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# UNIT 1 RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOURCES

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Harappan Civilisation and  
Other Chalcolithic  
Cultures

## Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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The primary objective of this unit is to acquaint the learner with the interpretations of the sources that reveal the nature of the ancient society. We therefore need to define the meaning of the term ‘ancient society’ to begin with and then move on to define a loose chronology in the context of the sources and their readings. It would also be useful to have an understanding about the various readings of the sources, a kind of a historiography of the interpretative regime.

In order to facilitate a better understanding this unit is divided into five sections. In the introduction we have discussed the range of interpretations that are deployed on the sources and often the sources also become interpretative in nature. The complexity of the sources has also been dealt with in the same context. The new section then discusses the ancient society and what it means. This discussion is spread across the regions and the varying sources that range from archaeology to oral traditions. The last section then gives some concluding remarks.

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## 1.1 SOURCES

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Here we introduce you to different kinds of sources that help us reconstruct the social structure.

### 1.1.1 Epigraphy

Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions. Epigraphic evidence form one of the most reliable sources of ancient history. Inscriptions are engraved on stone tablets, metal plates, pillars, walls of caves, etc. The inscriptions represent various languages at different places and period of time. Some inscriptions give details about the political and religious activities of that time. Others are official, commemorative and historical.

The edicts of Asoka, the pillars of Samudragupta and Rudradaman I are religious and administrative inscriptions. Bilingual inscriptions at Delhi and Berhampur and musical rules found in the Pudukottai, treatise on architecture inscribed on a tower at Chittor are some other interesting examples of inscriptions.

Inscriptions on metal plates also cast light on the historical period. The Mandasor copper plates, the Sohgaoura plate from Gorakhpur district, the Aihole inscription of Mahendra-Varman, the Uttiramerur inscriptions of Cholas cast light on trade, taxes and currency. Some of these dated in the Saka and Vikrama era reflect on the social condition of India. They give knowledge about the boundaries of kingdoms and empire.

Epigraphy throws light on the life lived in the past, the nature of society and economy and the general state of life. Inscriptions in the South Indian context found on the hero stones for instance open up a different dimension of a pastoral economy for our consideration.

### **1.1.2 Numismatics**

Numismatics is the study of coins. The coins made of gold, silver and copper speak of the economic situation of that period. Coins give us information about some chronological issues as well. They also give us information about the extent of influence of particular ruler or kingdom and its relations with the distant areas. Roman coins discovered in India give us an idea about the existence of contacts with the Roman Empire. Portraits and figures, Hellenistic art and dates on the coins of the western satraps of Saurashtra are remarkable sources for reconstructing this period. The Puranic accounts of the Satavahanas are ascertained from the Jogalthambi hoard of coins.

The circulation of coins in gold and silver during the Gupta Empire imparts an idea of the healthy economic condition during the rule of the Guptas. The entire argument for instance on the urban decay rests on the paucity of currency and lesser content of precious metals in coins in that period.

### **1.1.3 Archaeology**

Archaeology is the study of the material remains of the past. They include buildings, monuments and other material relics that the inhabitants of that period were associated with. Besides all these pots, pottery, seals, skeletal remains all are inseparable parts of the reconstructing the context in which they were found.

Lord Curzon under the Director Generalship of Dr Marshall set up the Department of Archaeology. Excavations conducted at various sites in the valley of the river Indus, Lothal in Gujarat, Kalibangan in Rajasthan, at Sind and Punjab give us knowledge of the civilization during about 2700 BC. Excavations at Taxilla give an idea about the Kushanas.

Similarity of monuments excavated in India and abroad establish a relations between various areas Excavations at south Indian sites such as Adichanallur, Chandravalli, Brahmagiri highlight the prehistoric periods. The rock cut temples of Ajanta and Ellora with its sculptures and paintings express the artistic finery of that period.

### 1.1.4 Literature

Literature in the ancient period was not fuelled by the urge to preserve history but was a complication of experiences and rules of worship. The literature includes the Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aryankas, the Upanishads, the Epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Brahashastras, the Puranas.

The Buddhist and Jain literature gives knowledge of the traditions prevalent in those periods. The literature of this period is in Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit. It gives us knowledge about music, dance, painting architecture and administration of various kings. Kautilya's Arthashastra is a remarkable work on the system of administration. The Sangam literature in south is an elaborate record of life in South India.

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## 1.2 INTERPRETATION

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Historical problems can be discussed with open minds only. Rewriting of History is a continuous process into which historian brings to bear new methodological or ideological insights or employs a new analytical frame drawn upon hitherto unknown facts. The historians' craft as Marc Bloch, has reminded us, is rooted in a method specific to history as a discipline, most of which has evolved through philosophical engagements and empirical investigations during the last several centuries. No methodology which historian invokes in pursuit of the knowledge of the past is really valid unless it respects the method of the discipline. Even when methodologies fundamentally differ, they share certain common grounds, which constitute the field of the historian's craft. Notwithstanding the present skepticism about the possible engagement with History, a strict adherence to the method of the discipline is observed in all generally accepted forms of reconstruction of the past. The students of history should not be presenting definitive conclusions but suggesting possibilities that are based on the sound reading of the evidence. Here we have taken into consideration anthropological, archaeological and textual sources to illustrate the study of ancient society. The anthropological reading of the source pertains to a reading of a tribe; the archaeological reading considers a chalcolithic settlement and the textual one looks at the Rigveda in terms of an interpretation of a textual source. Though we have not followed any definitive chronology here, yet there is a certain understanding of time sequencing. Let us first understand the various readings of the 'ancient Indian history' before we get into the context of these sources discussed above.

