to a caste, religious group or tribe which has a wider territorial spread and comprises several villages.

Based on his research, S. C. Dube gave certain indicators of the concept of social development. They are discussed as follows:

- Social development is a shift in emphasis from the individual to larger collectivities, including the poor who constitute the majority.
- It is a modification in the strategies of planning and implementation to take account of the interface between economic and cultural objectives.
- The concept is a redefinition of social goals in terms of the satisfaction of human needs and improvements in the quality of life.
- The formation of indicators to evaluate social progress and to assess emerging social trends.
- The setting up of monitoring mechanisms to ensure that growth level is sustainable and at no point exceeds the outer limits.
- The anticipation of growth-related and other problems and preparedness to handle them quickly and also effectively.
- The idea of social development is understood as a creation of ethos in which it is possible to question and rethink the appropriateness and adequacy of existing social formations and to work towards their restructuring.

Dube on Indian Society

Dube wrote about contemporary Indian society in his book *Indian Society*, which was published in 1990. In the book, Dube drew upon different sources to write about Indian society of the past and present. According to Dube, present Indian society has different contradictions that seem to be mystifying. It is a society of enormous depravations, but it also has some islands of prosperity. It is a culture embedded in spirituality, yet, at the same time, the ruling classes, have set standards of brazen consumption that seem almost unethical.

Through his various studies on Indian society, Dube concluded that Indian society is both continuous and changing. Dube believes that the reason for change must be sought in an array of factors. So far state compulsion has been instrumental in bringing about little social and cultural change in the village community. The factors of utility, convenience and availability have played a critical role in bringing several new elements into the life of the community. In the family milieu, changed conditions and changing attitudes of the people have brought about some important variations. With the changing economy, in place of their traditional occupations, people have started accepting other vocations. Family bonds have been under stress and are not as strong or cohesive as they used to be. There are several reasons for the erosion of kinship: modern education, new occupations, geographical mobility, impact of mass media, and so on. Another important change has been greater freedom of choice in marriage, especially for men. Dube states that the influence of the city has brought about adjustment and modification in several spheres, but the need of balancing different extremes in the organization of the community has so far prevented any drastic structural change in Indian village communities.

Looking at the country broadly, Dube suggests three trends in Indian society. These are:

- The regional culture, founded on the traditions, customs and life-ways of the culture area.
- The national culture, consisting of some pan-Indian characteristics inspired by the national renaissance, cemented by the struggle against British colonialism as well as by social and economic reform and sustained by the will to find a rightful place in the community of countries; the components in this group being partly revivalists and partly conscious innovations.
- Taking on characteristics and components from western technology and culture. Traditional social institutions and culture, traditions and life-ways continue to be idealized. The belief is that these began long ago and people salvation lies in following these traditions, which are divinely ordained.

Another Sociologist who has actively studied Indian villages is M.N. Srinivas. He was Professor of Sociology at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda and University of Delhi; and Senior Fellow, Sociology Unit at Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore; and J.R.D. Tata Visiting Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.

He was involved in extensive field study of the Coorgs between 1940-42. In his study, he describes the concept of functional unity by explaining the interaction in ritual context of different castes of Coorgs, mainly Brahmins (priests), Kaniyas (astrologers and magicians) and Bannas and Panikas (low castes). Srinivas studies on caste and religion (1952, 1959, 1962, and 1966) highlighted not only their structural-functional aspects, but also the dynamics of the caste system in rural setting. He proposed conceptual tools

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like 'dominant caste', 'sanskritization-westernization' and 'secularization' to understand the realities of inter-caste relations and also to explain their dynamics.

Srinivas conducted small regional studies rather than the construction of grand theories. In this context, field work plays an important role to understand the nativity of the rural Indian society. He is best known for his work on religion, village community, caste and social change. He was influenced by Radcliffe-Brown's notion of structure, who was his teacher at Oxford.

He studied Indian society as a 'totality', a study which would integrate the various groups in its interrelationship, whether tribes, peasants or various cults and sects. Writings of Srinivas are based on intensive field work in South India in general and Coorgs and Rampura in particular.

Srinivas conducted the study of Rampura – a Mysore village – which gave him the concept of 'dominant caste'. In *The Remembered Village* (1976), Srinivas discusses social and economic changes, which have taken place in Rampura. He says:

Technological change occupied a prominent place in the life of the people of Rampura soon after independence. Technological change, of course, went hand in hand with economic, political and cultural changes.

The main aim of Srinivas has been to understand Indian society. He believed that Indian society is essentially a caste society. He studied religion, family, caste and village in India extensively. Srinivas though talks about economic and technological development, all through his works he also appeals for change in caste, religion and family. He discusses westernization and modernization as viable paradigms of changes.

From his studies, Srinivas also concluded that the social world of the woman was restricted to household and kinship group. Whereas, the men inhabited a more heterogeneous world. In the Telangana village, Dube observed that women were not allowed to participate in activities held in public spaces. He said that the villagers were clearly laid out. After caste gender was the most important factor that governed the division of labour in the village. Masculine and feminine pursuits were clearly distinguished.

Rural Sociology in India (1969) by A.R. Desai is a very interesting work in the field of rural sociology. Desai has provided an interesting introduction to rural sociology in its first part. The remaining 16 parts contain village studies done by different anthropologists and sociologists. The book has a comprehensive narration and analysis in the domain of historical aspects of village life, Indian village community, rural stratification, agrarian unrest, land reforms, rural industries and institutions, Panchayati Raj, Bhoodan and Gramdan movements, village social change, village studies and theories of agrarian development.

A.R. Desai was deeply influenced by the Marxist school of thought which he used to understand the diverse aspects of Indian social reality. In 1969, Desai edited a volume on *Rural Sociology in India*, which was a major turning point and pacesetter in the field of agrarian studies. He also published an anthology in 1979 that included studies on peasant struggles, which had also been carried out by historians and social scientists of diverse orientations. Some of his other important works include *The Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (1948); *Slums and Urbanization of India* (1970, 1972); *State and Society in India* (1975), *India's Path of Development* (1984), and so on.

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Desai closely examined the theories of Marx and Engels, as well as Trotsky, and tried to use the Marxist framework to comprehend the different aspects of the complex Indian social reality. In India, Desai is considered to be one of the forerunners in introducing the modern Marxist method to empirical investigations involving bibliographical and field research. Thus, his primary contribution to Indian sociology was his stress on the Marxist approach and his use of the dialectical method to study Indian society. Desai stated that the Marxist method helped one to raise pertinent questions, conduct researches in the correct direction, articulate adequate hypotheses, evolve proper concepts, adopt and combine suitable research techniques and locate the central tendencies of transformation with its major implications.

Desai's analysis of Indian society was radically different from other Indian sociologists. Desai rejected any interpretations of tradition with reference to religion, rituals and festivities. As a doctrinaire Marxist, for Desai, tradition was basically a secular phenomenon that originates and develops in social institutions like the family and the village. Desai also does not find the origin of tradition in western culture. He believed that the emerging contradictions in the Indian process of social transformation arose primarily from the linkages between the capitalist bourgeoisie, the rural petty-bourgeoisie as well as a state apparatus that was drawn from similar social roots. As a Marxist thinker, property relations was the most vital relationship in his analysis of society, as well as the nature of society that he strived for. However, for Desai this approach did not 'demand a crude reducing of every phenomenon to economic factors. It does not deny the autonomy, or prevalence of distinct institutional and normative features peculiar to a particular society'.

Moreover, in his studies of nationalism, analysis of rural social structure, the nature of economic and social policies of change in India and the structure of the state and society, Desai tried to expose the contradictions and anomalies in policies and process of change resulting from the capitalistic – bourgeoisie interlocking of interest in Indian society. According to Desai, the polarization of class interests, especially of the bourgeoisie in India, is the foundation of modern society in India. It is thus inherent in the class contradictions and the logic of its dialectics. This class contradiction has been thoroughly examined by Desai in several of his writings.

Desai applied market methods in his treatment of Indian social structure and its processes. In his books introduction to *Rural Sociology in India* Desai suggests that he makes explicit use of the historical-systematic and Marxist methods of analysis for the understanding of rural society and its problems. He also refers to the contribution of a few American sociologists who contributed to the systematic methodology for the study of the rural and urban phenomena. The central thrust of his analysis of agrarian society was to suggest how the state transformed the agrarian structure from pre-capitalist to capitalist relationships. This occurred as a result of state intervention through various legislations and developmental programmes. As he stated, 'the overall thrust of the agrarian policy of the rulers has been to eliminate parasitic, absentee intermediaries in the form of various categories of zamindars and absentee landlords and to create in their place classes of agricultural capitalists, rich farmers and viable middle proprietors directly linked to the state'. Desai believes that the consequence of these policies is that sharp differentiations have taken place among the peasant class, and the condition of small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers has deteriorated.

Quite close to the studies of Dube, Srinivas and Marriott, is the edited work of D.N. Majumdar, *Rural Profiles*. It includes contributors belonging to the disciplines of sociology and social anthropology. F. G. Bailey's (1957) study of two villages in Odisha

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brings out the problem of caste and class formation. Bailey employs structural-functional method and analyses the rural life in the context of changing agrarian structure.

D.N. Majumdar (1958), in the study of Mohana, a village in Uttar Pradesh, considers village as a concept, a way of life. Majumdar believes that a village as a whole, is an integrated way of living, thinking, and feeling. He found that an Indian village has a special kind of communication system characterised by caste relation.

Majumdar observed in Mohana that the high castes and the lower castes share a similar pattern of life. He felt that there was a kind of consciousness of homogeneity, interdependence, and also a sense of security that was born out of living together and sharing opportunities and crisis.

Another sociologist, G. S. Ghurye (1960) made a new experiment in his village study of Loni or Lonikand. Ghurye argues that the village is interwoven by pervasive role of religion. He has described the structure of the village community, its social organization and the changes brought in it during a period in the field of bio-social life of the people. The village pattern of living is brought through a description of representative families. In fact, Lonikand is a study unfolding social and cultural change that took place during a long period of 100 years.

Andre Beteille's study of Sripuram is yet another village study which has acclaimed a high reputation in rural sociology. It is an intensive study of a multi-caste village in south India. Quite like Ghurye's Lonikand, Sripuram is a study of transformation.

One of the most prominent Marxist sociologists of India, Akshay Ramanlal Desai was born in Nadiad, Gujarat in 1915. His early years were shaped by the ideas of his father Ramanlal Vasantlal Desai, who was a well-known litterateur of the time. As a student, the younger Desai was an active part of the student movements in Baroda, Surat and Bombay. Desai attended the University of Bombay and worked on his doctoral thesis under the guidance of the sociologist G.S. Ghurye. He obtained his PhD in 1946 and married Neera Desai in 1947. Neera Desai was an academic who is considered a pioneer in the field of women studies in India. In the 1960s, Desai developed the field of political sociology in India.

Village studies have become very popular in social anthropology and sociology.

3.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- A rural society is a society which is thinly populated. Agriculture is the main occupation of villagers. People living in rural societies lead a very simple life with simple traditions and culture surrounded by a natural environment.
- There is homogeneity in their professions, ways of living, dress and traditions. In such societies, the rate of change is very slow as there is lack of facilities like transportation, technology and communication.
- Community sentiment may be defined as the feeling of unity among the members of a community. In absence of such a unity, no group can claim to be a 'community'.
- Family is the basic unit of Indian social structure. It has an important place in the rural society. Apart from performing various basic and important tasks, the family is also involved in socialization, social control and performs various economic activities.

Check Your Progress

10. What are Samitis?
11. According to Valmiki's Ramayan what are the two types of villages?
12. Who was the connecting thread between the government and the common people?
13. How were the villages categorized during Chandragupta's rule?

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- Internal organizations govern and determine the social and individual life of the rural people in India. Normally all villages have Panchayats, head of which is elected with the consent of all the adult members of the village.
- In rural India, the political behaviour of every individual is mostly governed by religious considerations.
- Religious ideas and thinking is more deep and strong in rural areas than in urban areas. The rural people base their thinking on faith while religion in cities is based on reason.
- The relationships in villages are among a smaller group of people, so they are more direct and personal. Whereas, in cities and towns relationships are numerous and also indirect and impersonal.
- Life in villages is slow and laid back in comparison to cities.
- The fast development and progress in the present times has had a strong influence not only on urban but rural life as well.
- Migration between rural and urban areas has led to a connection between these two ends. People move from rural areas to urban for work.
- Family ties and family system are much stronger in rural areas than in urban. This means that the functions performed by families is steadily decreasing.
- The culture in villages is of static nature. It is not as fine as city culture which is changing constantly.
- In earlier times, it was a common trend that work or profession was governed by the caste of the person. The person whose father followed a certain profession or business also followed the same. Present youngsters are taking up new professions according to their capabilities and opportunities available.
- The folkways can be described as the recognized ways of behaviour and acting in society which arise automatically within a group to meet the problems of social living.
- Sumner applied the term *mores* to those folkways who are considered by the group to be of great significance and, therefore, rather indispensable to its welfare.
- Family plays a decisive role in the material and cultural life of villages and in moulding the psychological characteristics of the rural collectivity.
- The village was the only unit that was stable in spite of problems and troubles. These were stable because of the agrarian's aspect that led to a stabilizing factor in villages. The villages were autonomous in their functioning.
- According to Valmiki's Ramayana, there were two types of villages. The *ghosh* (small villages) and the *gram* (big villages).
- All through the Buddhist texts which date back to the 5th century BC, one gets a reference of agricultural systems and the village communities which were self-governing.
- During Chandragupta's rule, the villages were categorized into three types depending on their areas. The largest or biggest ones were called *jyeshtha*. The middle ones the *madhyama*, and the smaller ones were the *kanishtha*.
- Poverty can be removed when agriculture is improved. India is not only a country of villages but its economy is also mainly agriculture. Study of villages can help to formulate various programmes for village improvement and poverty eradication.

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- Solution of rural problems can bring about change in the rural society. Through village studies, we can come to know about the problems that village societies face.
- Village community has to be studied in totality in the interest of democratic decentralization. India can improve economically and politically only when decentralization of economic and political powers take place. Rural study helps to formulate programmes to do so.

3.5 KEY TERMS

- **Rural society:** A rural society is a society which is thinly populated and the main emphasis of which is agriculture.
- **Little Community:** Little Community is a group of people inhabiting a definite locality bound together by the feeling of oneness.
- **Community sentiment:** Community sentiment may be defined as the feeling of unity among the members of a community consequent upon common life.
- **Folkways:** The folkways can be described as the recognized ways of behaviour and acting in society which arise automatically within a group to meet the problems of social living.
- **Mores:** Mores to those folkways who are considered by the group to be of great significance and, therefore, rather indispensable to its welfare.

3.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. A rural society is a society which is thinly populated and the main emphasis of which is agriculture. The people living in such societies lead a very simple life with simple traditions and culture surrounded by a natural environment.
2. Community sentiment provides the following three elements:
 - We-feeling
 - Role feeling
 - Sense of dependency
3. Religious ideas and thinking is more deep and strong in rural areas than urban. The rural people base their thinking on faith while the religion in cities is more based on reason.
4. With the urban influence in other areas, it is found that the way the village panchayats exerted an influence on the rural areas is now no longer there. As people are more influenced by the modern developments and thinking, village panchayats are losing their strong hold on the common people like earlier times.
5. The folkways can be described as the recognized ways of behaviour and acting in society which arise automatically within a group to meet the problems of social living.
6. Sumner applied the term *mores* to those folkways who are considered by the group to be of great significance and, therefore, rather indispensable to its welfare.

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7. One characteristic of the rural family is that it is generally agriculture-oriented, i.e., a very large majority of its members are engaged in the agricultural occupation.
8. Daniel Thorner rejected the often-described classification of cultivators in rural areas in three categories: landlords, tenants, and labourers. This was on the ground that one and the same man can belong simultaneously to all three of the above mentioned categories.
9. Daniel Thorner has analysed agrarian social structure on the basis of three criteria, viz., (a) income obtained from the soil (i.e., rent, own cultivation, or wages), (b) the nature of rights (i.e., ownership, tenancy, sharecropping and no rights at all), and (c) the extent of fieldwork actually performed (i.e., doing no work, doing partial work, doing total work, and doing work for others).
10. Dr. K. P. Jayaswal, in his pre-eminent study, *Hindu Polity*, wrote that 'national life and activities in the earliest times on record were expressed through popular assemblies and institution'. These gatherings were called *Samitis*, meaning 'meeting together'.
11. According to Valmiki's Ramayana, there were two types of villages. The *ghosh* (small villages) and the *gram* (big villages).
12. The *gramani* was the connecting thread between the government and the common people.
13. During Chandragupta's rule, the villages were categorized into three types depending on their areas. The largest or biggest ones were called *jyeshtha*. The middle ones the *madhyama*, and the smaller ones were the *kanishtha*.

3.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. State the role played by the urban areas in influencing the rural areas.
2. State the importance of *mores*.
3. How can rural religion be studied?
4. Which three aspects govern the study of Rural Religion?
5. What do you understand by rituals?
6. What are the types of peasants?
7. How does the ancient sociology describe villages?
8. List the functions of the *gramani*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the rural society and also discuss its features.
2. Critically analyse the rural-urban differences and continuum.
3. What are the differences between rural and urban areas with respect to social interactions?
4. Evaluate the institution of family, caste system, religion and economy.
5. Discuss the various features of village studies.
6. Write a note on the Indian villages of the Buddhist era.

3.8 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 RURAL POWER STRUCTURE

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 Traditional Rural Power Structure
 - 4.2.1 Power Structure in Rural India
 - 4.2.2 Dominant Caste and the Emergence of Elites
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 - 4.3.1 Village Panchayat in Ancient India
 - 4.3.2 Recent Development of Panchayati Raj
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 - 4.3.4 Balwant Rai Mehta Committee
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 - 4.3.7 Structure and Functions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions
 - 4.3.8 Local Self-Government
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 - 4.4.1 Change in Castes, Ethnic Group and Major Occupation
 - 4.4.2 State Intervention and Rural Transformation
 - 4.4.3 Panchayati Raj and Other Programmes in Rural Areas
 - 4.4.4 Abolition of Zamindari System in India: A Passage for Vital Change
 - 4.4.5 Rural Industrialization and Change in Rural Leadership
 - 4.4.6 New Emerging Patterns of Rural Leadership
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Key Terms
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- 4.8 Questions and Exercises
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4.0 INTRODUCTION

In developing countries like India, where majority of the population live in rural areas and are dependent on agriculture for its livelihood and where problems like poverty, unemployment, social and economic inequality exist more pronouncedly in the countryside, the role of public development administration in rural transformation is vital. In India, rural transformation has been one of the most spectacular features during the post-independence period. The process generally implies a change for the overall betterment of rural conditions.