The colonial construction of India's past forms the earlier modern writing of Indian history. European scholars searched for histories of India that would have conformed to their stereotype of history writing but could find none. The only exception was Kalhana's Rajatarangini, a twelfth century history of Kashmir. There were primarily two strands of writing Indian history in the colonial perspective, the Utilitarian and the Orientalist. The Utilitarian perspective basically argued for a changeless society in the Indian subcontinent. It also suggested that this backward society can be changed through legislation which could be used by the British administrators to bring about 'progress' in the other wise stagnant and retrograde Indian society. James Mill thus harped on the negative aspects of Indian society. Although James Mill's periodisation of Indian history into Hindu and Muslim periods is generally pointed out as an example of this colonial view, almost every aspect of the social, cultural and political life was incorporated into this religious schema. This view has had an abiding influence on Indian historiography, with a large number of Indian historians of vastly different ideological persuasions rather uncritically internalizing

this interpretation. Thus the history of India is seen through a series of stereotypes rooted in religious identity. No aspect of society or polity has escaped this religious view, be it social tensions, political battles or cultural differences.

The Utilitarians also are credited with the dubious theory of the Oriental Despotism. The theory of Oriental Despotism argued for an existence of a system of governance that consisted of a despotic ruler with absolute power at the top and the self-sufficient villages at the bottom. The surplus created by the villages was creamed by the despotic ruler and his court. Much of the Asia was assumed to be arid and the control of irrigation networks was critical in the system of control. Later on Marx too took a leaf out of this theory and gave a different mode of production, the 'Asiatic' to the Asian society. It was the later more scientific reflection on India's past, first by the Nationalist school and later on by the Marxists that led to the rejection of this rather obscurantist view of the past. Indian history in the 1960s and 70s moved from being largely a body of information on dynasties and a recital of glorious deeds to a broad based study of social forms. In this there was a focus on religious movements, on patterns of the economy and on cultural articulations. The multiple cultures of India were explored in terms of how they contributed to the making of Indian civilization. Therefore, many aspects of this multiplicity and its varying cultures – from that of forest dwellers, jhum cultivators, pastoralists, peasants, artisans, to that of merchants, aristocracies and specialists of ritual and belief – all found a place in the mosaic that was gradually being constructed. Identities were not singular but plural and the most meaningful studies were of situations where identities overlapped.

These included Marxism of various kinds, schools of interdisciplinary research such as the French Annales School, varieties of structuralism and others. Lively debates on the Marxist interpretation of history, for example, led to the rejection of the Asiatic Mode of Production as proposed by Marx, and instead focused on other aspects of Marxist history. There was no uniform reading among Marxists, leading to many stimulating discussions on social and economic history. The ideas of historians, such as Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel and Henri Pirenne, were included in these discussions. The intention was not to apply theories without questioning them, but to use comparative history to ask searching questions.

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### 1.3 THE ANCIENT SOCIETY: ANTHROPOLOGICAL READINGS

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*'At the easternmost reach of the inhabited world, beyond which lies nothing but empty desert, there is an enormous country populated with fantastic animals as well as strange nations and tribes. It is a place of mighty banyan trees, of a sun so hot it appears ten times its ordinary size of multiple great rivers fed by torrential rains. Gryphons and satyrs roam there along with gigantic elephants, deadly snakes, multicolored peacocks and parrots, fierce jackals, and manlike monkeys. Its human population is more numerous than that of any other land. The people in the North are tall and fair, resembling Egyptians, while those in the South are dark skinned; like Ethiopians, though lacking their woolly hair. The northerners, long lived and free of disease, wear brightly colored clothing ornamented with jewelry of gold and sparkling stones. Settled agriculturists, their land is so bountiful it sustains two growing seasons every year. Organized into stable classes, they are ruled by kinds who live in opulent palaces graced by pleasure gardens, and are guided by wise philosophers,*

*who, like Plato, teach the immortality of the soul. The people of the North pay a tribute in gold to the Persians which they acquire effortlessly in their deserts from deposits left by huge gold-burrowing ants. Bizarre nomadic tribes are scattered throughout the rest of the country including pygmies, cannibals, breastless Amazons, men without noses, giants five fathoms tall, headless people, as well as those with feet so large they are able to use them as umbrellas, shielding themselves from the sun while lying on their backs. The entire land is wealthy in ordinary crops, herd animals, and gold, but also in beautiful gems, shimmering silk, exotic spices, and potent drugs.'*

This is the view of India that arose in Greece between the sixth and fourth centuries BC, was passed on to the Romans when they superseded the Greeks as the centre of the ancient Mediterranean world, and migrated to Northern Europe after the Roman Empire fell under the impact of the barbarian invasions. Its principal sources lie in the writings of four men: Scylax of Caryanda, a Greek officer sent by Darius, the ruler of Persia, around 515 BC to reconnoiter the Indus valley, his easternmost province; Herodotus who wrote about India half a century later in *The Histories*, his famous treatment of the Persian wars; Ctesias of Cnidus, critic of Herodotus, and Megasthenes, a Greek ambassador to the court of the Mauryas, who resided in the Gangetic plain and wrote extensively about Indian institutions and customs around 300 BC, in the aftermath of Alexander the Great's invasion. Here the quotation above reveals the way the ancient Greece thought about the East. Similar notions have prevailed regarding the earliest societies. This rather exotic view of the past needs to be tempered with more measured understanding of our past.