Each country has its own social and political traditions, which are typical to it. Similarly, India too has its own unique system of government. The organization of political system took place over a large period of time to reach its present shape and structure. The rural power structure came into being with the discovery of village panchayats. The word 'panchayat' has its base in the Hindi word *panch* which means five, so panchayat was a council of five members. Panchayat is referred to as the most basic form of government in which the village people are involved. Villages in India have had a village council or association from the very beginning. Mostly the village elders formed the panchayat. *Manu Smriti* has a mention of *gram sangha*. In Chanakya's *Arthashastra* too there is a mention of *gram sangha*. This unit will introduce you to the traditional rural power structure, the concept of dominant caste and Panchayati Raj and the changing patterns of rural leadership.

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outstanding personal abilities, wealth, specialised training or experience. Alternatively, the term elitism could be used to describe a situation in which power is in fact concentrated in the hands of an elite, whether rightly or not. The elite theory of Pareto (1848–1923) is contained in his principal affirmation that ‘history is a graveyard of aristocracies’.

- **Pluralist theory of power:** The concept became popular in the context of community power debates in the 1950s and 1960s and continued till 1970s and 1980s in America and was expressed in the writings of Floyd Hunter, Robert Dahl, and Palsy. According to pluralists, power is an ability to influence policy outcome. Dahl responded that there are many different elites involved, who have to work both in contention and in compromise with one another.
- **Five bases of power:** The five bases of power were proposed by the social psychologists French and Raven, in a now-classic study (1959). They developed a scheme of five categories of power which reflected the different bases or resources that power holders rely upon. Two additional bases (informational and connectional) were later added.
 - (i) **Coercive power:** Coercive power means the application of negative influences on employees. It might refer to the ability to demote or to withhold other rewards. It's the desire for valued rewards or the fear of having them withheld that ensures the obedience of those under power. Coercive power tends to be the least effective form of power as it builds resentment and resistance within the targets of coercive power. For example, a government employs coercive power when it threatens military actions against another government; but it must have some ability to carry out that threat or the other government must believe that it has the capacity to carry out the threat.
 - (ii) **Legitimate power:** Legitimate power refers to power of an individual because of the relative position and duties of the holder of the position within an organization. Legitimate power is formal authority delegated to the holder of the position like supervisor–subordinate relationship, where the supervisor (say in the military) is of a higher rank (legitimately more powerful). However, that supervisor in that same relationship may or may not have referent power, if the subordinate does not respect his authority.
 - (iii) **Referent power:** Referent power means the power or ability of the individuals to persuade and influence others. It is based on the charisma and interpersonal skills of the power holder. Here the person under power desires to identify with these personal qualities, and gains satisfaction from being an accepted follower. Nationalism, patriotism, celebrities, mass leaders and widely-respected people are examples of referent power in effect.
 - (iv) **Expert power:** Expert power is an individual's power deriving from the skills or expertise of the person and the organization's needs for those skills and expertise. Unlike others, this type of power is usually highly specific and limited to the particular area in which the expert is trained and qualified. For example, a personal assistant who has lower status in the organisation may also possess a degree of high expert power because they have extensive knowledge of how the business operates such as knowing where everything is located or are able to deal with difficult situations.

- (v) **Reward power:** Reward power depends upon the ability of the power wielder to confer valued material rewards. It refers to the degree to which an individual can give others a reward of some kind such as benefits, time off, desired gifts, promotions or increase in pay or responsibility for example a child is given a prize for earning better grades.

4.2.1 Power Structure in Rural India

Who holds power in the villages? What was the traditional power structure and what is the new power structure that has emerged? The power-holders may be classified into four groups:

- Power based on the ownership and control of land
- Power based on caste
- Power based on majority strength
- Power based on the positions they hold e.g. in panchayats dimension

In the traditional power system, the main dimensions of power system was the zamindari system, the caste system, and the village panchayat. The villagers referred their social, economic and other problems either to the zamindar or to their caste leader or to the village panchayat. In a state like Rajasthan, traditional power structure was feudalistic.

- In other states also, zamindari was hereditary. The jagirdari and zamindari systems were in fact land revenue systems. The kings granted lands to their favourite men like ministers, courtiers and military commanders, etc.
- The jagirs were bigger estates than the zamindaris. A jagirdar was in-between the tiller and the state but behaved like the owner of the land while dealing with the peasants. He collected revenue from peasants for himself and also to look after the military force which he maintained. The zamindars were big landlords but possessed no title.
- The jagirdars levied number of taxes and took a great portion of the produce as land revenue. They discouraged reforms and social awakening.
- Zamindars were those who were assigned land by the feudal chiefs. They had to pay tribute to the ruler. The zamindar in turn rented their land to the landless peasants whom they exploited in every respect. Thus, ownership of land and their economic status were the fundamental sources of power for the jagirdars and zamindars in a village.
- The caste leaders had social status in a village. As the caste councils were very powerful, they could even ostracize defaulters from the caste. The leaders had great power over the members. The village panchayats, which were informal organizations, consisted of village elders from amongst all the major castes in the village. The panchayat met whenever issues involving the interests of the village had to be decided.
- Due to introduction of land reforms after independence, the jagirdari and zamindari systems were abolished. This eventually led to the weakening of the traditional power structure and helped to create a new power structure instead. Elected persons with political backing became leaders in place of hereditary caste leaders. Individual merit and not caste or class became an important factor in leadership.

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- Yogendra Singh (1961) in his study of changing power structure in Uttar Pradesh villages concluded that the power system has a tendency to incline in favour of the groups which fulfill the economic expectations of the people in the village. Some studies in Haryana and Rajasthan villages conducted in the 1970s and the 1980s showed that linkages with politicians and officials has been instrumental in strengthening the privileged position of the upper classes in rural stratification.
- Andre Beteille noted in his study that power has become independent of class to a greater extent than in the past. Ownership of land is no longer the decisive factor in acquiring power. A.R. Hiranman (1977) has pointed out that the distribution of power and authority in the village does not show any correlation with landholding or caste.

Iqbal Narain and P.C. Mathur's study in Rajasthan (1969) concluded that the upper class continues to have a monopoly of leadership but new leadership of younger age group has also emerged at the village level.

4.2.2 Dominant Caste and the Emergence of Elites

Sociologist, M. N. Srinivas, wrote an essay on the social system of a Mysore village in which he used the term 'dominant caste'.

Srinivas worked on this concept further and arrived at conclusions on the basis of his study of Rampura village, in 1948. In the report he prepared in 1955, he defined 'dominant caste' as follows:

The concept of dominant caste, which has emerged in recent sociological research is important in this connection. A caste is dominant when it wields economic or political power and occupies a fairly high position in hierarchy (even in the traditional system, a caste which acquired economic and political power did succeed in improving its ritual status).

According to Srinivas, all Indian villages had a dominant caste; it is a predominant concept. He spoke of the Gounder, Padayachi and Mudaliar castes of Tamil Nadu, the Nairs of Kerala, the Marathas of Maharashtra, the Patidars of Gujarat, the Reddy and the Kamma groups of Andhra Pradesh, etc. In the northern parts of India as well there are the Jats, Ahirs, Giyars and Rajputs, which are dominant castes. According to Srinivas, the traditional superior castes were able to dominate because of their high numbers and Western education. Their acquired knowledge pushed them ahead of other castes because of the modernization and development they got acquainted with.

Srinivas further reinforced the fact that 'strength in numbers' was an important factor which made a caste dominant in a particular area, even more so with the introduction of adult suffrage. The leaders of the dominant castes turned out to be of great help to the political parties in securing votes. But the traditional forms of dominance have not entirely disappeared and nor has dominance shifted fully to the numerically strongest caste. There is no doubt, however, that there has been a shift, which has been characterized by inter-group tensions. However, what is true and rather significant is the fact that in several parts of the country, there are certain castes which are authoritatively overriding.

According to Srinivas, the characteristic of a dominant caste are as follows:

- It has power, both economic and political.
- It is placed high in the caste hierarchy.
- It wields strength in terms of numbers.

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In 1966, he reviewed his earlier definition, as follows: 'For a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizable amount of the arable land locally available, have strength of numbers, and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy. When a caste has all the attributes of dominance, it may be said to enjoy a decisive dominance.'

Let us discuss all the above points in detail:

- **Economic and political power:** The power possessed by a caste depended on the land owned by it. This is because, with more land in its possession, the agricultural produce of that caste increases. With the increase in size of land, the irrigation facilities also improved and advanced. This, in turn, had a positive effect on the produce. With more property to look after, the owners of large tracts of lands, were in a position to employ labourers to work on their fields. So, the workers on their fields ended up being subservient to the landowners. Also, since these land owners used better agricultural techniques in terms of manure, fertilizers, modern implements and irrigation facilities, the yield was high and there was a marked improvement in the overall situation of the village.