At the stage of hunting and gathering, the society, as we understand it had not emerged. The units hunted together for a while and dispersed. There was no permanency in societal relationships. This stage of gathering and hunting remained for almost ten million years. It is only with the domestication of plants and animals that the first settlements emerge. The transition from gathering and hunting to the domestication of plants and animals also resulted in the emergence of what is known as the tribal world. It was a condition where three elements defined the nature of that condition, viz, the production was for consumption, individual rights were embedded in the community ownership rights and authority and not power was respected.

The label "tribe" has been an unstable category that has been deployed within multiple networks of power relations, such as state-society, local-national and national-global spheres. We will question the contending meaning of tribes, variously defined as indigenous, aboriginal, primitive, underdeveloped, disempowered and marginalized. Conversely, we will draw attention to the ways in which "tribe" has also been used to empower and resist the nation state and the global economy. British colonial rule imagined and institutionalized tribes in the northern and north-west frontier, tribe-based demands for statehood in areas such as Jharkhand and Bodoland, the creation of tribe as an economic and political category in the north-eastern frontier, the politics of tribal identities in Assam today and the resurgence of the figure of the tribal in contemporary literary and cultural discourses of globalization.

The term adivasi was coined as a translation to the colonial category of aboriginal. The tribal and the aboriginal are not synonymous categories. They are infact two different categories altogether. The term tribe refers to the political organization of the community while the term aboriginal means one present from the beginning

(origin) or of the sunrise (literal meaning). Any identification of a particular people with the area implies a genetic sub text and a continuity of between them and the first human populations of those regions. This hypothesis may have some limited validity in the New World but none in the Old World.

Let us consider the ground reality as is obtained from the archaeological data. There is considerable evidence that the domestication of plants and animals occurred at different places in the subcontinent at times. The site near Allahabad suggests an introduction of wild rice and tame animals in the diets of the people in the region by the eighth millennium BC. We have sites from sixth millennium BC where there is enough evidence of domestication of cattle, sheep and goats. Mehrgarh at the foot of the Bolan Pass in the 9000BP gives us signs of wheat and barley. The archaeological evidence does not support the consistent superiority of farming as a subsistence strategy for some millennia after its appearance.

In fact the opening of the first millennium BC saw the prevalence of hunting and gathering, pastoralism and agriculture as the three varying strategy as per the demands of the eco-niche in the subcontinent. We cannot place the 'tribal' in the hunter gatherer context always. These were responses determined by the eco-niche and the limitations of manpower and technology.

The state too had an uneasy relationship with the people who lived in the forests. The forest produce was crucial to the state, and the control over the same was desirable. The Mauryan State for instance, in one telling stroke warned the forest dwellers thus, *"and the forest folk who live in the dominions of the Beloved of Gods, even them he entreats and exhorts in regard to their duty. It is hereby explained to them that, inspite of his repentance, the Beloved of the Gods possesses power enough to punish them for their crimes so that they would turn from their evil ways and would not be killed for their crimes.* The 13<sup>th</sup> rock edict is remarkable for its clarity and ruthlessness. An empire had to be run and the resources had to be marshalled. It was in that context that the people were being warned.

Let us now consider the so-called tribal, in the context of the above. Though we cannot argue from the perspective of the indigenous, certainly we can form the perspective of the marginalized. The first question to be asked pertains to the defining elements of the term 'tribal'. Prof. Shereen Ratnasar has argued a tribe is not just a group of people that shares a common culture, a name, an ethnic identity, and a language/dialect; more important, its members, even if they live in dispersed villages or pasture grounds, believe they are one people because they trace their origins to a common ancestor. Descent is traced most often through the male line, but in some groups like the Khasis, through the female line.

A common ancestor means that members are believed to be related by blood. An individual is a member of a tribal society by virtue of his/her birth in it. The resources of nature have been inherited from the tribal ancestors or ancestor-gods, are held by the group as a group in trust for future members, and hence are not alienable. Sometimes a tribe with a large population has internal divisions (clans, lineages, or sections) that each hold their own areas of natural resources, so that a member has rights to them by virtue of birth in a particular lineage, section, or clan. To be related by kinship (blood), furthermore, means a series of duties and obligations towards others in the tribe. Of course, this does not prevent friction or disputes altogether, and it could be said that the low level of development of institutions of dispute settlement is one of the limitations of tribal society.

When did this kind of social organization come into being? The earliest societies in the world were not tribes, but are called 'bands' or 'hunter-gatherers'. Periodic movement, no permanent villages, and the lack of clearly defined membership in residence groups characterized them. The only stable social group was the family. The men of different families might co-operate in raising shelters at a seasonal settlement, or in hunting a large animal, but such co-operation was only for that particular task. A hunting team formed a week later may be constituted by some of these participants, but also other men.

When agriculture began (thousands of years ago), people settled down to cultivate land. In terms of work, agriculture was different from hunting and gathering. The returns on labour were no longer immediate: you ploughed a field and sowed the seed, say, with the first rains of the year, but the crop was ready to harvest several weeks later. And then you stored the cereal rice, wheat, or barley, to last you until the next harvest. So sedentary and stable village life, and sustained co-operation between families, were characteristic social correlates of the new economy. This is the context in which societies united by kinship, which are known as 'tribes', came into being.

It is in the context of the above that we need to locate the archaeological evidence in its anthropological readings. The two go together and give an interpretative support. The site of Inamgaon in the Deccan is a good case in point for the same.

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## 1.4 NATURE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

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The realm of archaeology in the south asian context is not rooted in the so called hard data or scientific precision. We do not have the city of Pompeii here. In most of the cases the archaeologist deals with material that has been discarded by the people who were using it once. These things make little sense outside of the context in which they are found. So the archaeological data gets understood in the from the attributes of the excavated material in the context in which it is found and the inference that is drawn from it. These are the limiting factors for the data. It cannot by itself argue about the identity of an ethnicity, though it may suggest the existence of various groups by the manner in which the material remains differ. It in this case and in many other requires a corroborative evidence from other sources, textual, epigraphic or numismatic. In some instances the other corroborative source may not exist. In such situations the archaeologist will have to generalize on the basis of living prehistory, i.e. from observing a phenomenon that still exist and try and make a connection. The richness of the material remains may also pose a range of questions to archaeology. The interpretation of the same from the historical point of view will thus largely depend on the context in which the data is being excavated as well as the context from which it is being argued out.

If for instance a typical chalcolithic settlement were excavated then it would yield in a structured stratigraphy a variety of artifacts. It would for instance yield pottery, animal bones, grain, burial and a host of other things. In order to make any sense out of that material we need to analyze it in the context in which it was taken out. Thus the reading of stratigraphy would be vital along with the relationship of all the artifacts in the same strata to be contextualised. In Inamgaon for instance (a chalcolithic site excavated by the team of archaeologists from the Deccan College) the excavation was carried out from 1968 to 1983. This is perhaps the longest excavation done in the annals of chalcolithic sites in the Indian context. The excavation at Inamgaon

allow us to examine the changes that occur in the material culture over a period of time, from 1600 to 700 BC. This time span is further divided on the basis of the stratigraphy and the difference in the material cultural sequence into three periods the Malwa (is the earliest) the Early Jorwe and the Late Jorwe. Further generalizations could be drawn about the subsistence patterns, social stratification and changing nature of the settlement. Still further generalizations are possible which could be drawn on the issues that pertain to the social structures. Here there might be a divergent opinion, as we do not have any corroborative evidence in the form of epigraphy or numismatics or oral tradition or textual sources. Here the site itself is a text that would be deconstructed. The archaeological evidence in this case is the only evidence. But there would be other contexts and other time sequences where there is other kind of evidences, available in the form of inscriptions, coins, texts and oral traditions. In such a situation the nature and the interpretation of the archaeological evidence would confirm, deny or throw an alternative argument for historians consideration. Let us also remember that archaeology is a discipline in its own right. Such as this discipline has also its own epistemology and historiography. The nature of interpretation would depend on which of the historiographical traditions the archaeologist is drawing upon to arrive at the generalizations. Archaeology in that sense is not a sub discipline of history in a sense epigraphy or numismatics is.

Let us now move on to the textual context beyond the chalcolithic and towards the threshold of the change in the ancient society.

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## 1.5 TEXTUAL SOURCES

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Let us now turn to the textual sources. Here we will take one specific example of Rig-veda to illustrate our point regarding the textual sources and our understanding of the same. Rig-veda is not an easy source to understand the past. However it is one of the most important ones, as it is the earliest of the textual sources. Rig-veda is dated roughly to 1500-1000 BC.

Rig-veda is not like the Arthashastra or the Puranas. It is not a work of literature as well. The earlier commentary with the text of Rig-veda is compiled by Yaska who is dated even before Panini (before 400BC). Yaska also refers to the earlier commentaries written before him. This suggests that Yaska is not the first one to comment on the text. Today the text that we get is the one compiled by Sayana (1387 AD).

Let us analyze this text to understand the difficulties related to it. The text is compiled in the 'vedic' language that predates Sanskrit. It is a compilation of 1028 suktas/hymns that panegyryze the gods. It is divided in ten mandals out of which the first and the tenth mandala have been compiled later. It is not a religious text alone. It is a collection of a composition of hymns serving useful purposes. It was passed on from generation to generation through a pre decided manner of recitation. There are a number of ways in which the Rig-veda can be recited.

It paints a picture of a society that was pastoral in nature, tribal in terms of social structure and gave tremendous importance to the cow. Horse and the chariot were valued in times of war. There are references to the gods such as the Indra and Agni. The simile used in the text is a votary of historical information. For instance we do get references to cattle wealth and its importance. Clearly the early society value the herd and the wealth was counted in terms of the number of cattle one had.



The Rig-veda as a text then provides us with a glimpse of one segment of culture that was pastoral. It indicates as to what the society valued as wealth and also gives some indicators of the material cultural context which the archaeology can look for.

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## 1.6 SUMMARY

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The search for the source is as endless as its explanatory regime. We need to for our part as students of history should see to it that the dialogue between the historian and her/his past remains within the parameters of reasonableness and not degenerate into a comedy of errors that is colored by obscurantist political perspectives. The field of sources and their interpretation is a contested field, never more so than now. The task of the historian would be to see to it that the field does remain in the domain of historical dialogue and not lapse into the general free for all.

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## 1.7 GLOSSARY

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**Indigenous:** Belonging to or native to a particular land in a region.