According to Yogendra Singh (1994), dominant castes prevail in most south Indian villages. This is due to higher land ownership. The dominant castes of south India are Brahmins and Vokkaligas. The Havik Brahmins of Toltagadde in the Maland area of Mysore, are a dominant caste just like the Smartha Brahmins of Kumbapettai village of Tanjore (Tamil Nadu). The dominant caste of village Rampura is Vokkaliga.

Yogendra Singh further emphasized that the above castes were taken to be dominant because of their high economic status due to high land holding. For instance, the Brahmins of Toltagadde had the complete ownership of all the cash crops of the area. Similarly, the Kumbapettai Brahmins owned almost the entire land in the village. In Uttar Pradesh also the situation is similar with the Rajputs in the eastern part owning 82 per cent of the land. The Vaghela Rajputs of Cassandra village in Gujarat have total control of all the land in the village. Clearly these castes are the dominant ones because of the high land ownership.

People belonging to the dominant castes have better education because of which they have stronger control over the other villagers. As a result, they have more control in the Panchayati Raj. This further increases their economic and political power.

- **High rank in caste hierarchy:** The castes, which occupy the top rungs of the hierarchy always enjoy a status of dominance. The Brahmins and Rajputs have always enjoyed more importance, respect and a higher status because they sit on the top rungs of the caste ladder. They are the ones called upon to play the most important roles in all significant events, especially religious functions and ceremonies. The Rajputs have always been the biggest land owners in villages, and therefore, they have been seen as the feudal lords. However, in recent times, the absolute power of the Brahmins and Rajputs has become less. There are reservations for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes and women as well. This has resulted in a significant shift in the concentration of power. The numerically strong, traditional scheduled castes who had been marginalized till recently have now gained power. They have taken advantage of new educational and reservation policies and have grabbed job opportunities too. Therefore, today a higher status in the

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hierarchy is not a necessary condition for being a dominant caste. The new reservation policies have helped the castes which were once lagging behind, to enjoy the status of dominant castes.

- **Numerical strength:** In the past, the number of members in a caste did not really play a role in its being a dominant caste. With time, however, numbers have become an important criterion. The reason for this is that during elections the vote bank plays a crucial part. The deciding factor for any candidate in elections is the number of votes cast in his favour. People of a caste usually vote for the candidate belonging to their caste. Not only the village but also other people of the same caste from different villages unite and vote for the person belonging to their caste.

The members of the leading/main caste of one village enjoy dominance because of their networking with other important people. These castes have an influence on other regionally dominant castes. They all combine to form a strong powerful group and increase their political consolidation as well.

- **Land ownership:** According to Srinivas, land ownership is another very important factor, which makes a caste a dominant caste. He said, 'Landownership confers not only power but prestige, so much so that, individuals who have made good in any walk of life tend to invest in land. If land ownership is not always an indispensable passport to high rank, it certainly facilitates upwards mobility'.

Criticism

The concept of 'dominant caste' as given by Srinivas received some criticism too. It is said that the concept of dominant caste was derived from African studies on dominant class. This was widely criticized by social anthropologists.

In the years between 1950 and 1960, rural society witnessed lot of changes in terms of academic development. Education was the main steering power behind all progressive changes.

The criticism to the concept was mainly the following:

- **'Dominant caste' exists only in traditional villages:** In the ancient past, a dominant caste was the one which had all the power. This was mainly because they possessed large tracts of land. Also, some castes, such as the Brahmins and Rajputs were showered with gifts by feudal lords as well as by the British in the form of land. This gradually made them the strongest of the castes.

However, once land reforms were introduced, and once there was land ceiling and abolishment of the Zamindari and Jagirdari systems, the situation changed drastically. Land ownership ceased to be the main criterion for caste dominance. Instead, political power became the important reason or cause for becoming a dominant caste. According to Andre Beteille:

The powerful families in the past were the big landowning families. These included the principal Brahmin families, and among the non-Brahmin families, the Marathas. Today, the political power wielder in the village or outside is not as closely tied to ownership of land as in the past. New bases of power have emerged which are, to some extent, independent of both caste and class. Perhaps most important among these is the strength of numerical support.

Similar was the observation of D. N. Majumdar, who carried out a study of Mohana Village in Uttar Pradesh, in 1958. He found that earlier the Brahmins and Thakurs formed the dominant castes, but with changes in land ownership, the power shifted. Abolition of the Zamindari system changed the situation totally. The concept of 'dominant caste' now remains limited to only areas like the tribal villages where economic power still lies with the handful of dominant groups. Since these areas have not really been affected by political changes or modernization, they can claim to be following the traditional system of 'dominant castes'.

4.3 PANCHAYATI RAJ

Panchayati Raj is the name given to the old term 'village panchayat' or 'District Board'. Village panchayat is the name given to rural self-government. Panchayati Raj basically acts as a connecting link between rural people and the state. Panchayat comes from the Hindi word *panch* meaning 'five'. So panchayat means a 'council of five'. Panchayat is referred to as the most basic or grass root level of government. Villages in India had a kind of village council or association of the residents. Mostly the village's elders formed the panchayat.

Panchayati Raj discusses the decentralization of democratic power and the group of people who hold the power in this system, and the effect of the programme which are undertaken by the Panchayati Raj. All these aspects are explained in this section.

4.3.1 Village Panchayat in Ancient India

Village panchayats are the most important pillars of the political structure of India. The Vedic period shows us the presence of these panchayats. E. B. Havel, the great historian shares, 'The political organization of the Aryan tribes was a democracy, based on the organization of the village.' In a community, members from various villages were generally federated for purposes of mutual protection under the rule of a Raja or a King, sometimes elected or sometimes hereditary, were vested with supreme authority and were responsible to subject Aryan common law and tradition.

The old village panchayat used to perform judicial functions and was also responsible for the collection of taxes, public work and maintaining internal security. But with the coming of the British in India, this freedom of villages was usurped. The power became totally centralized. By the middle of the 19th century, these ancient village governments had almost completely disappeared.

Vedic India was definitely agriculture based, nonetheless, the rural administration was very well organized. The headman of the village and the assembly formed the core of administration unit. The *sabha* and *samiti* were the popular village assemblies. Even during the Mauryan period the provincial's administration was well developed. This was observed and rebounded by Professor Dikshitar in his book *The Mauryan Polity*. With the lord Ripon came a revolution in the field of local self-government. On 18 May 1882 the Ripon Resolution of local self-government was passed. This Resolution was passed with the objective to mobilize administration in villages and towns. This Resolution was to be an instrument of political and popular education. He intended to give internal autonomy to all local bodies. This created a two tier system with district boards and sub-district boards, based on sub-division or Tehsil. The sub-division was maximum in its area. District Board was taken as the unit of rural local government. Ripon, however,

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Check Your Progress

1. How does social science define power?
2. Who propounded the concept of 'dominant caste'?
3. List the characteristics of a dominant caste as specified by M. N. Srinivas.

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faced a lot of resistance to implement it fully and so it remained ineffective for a long time. The Royal Commission on Decentralization (1907) reported that very negligible development took place in 25 years after the Ripon Resolution was passed. When the causes of failure were analysed, it was recommended that the panchayat would be re-established as the vehicle of village government. The Commission insisted on active village councils but the in trial attempts met with failures. The census of 1911 in U.P and Bombay revealed that no system of village panchayat existed.

The 20 August 1917 declaration of the British government promised gradual development of self-governing bodies. The Montfort Report of July 1918, was an exercise in self-realization. The Report repeated the recommendation of the decentralization commission with great force. The local bodies needed to have nominated members not more than one-fourth of the total.

4.3.2 Recent Development of Panchayati Raj

During the ancient and medieval periods, the village panchayats were well-developed organizations but by the end of the medieval period, they had completely died out. It was during the British rule that steps were taken to revive the panchayat system.

Due to the sustained efforts of the Indian National Congress in 1919, under the Government of India Act, when different ministries were formed, various provinces passed the Village Panchayat Acts.

During the British period, major rural activities were carried out by the *gram* panchayats. But these were not very successful because the area under the panchayat was huge and funds given to them were very limited. Because of this reason the *gram* panchayats could not become a link between the rural people and the district bounds.

The expected progress in this area was not very spectacular. The Act of 1935 established provincial autonomy and provided more opportunities for development of local institutions but the village bodies remained weak and ineffective. The only work they did was to settle petty quarrels and nothing more than this.

Gandhian Influence

Mahatma Gandhi on 2 May 1931 wrote in *Young India* and expressed his anger at the activities of some panchayats. By then, the village panchayats had become the main place of the village upliftment programmes. The duty of these organizations was to look after the rural education, rural health and general cleanliness of villages. Gandhi mobilized the panchayat by non-official agencies under his constructive programmes. These bodies became the indispensable parts of the national independence movement.

4.3.3 Post-Independence Era

India had a weak system of rural government. The Constitution of India (vide Article 4) directed the state to establish village panchayats and develop as units of self-government. Attempts were made to establish panchayats, so legislations were passed concerning this issue. By the end of the First Five Year Plan, there were 1,23,670 panchayats in India, covering more than half of the total number of villages. The government hoped to cover all the villages in the Second Five Year Plan. However, the Plan did not report much progress. The experiences of the Five Year Plans were not very encouraging as serious flaws were revealed. In order to remove these defects, fundamental changes were required.

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So keeping all these in mind the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was formed. This Committee recommended democratic decentralization.