**Marginalised:** Groups, communities pushed to the edges of a society due to a one sided developmental process.

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## 1.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the various sources of reading India's past.
- 2) Why is interpretation important? Discuss in the light of the explanation offered above.
- 3) Write a short note on reading archaeology.
- 4) Discuss the text of Rig-veda as a source.
- 5) What constitutes a source for the study of history?

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## UNIT 2 HUNTING-GATHERING, EARLY FARMING SOCIETY, PASTORALISM

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### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 The Archaeological Evidence for Paleolithic Societies
- 2.2 Social Structure of Hunting-Gathering Societies
- 2.3 Mesolithic –Neolithic Continuum and the Process of Domestication
- 2.4 The Archaeological Evidence for Early Food Producing (Neolithic) Villages and Campsites.
- 2.5 Social Structure of Early Food-Producing (Farming and Herding) Societies
- 2.6 Summary
- 2.7 Glossary
- 2.8 Exercises

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### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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In this Unit, we will be contrasting two kinds of societies, hunting-gathering and food producing (agriculture and/or pastoralism). These signify two different stages of social development, with hunting-gathering representing the band level and food producing, the tribal level. Archaeologically, the material culture of early human history (categorised as the Palaeolithic /Old Stone Age, Mesolithic /Middle Stone Age and Neolithic /New Stone Age) in the subcontinent can help us understand band and tribal levels of social organisation. Thus, in this Unit, we will describe the archaeological evidence for the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic societies. This evidence would provide information on subsistence strategies, residential units, kinds of technologies, and so forth. Social structures of prehistoric societies, on the other hand, have to be inferred with the aid of anthropological theory and ethnographic accounts.

Human history comprises a mere fraction of geological history. The geological period during which most human evolution took place is termed the Pleistocene, that extended from roughly 2 million years ago to about 10,000 BP. Over this vast time span, man has largely been a hunter-gatherer. It is only in the last 10,000 years, from the onset of the Holocene, that several significant developments in human societies have taken place. On the other hand, language development, of crucial importance to human societies would have taken place in the Pleistocene. Dates for the origins of language development cannot be ascertained with any certainty so far. However, some scholars assume that the evidence of visual art forms (paintings, sculpture) from c. 35,000 BP establishes the presence of language in the Upper Palaeolithic.

The Holocene witnesses a far more varied picture in contrast to the Pleistocene. Unlike the Palaeolithic where the margins between the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic are distinct in chronology and lithic technology, in the Holocene there may be a contemporaneity of Mesolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age societies. Thus at the same time there could be groups at various stages of social development (bands, tribes, early states) coexisting together. In the Pleistocene, a more limited range of subsistence strategies (involving hunting, foraging and fishing)

contrasted with the far more varied strategies (cultivation, herding, hunting-gathering, fishing and combinations of these) of the food producing societies in the Holocene.

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## 2.1 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR PALAEOLITHIC SOCIETIES

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In the Indian subcontinent, the earliest evidence for humans goes back to about 1.9 million years ago from Rawalpindi in Pakistan. This period from roughly 2 million years ago till about c.10,000 years ago is known archaeologically as the Palaeolithic. The word Palaeolithic means Old Stone Age (where 'palaeo' means old and 'lithic' comes from *lithos*, the Greek word for stone). Within the Palaeolithic, sub-phases are differentiated into Lower, Middle and Upper on the basis of types of stone tools and the techniques for making them as well as relative dates based on stratigraphy. The Lower Palaeolithic is roughly dated from 1.9 million years ago, the Middle Palaeolithic from about 80,000 years BP to 40,000 years BP and the Upper Palaeolithic from 40,000 till 10,000 years BP.

The Lower Palaeolithic is generally identified by the presence of two types of tools: the chopper-chopping tools and the handaxes. The former, particularly in a non-Indian context, are considered to be earlier to the handaxe tradition. Middle Palaeolithic tools are identified by flake industries and the preferred tools were scrapers. A blade and burin tradition marks the Upper Palaeolithic. Largely the Lower Palaeolithic industry concentrates on quartzite as the raw material; from the Middle Palaeolithic, more fine-grained stones, such as jasper and varieties of chert, were preferred. The tool making technology in the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic is relatively simple, with flakes struck off parent nodules. In the Lower Palaeolithic, tools of the chopper-chopping variety were flaked on working edges, while handaxes were also known as bifaces or tools flaked from both sides. The real change in tool making technology occurs, perhaps from the Middle Palaeolithic but more obviously in the Upper Palaeolithic, when nodules were carefully prepared, so as to remove a number of blades from a single pebble of stone. The raw materials used were fine-grained stones that would result in sharp-edged tools. The technology also implied some amount of mass production and a more efficient way of making tools. Tools were also richer from the Upper Palaeolithic, capable of being used for varied purposes. It is also from this period that bone was used for making tools. A gradual reduction in tool size is a feature of the Palaeolithic with the largest tools in the earliest sub-phase, the Lower Palaeolithic. This is noted at sites in Central India like Adamgarh Hill in Hoshangabad District or Bhimbetka where occupations of Lower and Middle Palaeolithic humans were marked by tools increasingly smaller in size (See Figure 1).

Palaeolithic stone tools are found in several contexts: habitation sites in rock shelters or in the open; factory sites near sources of raw material where tools were made; habitation sites cum factory sites; or scatters of tools. Sometimes, one may find Palaeolithic tools in sections along the banks of rivers. These may not indicate actual living areas of Palaeolithic man but may represent tools moved by river action. We are likely to get better evidence from say, rock shelters where early man may have lived for periods of time, than from the relatively more open areas.

Geographically in the Indian subcontinent, certain areas would have been preferred for habitation by early humans: areas with stone outcrops that would have provided

raw materials for tools, areas with water, and so forth. Thickly vegetated areas, such as in Kerala or the northeast would have been avoided. Thus, we find Palaeolithic sites largely on the foothills of the Himalayas, along the margins of the Ganges plain bordering on the hills of central India, margins of the Thar Desert, and much of central and peninsular India (see Figures 2-4).

Another body of evidence from the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic is the art found in the form of rock engravings, rock bruising and as paintings on walls of caves and rock shelters. Geographically, these are obviously limited to areas where rock formations are available such as the extensive sandstone formations of central India, where shelters with paintings are commonly found. Apart from central India, Ladakh in North India is an area where rock engravings are still being discovered, and South India where carvings and bruising have already been recorded. There are also examples of portable art such as the decorated ostrich eggshells found from Rajasthan that have been radiocarbon dated to c. 40,000 years BP. The Patne eggshells have been dated to 25,000 years BP. The most evocative and extensively studied are the rock paintings (Figure 5). The major ascribed reason for the art itself has been magical. Early paintings largely centre on scenes of hunting and gathering. The depiction of the hunt has been seen in terms of ensuring the efficacy of the actual hunt that in 'killing' the animal through a depiction would ensure the same in practice.

Dating examples of prehistoric art is not easy, and one has a very large time range for the paintings, from about c. 40,000 BP to 1000 AD. While it is difficult to obtain exact dates, one may be better able to obtain relative dates. The fact that paintings are often superimposed one upon the other would enable us to figure out which painted layer was earlier than the others, but the dates for each layer or the relative time elapsing between each layer would be less easy to ascertain. Cave shelters that have occupation deposits can be excavated and the paintings can be correlated to the deposits. One example illustrates this: at Bhimbetka, a famous cave shelter complex in Madhya Pradesh, paintings in a shelter were adjudged to be Upper Palaeolithic in date as they were depicted in green pigment. The correlation was made on the basis of pieces of green pigment found in occupation layers within the shelter that contained Upper Palaeolithic tools. On that basis, V.S. Wakankar also considered the use of green pigment as indicative of the earliest prehistoric paintings. However, this last point has been disputed as early paintings have also been found in red colour.

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## 2.2 SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF HUNTING-GATHERING SOCIETIES

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Let us take the example of the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic site of Budha Pushkar around a lake in the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. Artefacts are found in clusters that perhaps represent small living and multi-activity sites suggesting that groups may have camped here periodically. This archaeological picture beyond a point would not help us to understand ancient society. Information on social structures can be inferred with help from anthropological or ethnographic data from living hunting-gathering societies.

According to Elman Service and Marshall D Sahlins hunting-gathering societies are essentially at the band level of social organisation. The term band is used to signify very small groups (20-50 persons) with a flexible membership. Thus the family is

the essential unit of production with foraging activities performed by the nuclear family within the band's range. Most activities (like collecting, fishing, foraging) are performed at the family level, while hunting of large game could have involved a group of males from several families and/or from a different band. The membership of such groups may have changed from hunt to hunt.

Hunting-gathering societies are solely dependent on wild plants and animals. Wild plant foods gathered mainly by women may have been a more substantial component of the diet than the meat from the hunt. In fact, scholars feel that such communities should be more appropriately termed "gatherer-hunters". Whatever was collected/hunted would have been according to need and consumed immediately – there was no likelihood of storage or surplus. Camps would have had to frequently shift in response to the availability of both plant and animal resources. The frequent mobility of bands also ensured that population remained low; in fact, families deliberately limited their numbers.

Band level societies are essentially egalitarian, with only two kinds of social units comprising of families and bands of related families. There is no formal, permanent or hereditary leadership – either elders may have had influence over moral issues or a particularly skilled hunter may have assumed a leadership role during a hunt. Though there is no clear territoriality, there is some kind of tacit understanding over resource use or the areas where these were available. Conflicts over use of resources may often have been resolved by the moving away of one group.

Ritually, there may have been totemistic beliefs. A totem could be a plant or animal or inanimate object that was protected and revered. The relations between a group and a totem could be such that the group took its identity from the totem. We have also seen in the previous section that visible evidence of beliefs may survive in the form of paintings, engravings and bruisings.

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### **2.3 MESOLITHIC-NEOLITHIC CONTINUUM AND THE PROCESS OF DOMESTICATION**

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Around 10,000 years BP, the Pleistocene gave way to the Holocene. This shift was marked by climatic changes to a warmer climate much like the present, with an increase in rainfall and humidity resulting in a dependability on water sources such as lakes and rivers. Vegetation too changed with an expansion of forests and grasslands into previously arid areas. Human adaptation to the changed environmental circumstances is marked by the Mesolithic. Essentially the Mesolithic is a stage transitional between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic, falling between hunting-gathering and food producing societies. Thus, the Mesolithic, in comparison to the Palaeolithic, probably witnessed the experimenting with a larger range of subsistence strategies. On one end of the continuum would have been a reliance on hunting-gathering and fishing, involving a mobile existence and on the other end, a relatively more settled pattern around a home base.