4.3.4 Balwant Rai Mehta Committee

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee found that when the Community Development Programmes (CDPs) came to the *gram* panchayat level, they were not considered programmes of the village people but the government. It was seen that if the rural people did not participate in these programmes, they would not be successful. It was suggested by the Committee that the villages should be given the power to analyse their own problems and needs. Then based on this, plans for improvement should be implemented.

The eminent members of the B. R. Mehta Committee were Dr S. D. Sharma, Phool Singh Thakur and B. G. Ras and later G. Ramchandran was also taken as a member. The findings of the Committee were based on their visit to 58 blocks in 13 states. The discussions with dignitaries took place and several recommendations were drawn. The most important one was the establishment of three tier system of democratic decentralization for administration.

The three tiers would be formed by the panchayat, block and *zila* level. Block was recommended as the basic unit. It would look after the planning and organization and also it would neither be too large nor too small. The next tier would be the panchayat *samiti*. This would form the middle tier. The next or third tier would be at district level. This would be the *zila parishad*. This would replace the district, though initially it was thought that this system would not be successful, but soon it was seen as a very revolutionary and successful step.

The Panchayati Raj was formed on the basis of the recommendations of the Mehta Committee. The objectives of the Panchayati Raj were as follows:

- To represent the felt needs of the village community
- To provide power to the non-officials for the development of village communities
- To give the power of implementation or execution to the people

Therefore, the Panchayati Raj made the village development programmes. The system of Panchayati Raj was first of all implemented in Rajasthan. It was on 2 October 1959, that the Panchayati Raj was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister in Nagaur in Rajasthan. Other states also took steps to start implementing the universal pattern in India soon.

The members of all the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj interacted with each other. The working of the three levels was taken care of by the non-government officials. These officials took guidance from the officials to implement programmes. But soon problems cropped up since the members of *gram sabha* were mostly illiterate and so they could not exercise any power. Again the problem remained as it was, hence in order to find solution to this problem another committee was formed called the Ashok Mehta Committee.

4.3.5 Ashok Mehta Committee

Ashok Mehta, an economist was made the head of this Committee. He analysed the loopholes of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommendations. In 1977, Ashok Mehta Committee recommended a fundamental change in the Panchayati Raj system. It was

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suggested that the Panchayati Raj should not only be taken as an implementing agency but a political institution.

In order to implement this change, it was necessary that an amendment in the Constitution should be done. It took more than 10 years to make this change in the form of 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill which was, however defeated in the Rajya Sabha. It was in 1992, that the 73rd Amendment Bill was passed in the Parliament. This Bill incorporated the recommendation of the Ashok Mehta Committee.

4.3.6 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act

The Panchayati Raj of the present day differs from the Balwant Rai pattern in two ways. First, the Panchayati Raj was a political institution and not just an implementing body. So, according to the 73rd Amendment Act, political parties were allowed to enter the panchayats. The members were to be elected by the political parties.

Second, the present day Panchayati Raj is not merely an implementing body but a decision-making body. The Panchayati Raj takes care of the governance of villages by itself.

Also, the other important aspect of the Panchayati Raj system is that it has given power to women and the weaker section of the village. Women are given a fixed quota for their representation in the Panchayati Raj. The Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) extends a fixed membership to the women and to the weaker sections of villages.

The present Panchayati Raj is constituted under the Constitution and is adopted by all the states. The features of the Act are:

- Panchayats will be political in nature and part of a totally decentralized structure.
- The *gram sabha* will be the life-line or backbone of the Panchayati Raj. The members of this *sabha* would be the voters of the village.
- There will be direct distinctions in all the three tiers: (a) *gram* panchayat at village level (b) panchayati *samiti* at intermediate level, and (iii) *zila parishad* at district level.
- Women will be given a reservation of one-third of the total seats at all levels. Out of this, one-third again shall be reserved for women from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes.
- Each Panchayati Raj will have a term of 5 years. If the panchayat is dissolved by the state, fresh elections will have to be conducted.
- Election to local bodies shall be conducted regularly.
- There would be a separate election commission and finance commission for the PRIs in each state.
- It would be obligatory for the centre to provide funds for the PRIs so that they function properly. Also PRIs would have their own fund raising capacity to generate money for their own smooth functioning.
- Some states like Rajasthan, Haryana and Odisha have debarred some candidates having more than two children.
- Some states like Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Karnataka have the provision for *nyaya* panchayat to settle disputes at these three levels.

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Drawbacks of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act

As studied earlier, the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act came into force in 1993. It was then that different states amended their laws. Some drawbacks have been pointed out, which are discussed as follows:

- **Illiteracy of women:** The 73rd amendment gives a lot of reservation to women. But the problem is that female literacy rate in India is very low. Due to this reason, the power rests with their male counterparts. These elected women function only according to the dictate of the men, so the whole purpose of women empowerment is lost.
- **Benefit not reaching the needy:** The Act was passed keeping in mind the weaker sections of the society. But the development schemes which were only meant for the weaker sections, benefits the higher layers as well. The higher and more influential or so-called creamy layers are the ones who avail all the schemes while the actual needy people are neglected.
- **Non-availability of women:** Looking at the socio-economic situation of the rural society, one can easily find shortage of women who are capable of handling the responsibilities of the Panchayati Raj. It becomes very difficult to find women who are actually qualified to take up the responsibilities. So in this case, either we have inadequate women members or less qualified women as members of these committees.
- **Corrupt leadership:** In India nothing happens without bribing the officials. In this case the money or funds for various schemes goes into the hands of bureaucrats and not the actual people who need help and other areas of development.

4.3.7 Structure and Functions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions

Structure

In order to meet the objectives of the Panchayati Raj, it was suggested that it should have a structure which would enable the smooth working at the village level. The suggestions regarding the structure of Panchayati Raj were as follows:

- The constitution of Panchayati Raj bodies would be simple so that it could be easily understood by the people.
- The election procedure too would be simple and inexpensive.
- The structure would be broadly based so that maximum number of village people would be associated with the functioning of the Panchayati Raj.
- The membership should neither be too small nor too large. This is because the smaller bodies remain insignificant while large bodies become over dominating.
- The institution should have well-defined area of work and no overlapping should exist.
- There should be a link between each tier of the system. This would ensure that objectives are successfully achieved.
- Political parties should not interfere too much in the functioning of the panchayat.
- The structure of all the Panchayati Raj institutions should be such that it should enable the growth of healthy local leadership.

Functions

The section which deals with the structure of Panchayati Raj explains that powers are given to each tier so that it can carry out its work smoothly. Along with the powers, each tier has its share of functions or duties to perform. The idea behind the whole system is democratic decentralization. According to the Amendment Act, the elected members of the Panchayati Raj are given freedom to carry out their own decisions but definitely within the framework of the Act.

Some important functions of the Panchayati Raj are as follows:

- Agricultural development and irrigation facilities
- Land reforms
- Eradication of poverty
- Dairy farming, poultry, piggery and fish rearing
- Rural housing
- Provision of safe drinking water
- Social forestry, fodder and fuel
- Primary education, adult education and informal training
- Building of roads and buildings
- Setting up of markets and fairs
- Child and women development
- Welfare of weaker section, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes

Along with the above functions, the other special provisions are:

- Enforcement of prohibition
- Protection of land
- Minor forest produce
- Water resources
- Village markets
- Development

4.3.8 Local Self-Government

Local Self-government means to take care of one's own problems and issues by the local bodies themselves. These local bodies are those which are formed by the people who elect these representatives. This form of government is a strong and effective form of democracy. It gives power to the common masses to choose their own leaders who are from among them. This is effective so that these people who are elected are from among the common people and are well acquainted with their problems.

This form of government is not uncommon in India. During the Vedic period, the *gram samiti* and *gram sabha* were the political structures that took care of the functioning of the village. The *gramani* took care of the overall affairs of the village, he was the headman.

Even during the Mauryan period, *gramas* (villages), *nigams* (small towns) and *bhojkas* were present. The local self-government enjoyed full autonomy as they were free to make their own decisions.

The local self-government existed in the British period but it was limited to the Presidency towns like Bombay. It was in 1687, that the Court of Directors ordered the

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formation of a corporation in Madras. This corporation was constituted by both British and Indian members. The corporation was given power to impose taxes for the building of guildhall, schools, jail and also providing salary to the corporation members. But this step was not successful as people refused to pay taxes. It was according to the Charter Act of 1793 that municipal institutions became included legally in the Municipality.

After the coming of Lord Ripon as the Viceroy of India, the institution of local self-government got a great boost. The main improvement was that the process of nominating members to the Board was replaced by the election method. All this happened in 1882. Because of these revolutionary steps taken by Lord Ripon he is rightfully called the 'Father of Urban Local Government'.

After the local self-government institutions were formed in urban areas, on similar lines were formed the government for the rural areas. It was in 1992 that Panchayati Raj Institutions were formed in the country. According to the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, Panchayati Raj Institutions got constitutional status. From 1996 onwards, it was adopted in the tribal states of Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. This Act introduced the Panchayati Raj in all states.

However, according to the 74th Amendment of the Constitution which was adopted in 1992, the uniform form of structure of Municipal Corporation, Municipal Councils and Nagar Panchayats has been adopted. In the rural areas, the form of local self-government is the Panchayati Raj Institution which has been discussed in detail in the previous sections.

4.4 CHANGING LEADERSHIP

It is rightly said 'India lives in its villages'. More than 70 per cent of the population live in rural areas. Hence, there is more pressure on land, with reference to employment. At present over fifty per cent of the people in rural areas live below the poverty line.

In developing countries like India, where majority of the population live in rural areas and are dependent on agriculture for its livelihood and where problems like poverty, unemployment, social and economic inequality exist more pronouncedly in the countryside, the role of public development administration in rural transformation is vital. In India, the role of public development administration in rural transformation has been one of the most spectacular features during the post-independence period. The process generally implies a change for the overall betterment of rural conditions.

Rural leadership creates a very strong link between the policy makers, government administration and the society, as well as the rural masses. Many researches aimed at identifying new and emerging leadership trends in the rural Indian society. Sociologists have examined the impact and influence of a few selected social, educational and cultural developments in the area of rural leadership.

There are several projects and programmes being operated by the government to evaluate the effect of leadership training programmes in many Indian states. With the help of state governments, and the department of Panchayati Raj, the attitude of the village people towards women leadership is changing. These programmes seek to design and evaluate additional negotiation training modules to further empower women leadership and equip new leaders by strengthening their work efficiency.

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Check Your Progress

4. Fill in the blanks.
 - (i) Panchayati Raj basically acts as a connecting link between _____ and the _____.
 - (ii) On _____ the Ripon Resolution of local self-government was passed.
5. Who were the members of the B. R. Mehta Committee?
6. What was the fundamental change recommended by the Ashok Mehta Committee?

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The key objectives of these programmes are limited to:

- Improving the process and quality of decision-making
- Efficiency in implementation of public programmes at the village level, including the quality and quantity of public goods provided and villagers' reported satisfaction with public programmes
- Creating a good image of women as leaders
- Better provision of goods preferred specifically by women
- Intervention at ground level

Development is an overall outcome of multiple factors, promoting and encouraging change. It is, therefore, affected by the overall situation which exists wherever development is sought. In fact, if viewed with a broad (and perhaps more realistic) perspective, development administration does not include only those institutions which are working directly for it, rather Regulatory Administration, Management for Infrastructure Institution and Agriculture Administration are also integral parts of it. Relatively, the authoritative functioning of the *Patwari* and the police, have been relatively less successful in the field of electrification, transportation and communication, mutual trust and distrust relationship between the co-operative agriculture and administration functionaries (the VEW and the cooperative societies) and the people themselves are a matter of concern in the field of development administration. During the 1950s and 1960s, development administration was influenced by the early theoretical approaches to development. Administration believed that:

- Development was desirable
- Development could be planned, directed, and controlled by public agencies
- Poverty could be eliminated by improving the quality of public goods and services
- Obstacles to development could be overcome

Development and administration were primarily viewed as economic, with little concern for equitable distribution of social benefits.

Today, development administration is less bound to western approaches of development. The focus is an indigenous development that is sustainable and that meets the basic needs of the people. During the British rule in India, the system of administration was involved in keeping up with the needs of the rulers. However, it did not consider the needs of development administration, with the results that it could not be established as an agent of socio-economic change. With the advent of independence, when the nature and size of bureaucracy underwent a noticeable turn, the massive onus of development was so far conformed merely with non-development duties like maintaining law and order or collecting revenues from the people. While viewing the problem from this angle, one wonders whether a colonial system of administration, which came into existence for the purpose of carrying out non-development work, was capable of shouldering the responsibility of organizing and executing various programmes connected with the development of rural leadership and projects by imbibing the spirit of democratic values and mobilization.

4.4.1 Change in Castes, Ethnic Group and Major Occupation

One of the important elements of the Indian social structure is the caste system. This system has put restrictions on inter caste marriages and performances of religious sacraments and deeds have been defined in terms of the caste system. One of the

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important features of the caste system in traditional India has been its close association with occupation. Occupations have been categorized as pure and impure and these have been hierarchically grouped.

The information on castes, ethnic groups and major occupations reveals that an overwhelming majority belonging to different castes is associated with agricultural activities which occupy a predominant place in the agrarian economy of the region where the last study was carried out.

As a result of the Green Revolution in the area, the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Other Backward Castes (OBC) work no more for their landowner masters on payment in kind. This is due to the introduction of the Green Revolution as the traditional *Jajmani* system is declining in these areas.

Respondents who are not involved in agricultural practices are thereby concerned with service, carpentry, tailoring, and their numbers are few. The joint family system has been a very common feature in the rural society of India. In recent decades, the phenomena of modernization and urbanization have brought out many changes in the social scene. The rapid growth of population has put unbearable strain on the agricultural sector which is the main source of sustenance for the rural masses. In turn, it disintegrates the joint family system.

4.4.2 State Intervention and Rural Transformation

Rural development has acquired special significance in countries of the Third World. The developing countries have been facing the task of transforming a traditional society with low levels of literacy, political experience and production. These countries have implemented various developmental plans and strategies to restructure and transform the traditional social structure, in conformity with particular politico-economic goals. India, after independence, has launched vast programmes of planned changes encompassing social, economic and political processes. Among the programmes of rural research-construction, the Community Development and Panchayati Raj Institutions have achieved special impetus.

The main focus of many researchers was to see the extent to which the state as an institution has been able to influence and alter the traditional social structure of the village community and has led to the emergence of a new pattern of economic and political relationship among different groups in the society. For socio-economic upliftment of Indian villages, the union and state governments have launched a number of programmes and projects since 1947. Since independence, the states in India have played a vital role in the process of rural transformation.

In this respect, various Community Development Programmes were launched in India in 1952. The blocks came to be established as units of development administration. The national extension service was established soon thereafter, with a view to reinforce the administrative services to tackle the problems of development and growth. A research for alternative programmes of rural development was then launched. The ever growing need for more food from rapidly growing population introduced the adaptation of intensive Agricultural Development Programmes, high yielding variety programmes and multiple cropping programmes for increasing the production of food grains.

A large number of programmes were introduced in the fourth Five Year Plan (1966-67), which includes adaptation of the target group programmes like Small Farmer Development Agency, Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labours Development Agency

and Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas. Besides, certain areas of development programmes like tribal area development programmes, whole village development programmes, have also been launched.

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4.4.3 Panchayati Raj and Other Programmes in Rural Areas

With the introduction of Panchayati Raj and other programmes of rural reconstruction, both, social and political structure in contemporary India, are passing through a period of transition. Simultaneously, other trends like representation of elected people in various organizations, rising pressure for the distribution of economic benefits and facilities, close interaction between processes of economic and political development and emergence of a new class of power elites in the society have led to a shift in the rural social structure. These have greatly influenced the entire process of change. This is to identify the agricultural work and to try to understand the nature and extent of social change.

Developmental programmes have been assigned to Panchayati Raj institutions. Since these institutions consist of elected members, decisions regarding developmental schemes and allocation of funds are taken democratically. The amount of resources being channelled through these institutions in the recent years is enormous. There is intense competition among various groups and individuals to extract maximum resource quite intensely with a view to get control over them. Factionalism, personnel bickering and rivalries have been reported on the basis of castes, class and class based loyalties.

The recent 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution have been welcomed as it focuses on the political structure, rural leadership and process of rural India, their significance for the vulnerable and weaker sections of the rural society and their participation in the operation of this structure. Women being one of these vulnerable sections in the local government process have come under considerable scrutiny.

Facilities for all methods of family planning are available on a wider scale and at all levels of the health centres and hospitals of rural areas. Apart from sterilization, non-terminal methods like intrauterine device (IUD) and oral pills are popularized, since a large number of young couples are giving preference to these methods (Sixth Five Year plan, 1981-376).

Though, apparently, only developmental role has been assigned to the Panchayati Raj, but its social consequences have been such that one cannot afford to ignore their analysis. It is thus to examine as to what extent, the process of development has been able to transform the traditional social structure, including the transfer of leadership. Since both the processes, namely, development and political awakening, are simultaneously operating, they are of crucial importance to analyse the social background of those groups and individuals that have been associated with these procedures.

4.4.4 Abolition of Zamindari System in India: A Passage for Vital Change

Indian agriculture, at the time of independence, was predominantly feudal in character. Before independence, the system of land tenure in the district was based on Zamindari system, which had given zamindars the judicial right to landownership. Zamindars, who were mostly from the upper castes were the lone owners of the land. All others were their tenants, holding the right to cultivate and paying rent to the zamindars. After

independence, the Zamindari Abolition Act abolished the right of intermediate level of the village land and gave proprietary right to the actual tiller of the land. The abolition of Zamindari system, however, was not very successful in terms of abolishing the huge differences in the ownership of land amongst the land-owning and non-land-owning castes. The abolition of the Zamindari system and the subsequent land reforms were no doubt radical steps to transform the traditional social structure, but they could not bring much change in the existing situation. The enforcement of land reforms legislation enacted by the state government after independence resulted in the distribution of land among landless Harijans and weaker sections of the society. It played a vital role for bringing in changes in rural leadership traditions. The nature of landownership and social relations dependent on it has undergone substantial changes during the last sixty years.