What we know of a Mesolithic stage in India is not so much one that is clearly transitional between Palaeolithic and Neolithic, but one that is chronologically more diffused, sites in some cases contemporary to Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures. Very few sites have been dated; for instance, Chopani Mando in the Belan Valley (c. 6000BC) and Bagor in Rajasthan (c. 5000-2800 BC) (see Figure 6). On the other hand, we have indications of an advanced Mesolithic, where sites may have

been permanent or semi-permanent, consisting of groups of small huts, with earthen floors, hearths and walls of wattle and daub (reeds plastered with mud). Tools include grinding stones, hammer stones, querns and microliths. Animal bones were of both wild and domesticated species. That would explain the finds of microliths, and heavy stone implements as also the existence of hearths and huts. Querns and grinding stones may have been used for processing edible wild plants that could have been gathered or even cultivated.

From the Near East (the region comprising present-day Syria, Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Turkey to Iraq-Iran, referred to as the 'Fertile Crescent'), the evidence for the transition to a Neolithic way of life is clearer. Between 10,000 and 8,000 years BP, human societies tended to cluster around water bodies on a reasonably permanent basis. There is a shift from the hunting of big game to small animals preferring grassy areas (deer, sheep, goat) and to aquatic resources, as well as to a more limited range of edible plants (in this case wheat and barley). It is these plants and animals (wheat-barley, sheep-goat) that would shortly be domesticated.

By domestication we mean the process by which humans create a new form of plant or animal. Domestication is likely to have taken place in those areas where wild forms, of plants and animals, were already present. The selection of certain plants and animals, those with preferred attributes, would have necessitated a long process of domestication. Those attributes would be: in the case of plants those already relied upon by hunting-gathering societies; "generalist" species that could grow in disturbed conditions; those that are adapted to growing together rather than in dispersed forms; also those that would be able to tolerate moisture and temperature conditions of storage. Certain features would have been looked for – their seed retention capacity and the structure of the plant itself. Of plants that grow in the wild, only those that escape human gathering have the chance of getting dispersed on the ground and sprouting. When humans began to store seed stock for the next growing season, it was these seeds that formed the genetic stock of subsequent harvests. And early farmers would have preferred plants that kept (retained) their seeds till they were harvested, and also those that had their seeds bunched together rather than dispersed all along the stalk of the plant. Obviously in the latter case, much more effort in harvesting would have been required and many seeds would get missed altogether. Thus, the process of domestication of plants was precisely the gradual process of selecting for actual advantages, a process that continues even today. Thus, hardier plants would have been noticed and their seeds preferred over more delicate varieties, those that grew quickly, those that had higher yields, and those that appeared disease-resistant.

Similarly, the domestication of animals was also a long process beginning with following herds of animals, to gradually attracting them to human company, to the preliminary corralling or penning of animals and their protection from other wild animals. Again, the process would work better with certain more docile, friendly animals.

Specialised feeding habits prevent easy domestication of animals – hence goats and pigs are ideal species. Social species are preferable and those that are predisposed to follow a dominant animal are more likely to accept a human substitute. This submissive behaviour is an important requirement for animal domestication. No wonder then, that goat and sheep were the first species to be domesticated in the Near East: both are relatively placid and slow-moving foragers; neither is territorial; and both form highly social groups with a single dominant leader. Also, such species

maintain small home ranges and are thus amenable to human control. The ultimate end of domestication would be where a plant or animal would be unable to survive by itself and needs human initiative even for its propagation.

It is this step taken towards domestication that had far-reaching implications, which V. Gordon Childe described as the 'Neolithic Revolution'. In the Near East, the transition took over c. 2000 years, hence indicating that the change was not sudden but was more in terms of its impact. The process of domestication ushered in a change in ecological relations, with human societies now being much more in control of their food supply. Now plants and animals could be taken from their original habitat and nurtured elsewhere, thus expanding the possible areas of habitation. With the reliance on a limited range of annual crops, there is now a greater need to store grains for the year as well as for seed.

The growing of cereal crops meant their protection and careful tending over a long growing season. This would have required some amount of sedentarisation. At the same time, Neolithic strategies would have also involved the herding of animals (sheep, goat, cattle). Herding involves varying scales of mobility in some cases where for part of the year, animals may have to be pastured at some distance from the home base. It is likely that combinations of cultivation and herding may have been practised, rather than a dependence on either one alone. Moreover, hunting and fishing as also gathering would have had their place in subsistence strategies.

Archaeologically, settled societies do indicate some growth of population. One of the reasons could be sedentarisation where there would be no need to limit the size of the family. In fact, children may be quite useful in protecting growing plants and the herding of animals in and near the settlement. We now clearly see nucleation of population in the form of the 'village'. A Neolithic village would be comprised of a cluster of houses with hearths and storage facilities, particularly for grains. In the context of animal food, storage 'on the hoof' was resorted to, that is, protecting animals and butchering them as and when required. Crafts form a part of the Neolithic way of life. Pottery would now be required for storage purposes as also for the cooking of the hard cereal grains. Weaving of flax and cotton were probably practised.

Other than villages, there could also have been settlements occupied on a relatively temporary basis - such as seasonal settlements, pastoral camps, camps for processing raw materials and so forth. The Neolithic villages would not have been isolated entities. There would have been contact across villages and between mobile and sedentary groups for varying reasons (social ties, buffering mechanisms, barter, perhaps even ritual links).

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## **2.4 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR EARLY FOOD PRODUCING (NEOLITHIC) VILLAGES AND CAMPSITES**

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Let us try and see what these Neolithic settlements were like. An important site for the Neolithic is Mehrgarh in Baluchistan in Pakistan. The location of this site in the fertile Kachi Plain, known as the 'bread basket' of Baluchistan, is particularly significant. The site is located on the bank of the Bolan River and lies at the foot of the Bolan Pass (see Figure 7), perhaps an important route linking the northern and western valleys with the Indus Plains.