4.4.5 Rural Industrialization and Change in Rural Leadership

Industrialization has played a significant role in the development of rural areas in India. The concept of rural industrialization is a process of development of an area and also of participation by the ruralites working in harmony with the area's factors and agents of growth of industries. The village and the small scale industries consist of traditional village industries like Khadi, handlooms, CERI culture, handicrafts, modern small scale industries and power looms. While traditional industries are generally artisan-based, they are mostly located in the rural areas and provide part-time employment.

Rural industrialization cannot be regarded as a strategic substitute for other critically missing elements of the development process. It cannot replace the need for various kinds of agrarian institutional reforms, in favour of the rural poor and it cannot offset the implication of an impact of unsatisfactory performance in main sectors of the economy.

In recent economic literature and economic thinking, industrialization has been considered as a key to rapid economic development. It offers the prospect of a growing availability of manufactured goods, increased employment opportunities, improved balance of payment position and greater efficiency and modernization throughout the economy. Industrialization is characterized by technological innovation and improvement in technical skills that leads to higher productivity. Rural industries provide additional employment opportunities, raise production and improve economic conditions in rural areas. They are labour intensive. They provide additional employment to men and women. They ensure decentralization of economic power at the hands of few specific classes of the rural society and the elimination of monopolistic exploitation of the weaker sections of the society.

4.4.6 New Emerging Patterns of Rural Leadership

The study of leadership has acquired considerable theoretical and methodological sophistication in comparison with the times when it was thought that leaders were born with particular traits and attributes. Now, leadership is viewed in the social and cultural context, in which it appears. To put it rightly, leadership is regarded as a function of the group of situation. Many significant contributions towards the emergence and strengthening of this trend have come from the fields of sociology and anthropology.

Leadership, which is made up of multi variant factors, while aiming to accomplish the group or community goals, has become an important element within the social system in which it is operating. Changes within a system naturally demands a change in structural elements like leadership. Leadership is an important function of a community's social structure in terms of controlling and influencing the behaviour of others in a community.

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In the changing social structure, from the traditional to the modern order, leadership is also prone to change.

Rural leadership plays an important role in moulding the social, political and economic life of a village community. Change within the system will naturally necessitate a change in the structural elements of leadership. In the international concept, the role of leadership in community involvement in action programmes is also a responsible dynamic aspect of the community. As the social relationship depends upon the type of structure of a village, hence it is related to the village social structure.

Social structure has been considered as an arrangement of the relation of parts to the whole, in an ordered way to represent the distributive pattern over the network of inter-personal relationship. Leadership, therefore, depends upon the type of social structure of the community. In a changing village structure, the leadership may constitute a traditional modern continuum.

For a better study of the problem, it will be appropriate to make an analysis of the existing knowledge available on leadership. Rose and Henry, while revealing researches on leadership have drawn attention to three theories of leadership: (i) Trait or the great men theory (ii) leadership as a function of the group (iii) leadership as a function of the situation, in which the group is placed. For proper understanding of the subject, it has been considered important to consider all three aspects of leadership. Since a group consists of individual members, individual personality traits make different contributions by each member of the group.

It cannot be denied that to perform the function of leadership, an individual must exhibit, as part of the personality and character, some qualities which distinguish him/her from other members of the group. However, leadership is regarded as a desired activity and it has been also considered as a relation between an individual and a group, built around some common interests and behaviour as directed or determined by the leader.

Leaders occupy a special status in the group. They are considered to be a central figure by all group members who find in them qualities which can help members of the group to achieve the desired goals. Leadership aims at maintaining integration and continuity of the group structure. The problem highlighted by this study are:

- Leadership is the property of the group
- As the group structure changes, leadership would also change

In the traditional village social structure, there are certain aspects which may be considered as important for leadership, viz., sex, age, inheritance and caste. Due to the patriarchal society, leadership in north-Indian villages has been the privilege of males only. In a joint family setting, the head of the family occupies an established position, by virtue of being senior in age and more experienced than other members of the family. In addition, the headman of the village typified the hereditary character of power which flowed from the father to the son.

Role of Caste and Occupation in Rural Leadership

Caste and occupation in traditional Indian villages are close to each other. Thus, caste and occupation stratification in the village structure provided for leadership position, is occupied mostly by those who enjoy a higher rank in the caste and occupational hierarchies. However, in north Indian villages, leadership based on religion and clientele system, has also been considered traditional in nature. Leadership plays an important role in forming political classes.

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Politics has intervened in traditional leadership. It is the caste system, which made available to the leadership structure, an ideological base for political mobilization, providing it with both, a segmental organization and an identifiable system on which support could be crystallized. This leadership was forced to make concession to local opinion, articulate potential competition on traditional lines and in turn, organize castes for economic and political purposes. The aspects of caste consist of caste councils, arbitration procedures and so on. There is the integration aspect in which the caste system not only determines the individuals' social status on the basis of the group into which he is born, but also differentiates and assigns occupational and economic rules. It thus gives a place to every individual from the highest to the lowest and makes place for a high degree of identification and integration.

The powerful elites of different castes are dominant figures in the politics of village Panchayat and political parties. Political leaders are the mainstream of agrarian lobbies and other pressure groups, like the traditional village Panchayat, caste association, peasant organization and so on. If a social structure is based on caste, political parties cannot ignore this social reality. Leadership has become an unavoidable fact of human beings. Everyone is involved in some way or the other in some kind of political system. Even in the rural society today, leadership plays a vital role in forming various pressure groups and peasant unions.

Caste in India has been employed as a factor for achieving political power. The contexts of leadership in India are determined by the caste structure. Political parties cannot ignore this social context. Since leadership protects caste intersection, caste factors in leadership have been solidified, irrespective of the fact that there are growing confrontations and competitive roles. Leadership has become a reflection of caste and religion loyalties. The role of caste is not confined to elections alone; it is extended to the actual operation of the state apparatus. The penetration of caste into leadership has turned the state apparatus biased who are in favour of some certain castes and against others. The role of caste in Indian leadership has distorted the processes of secularization in the country.

Caste is employed to play an ideological role in leadership to legitimate capitalistic exploitation. The democratic political process in India is linked with the building of capitalism, and the conflicts generated by the capitalistic path of development are diverted towards caste confrontation. Caste is projected as a reality of Indian society by the ideologues of capitalism and the exploited peasants and workers are divided through caste conflicts. The tyranny of the rich peasants over their landless agricultural labourers is defended as a caste phenomenon. Landowners belonging to the upper and middle castes employ the state apparatus to extract surplus value by oppressing landless agricultural labourers and exploitative agrarian relations are defended with the help of state functionaries. The basic activity of social exploitation is undertaken by the rural rich, by means of caste factors in leadership.

Group Dynamics and Factors of Rural Leadership

Group dynamics, a division of social psychology, attempts to study and explore the manner in which psychological groups are formed, their structure and functions. Practically speaking, it is seen as a method of developing/arriving at a consensus between individuals as well as groups with regard to key subjects, matters and procedures. In certain villages, it has been observed that village leaders are absent. However, there do exist heads of small groups or factions, on the basis of caste, kinship and inter-village connections.

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While researching on village leaders in an Indian village, Mr Oscar Lewis (1954; 3-6) discovered that instead of leaders of villages, there exist leaders of factions. In his own words, 'leadership in the village of Rampur is limited to faction leadership and is primarily of a protective and defensive nature, in which each faction or combination of factions defends family interests.'

Organized on the basis of caste, each of these factions carried the names of their respective leaders. The Jats stood out because of the power and dominance they wielded, especially in the political matters of the villages. Not only were the lower castes economically dependent on them, they lacked the numerical strength to act as independent factions. They were not involved in forming political groups or temporary factions in order to fight court cases (even though there were some cases involving power politics). Over and above the struggles amongst factions, these factions were based mainly on relationships, and to conduct significant functions—social, economic and ceremonial. The relationships between factions of Jats as well as non-Jats, extended beyond village boundaries.

Social organization continues to be based on caste and kinship. There is no trace of the 'community' in the true sense of the word, that is, a united and cohesive unit. While there is no concept of leadership, village wise, the idea of progressive, productive and beneficial leadership in the interest of the public is now slowly starting to take roots.

The benefit was that the leadership was spread instead of being focussed. Therefore, it was possible for the village-level workers to approach the faction leader and then ignored, they would only spread and proliferate instead of getting eliminated. Therefore, all constructive schemes or projects in such villages, should be routed through the faction leaders, instead of the headmen or village *Pradhans*. Leadership organized on the basis of factions provided a closer representation of people than is plausible in the more sophisticated and monolithic type of political democracy of certain western countries, based on delegated authorities. Keeping this in mind, it is essential to work on the present organization of factions, and achieve a sense of wider community zones. However, it there do exist villages where Panchayats are functioning efficiently and with success.

As a consequence of the two World Wars, urbanization and industrialization, the traditional village social order has undergone many changes. The joint family social system is being replaced by nuclear units and as a result younger generations are assuming more responsibilities. The spread of women education has given more opportunities to women to take up important positions in the village social life. The caste system now tends to shift to the class system as a result of better and newer occupational opportunities.

Political freedom further hastened the process of change. Every individual now has certain fundamental rights, such as freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of association and opportunities to his economic position, irrespective of age, sex, caste and creed. In this respect, the pattern of rural leadership is changing.

The Community Development Programmes launched in October 1952 further accelerated the process of change. These programmes which are a part of the process of modernization taking place in Indian villages, have had their influence of institutions like the cooperative society, the Panchayat and the village school, besides helping to improve agricultural production. The programmes aimed at stimulating local efforts, initiative and leadership among the village community. This leadership is to be developed through democratic methods, based on group consensus in decision-making, without any limitation of age, caste, sex or class and open to achievement. A favourable attitude to

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the extent of participation in village development activities will also determine the modern orientation of a leader. The means that preferred the leader to induce in community participation for development activities are also a measure of the traditional modern dimensions of leadership.

Although as a result of development, factors like economy, land reforms, irrigation facilities, electricity, improved communication and mass media, the traditional village social structure is undergoing a change, a modern social order has yet to emerge. Till the time the Indian village is traditional, leadership would continue to be on the traditional pattern. However, since modernism, leadership too would move in the direction of modernity. Traditional and modern leadership is not mutually exclusive of age, sex, caste or class. Irrespective of whether a leader achieves his leadership position through heredity or achievement, the extent he desires to change the village social structure from traditional to modern order will be an important measure of modern leadership.

With reference to rural leadership and its emerging patterns, voluntary organizations have an important role. Voluntary organizations are autonomous and flexible. They are initiated by a group of like-minded people to change and transform the socio-economic life of people, especially the weaker sections. The essential feature of voluntary organization is initiated not only to solve problems but to prevent the occurrence of problems.

A voluntary organization includes a wide range of activities like construction and maintenance of educational institutions, hospitals, inns, roads, providing jobs to the needy and various economic development programmes and community services. It has an administrative structure and a duly constituted managing committee. It has definite aims and objects and programmes for the fulfilment of these. It is an organization initiated and governed by its own members on democratic principles without any external control.

There are various voluntary organizations whose main functions have been to provide relief as well as help when the local people get affected by flood, fires, epidemic, cyclones, earthquakes and other natural calamities. In this respect, it is the responsibility of the leader of such an organization to get resources from the state and central government. Nav Yuvak Mangal Dal and Ramlila Samiti, as voluntary organizations, are functioning to bring about rural transformation.

Efforts are also made to introduce elements of integrated rural development of concerned communities at local levels. During colonial India, the agrarian structure was headed by a class of intermediate level who oppressed and exploited the mass of peasantry. There was neither security of tenancy nor alternative livelihood. Therefore, peasants showed their powerful urges in the form of movements to transform the agrarian structure. Later on, they were organized by political parties and people like Baba Ramchandra and Swami Sahajanand. They took interest in rural leadership and rural development. After the Green Revolution, when the Indian agrarian society entered a phase of rapid capitalistic transformation of agriculture, the peasant movement, led by rich peasants was mainly launched for either infrastructural facilities or monetary demands, or for support prices of agricultural products. The other major area of peasant organization leadership demanded lowering down of the cost of production. This required subsidized rates of canal irrigation, electricity, fertilizers and so on.

It is observed that rural leadership is of great significance in the transformation of social, political and economic lives of rural people. It is an important function of community and social structure, in terms of controlling and influencing the growth behaviour of others in a community. While changing the social structure, leadership is also prone to

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change. Leadership depends on the types of social structures of the village community. The significance of social structure is an important factor to determine the acceptability of the village people to social change and development. In a traditional village social society, certain aspects such as sex, caste and inheritance have special significance. Social rank is conferred on the basis of age, physical strength, occupation or income. In Indian villages, leaders are found in various contexts such as caste, faction lineage and territorial groups. The institutions perpetuating the social life of the village community altered the pattern of social interaction to a great extent. This resulted in changing the role structure of members of the community. The relations got patterned on the basis of new roles. In the light of the above a shift in the role structure of the leader, as a result of change in other elements of the community social system, would alter the pattern of leadership within that system.

4.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- H. D. Lasswell and A. Kaplan stated that, 'The concept of power is perhaps the most fundamental in the whole of political science: the political process is the shaping, dissolution and exercise of power.'
- The power-holders may be classified in four groups: (a) those who have power based on the ownership and control of land, (b) those who have power based on their caste, (c) those who have power based on numerical strength, and (d) those who have power because of the positions they hold, e.g., in panchayats.
- It is true that benefits of development and progress have generally gone to the upper castes and classes in the village, but there have been visible changes in the standard of living, conditions of housing, health and sanitation of most villagers in the country.
- The concept of 'dominant caste' was propounded by M. N. Srinivas. It appeared for the first time in his essay on the social system of a Mysore village.
- M. N. Srinivas specified the following three characteristics of a dominant caste:
 - A caste dominates when it wields economic and political power.
 - It has a high rank in caste hierarchy.
 - It has numerical strength.
- The concept of 'dominant caste', it is argued, has emerged out of the African studies on dominant class. When Srinivas put forward the concept of dominant caste, it was seriously commented upon by sociologists and social anthropologists.
- Panchayati Raj is the name given to the old term 'village panchayat' or 'District Board'. Village panchayat is the name given to rural self-government. Panchayati Raj basically acts as a connecting link between rural people and the state.
- With Lord Ripon came a revolution in the field of local self-government. On 18 May 1882, the Ripon Resolution of local self-government was passed. This Resolution was passed with the objectives to mobilize administration in villages and towns.
- In 1977, Ashok Mehta Committee recommended a fundamental change in the Panchayati Raj system. It was suggested that the Panchayati Raj should not only be taken as an implementing agency but a political institution.

Check Your Progress

7. Between which institutions does rural leadership create a link?
8. What is the significance of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution?
9. What is the essential feature of voluntary organizations?

NOTES

- The reservation of one-third women along with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has provided women with a great morale boost.
- The 73rd amendment provided special provisions to not only women but also the weaker sections, i.e., Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The Provisions of Atrocities on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act is a big step in this direction.
- Local Self Government means to take care of one's own problems and issues by the local bodies themselves. These local bodies are those which are formed by the people who elect these representatives.
- Rural leadership creates a very strong link between the policy makers, government administration and the society, as well as the rural masses. Many researches were aimed at identifying new and emerging leadership trends in the rural Indian society.
- Rural development has acquired special significance in countries of the Third World. The developing countries have been facing the task of transforming a traditional society with low levels of literacy, political experience and production.
- The recent 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution have been welcomed as it focuses on the political structure, rural leadership and process of rural India, their significance for the vulnerable and weaker sections of the rural society and their participation in the operation of this structure.
- In recent economic literature and economic thinking, industrialization has been considered as a key to rapid economic development. It offers the prospect of a growing availability of manufactured goods, increased employment opportunities, improved balance of payment position and greater efficiency and modernization throughout the economy.
- Rural leadership plays an important role in moulding the social, political and economic life of a village community. Change within the system will naturally necessitate a change in the structural elements of leadership.
- The essential feature of voluntary organization is initiated not only to solve problems but to prevent the occurrence of problems.
- It is observed that rural leadership is of great significance in the transformation of social, political and economic lives of rural people. It is an important function of community and social structure, in terms of controlling and influencing the growth behaviour of others in a community.

4.6 KEY TERMS

- **Dominant caste:** A caste is dominant when wields economic or political power and occupies a fairly high position in hierarchy (even in the traditional system of a caste which acquired economic and political power did succeed in improving its ritual status).
- **Local self-government:** Local Self-Government means to take care of one's own problems and issues by the local bodies themselves.

NOTES

4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Power in its most general sense denotes (a) the ability (exercised or not) to produce a certain occurrence or (b) the influence exerted by man or group, through whatever means, over the conduct of others in intended ways.
2. The concept of 'dominant caste' was propounded by M. N. Srinivas. It appeared for the first time in his essay on the social system of a Mysore village.
3. M. N. Srinivas specified the following three characteristics of a dominant caste:
 - A caste dominates when it wields economic and political power.
 - It has a high rank in caste hierarchy.
 - It has numerical strength.
4. (i) Rural people; state
(ii) 18 May 1882
5. The eminent members of the B. R. Mehta Committee were Dr S. D. Sharma, Phool Singh Thakur and B. G. Ras and later G. Ranchandran was also taken as a member.
6. Ashok Mehta Committee recommended a change in the Panchayati Raj system. It was suggested that the Panchayati Raj should not only be taken as an implementing agency but a political institution.
7. Rural leadership creates a very strong link between the policy makers, government administration and the society, as well as the rural masses.
8. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution have been welcomed as it focuses on the political structure, rural leadership and process of rural India, their significance for the vulnerable and weaker sections of the rural society and their participation in the operation of this structure.
9. The essential feature of voluntary organization is initiated not only to solve problems but to prevent the occurrence of problems.

4.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is power?
2. What are the different types of power?
3. How have land reforms in villages been introduced?
4. How does M. N. Srinivas define a 'dominant caste'?
5. Enumerate the features of dominant caste.
6. Why was the concept of dominant caste criticized?
7. What do you mean by *sabha* and *samiti*?
8. What is Panchayati Raj?
9. Write a short note on the role of caste and occupation on rural leadership.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Evaluate the traditional rural power structure.
2. Discuss M. N. Srinivas' theory of dominant caste.
3. Critically analyse the concept of Panchayati Raj Institutions and the provisions made by it.
4. List the functions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
5. Describe the changing patterns of rural leadership.
6. Assess the new emerging patterns of rural leadership.
7. State the reasons that have led to a shift in the rural social structure.
8. Write a note on rural leadership.

4.9 FURTHER READING

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