With a very long history of occupation, Mehrgarh is recorded by archaeologists as having eight cultural levels, of which the first two, Period I and II were Neolithic. Period I is aceramic (without pottery) while pottery appears in Period II at the site. The earliest settlement may go back to c. 7000 BC. From the beginning of occupation, mudbricks were used for constructing the groups of 2-4 small rectangular rooms that may have been houses. These were associated with fireplaces. There is evidence for the crafts of bone and stone tool making. A new feature seen here is the setting of multiple blades in bitumen on a bone or wood handle, to be used as sickles for the cutting of plants.

Burials in Period I indicate early beliefs regarding the disposal of the dead. Items deposited with the dead were ornaments, made of materials of which some came from distant areas, such as marine shell. Other materials deposited in graves were bitumen-lined baskets and food, including whole young goats.

In Period II, structures with numerous compartments were constructed (Figure 8). Some of these were of two rows of cells separated by a central corridor or passage. These kinds of structures may have been used as storehouses or granaries.

Mehrgarh is a valuable site for the Neolithic because of the evidence for domestication. Plant remains are found in the form of impressions, particularly in brick, and as burnt specimens. Largely these were of wheat and barley. Over half the animals represented in the aceramic neolithic were wild, with the largest number being gazelle, along with other deer species, nilagai, onager, wild pig and so forth. Of domesticated species, goats are the largest in number followed by sheep and cattle. By the end of Period I, gazelle appear to have almost disappeared with other wild species found in small amounts, while sheep-goat are over half of the domesticated species.

The evidence of domesticated species may represent the importance of herding in the Neolithic economy. As mentioned earlier, there may have been pastoral campsites at varying distances from the home base. However, the archaeological detection of such campsites will not be as easy as that of a sedentary village, for the simple reason that herders on the move will carry little with them. Also, since occupations are for short durations, there will be little build-up of occupation deposits. Moreover, intensive explorations, necessary to detect such sites, have not been possible for various reasons.

Another geographical area where Neolithic sites have been found is Kashmir, where an important site, Burzahom was excavated (see Figure 7). At Burzahom, early Neolithic (dated around 3000 BC) dwellings were in the form of pits of varying depths. Holes around the pits may have been used for erecting poles and some sort of roofing made of birches, of which burnt pieces have been found. Cooking may have been done both inside and outside the pits as seen by the evidence for hearths. The suggestion is that the pits were mainly used as dwellings in the cold weather (see Figure 9). Apart from Neolithic ground stone axes, bone tools were also used. Crude handmade pottery was also found.

In the later Neolithic (which continued until 1700 BC) at Burzahom, the pit dwellings were given up and structures of mud or mud bricks were made. Handmade pottery and Neolithic tools continued. Apart from this, a few objects may indicate contact with outsiders. A few copper arrowheads, a wheel-made red ware pot with 950 beads of stones like agate and carnelian, and certain painted pottery may suggest



contact with Mature Harappan settlements in the Greater Indus Valley to the south. Other interesting details from the later Neolithic are animal burials (of wild dogs) found along with those of humans. The use of red ochre in the burials and in other parts of the settlement has also been noted.

A cluster of Neolithic villages (dated between 4000 and 2500 BC) showing links with the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic have been reported in the Vindhyan region, particularly the Ganges Plains and the Belan and Son Valleys. Hand-made pottery of various types is found as well as the ground stone axes typical of the Neolithic. The small squarish flat ground stone axes and cord-impressed pottery are hints that this region was the western extension of an Eastern Neolithic culture of Eastern Central India, Assam and South East Asia. The significance of this area may lie in its being the locus of an early domestication of rice in the subcontinent. The penning of cattle appears to be a new feature in these sites.

A dependence on cattle-keeping may also have been a feature of the South Indian Neolithic. Sites in this region are the distinctive ashmounds (literally mounds of ash suggesting large-scale ancient burning of heaps of cow-dung), as well as ashmounds associated with habitations or habitations alone. The ashmounds or stockaded cattle-pens were the earliest Neolithic sites in the south, dating between c. 2900 and 2400 BC. Examples of such sites were Utnur, Kuggal, Kodekal and Pallavoy (see Figure 7), all in modern Karnataka. These stockades were in two consecutive rings of palm trees, the inner one for possibly enclosing animals and the outer for the herders. Those ashmounds occurring alone (without permanent habitation sites) may have been pastoral campsites. Their location in the midst of forests may add to such an interpretation. The habitation sites generally date from 2000 BC.

Just like at Mehrgarh, subsistence strategies would have involved animal herding as well as grain (probably *ragi*) collection or cultivation. By c. 2000 BC, *ragi* is archaeologically detected and this may have been the main cereal consumed, as this region is well suited environmentally to the cultivation of millet.

In the South Indian Neolithic, materially, one finds the same evidence as in other parts of the subcontinent – stone artefacts like querns, hammer stones and sling balls, as well as blades of fine-grained stones. Pottery is found throughout the Neolithic period. One of the reasons for the location of sites in this region may be the proximity to the gold resources of Karnataka and the possibility that some small-scale early gold mining may go back to this period. The contemporaneity of the South Indian Neolithic with the Early and Mature Harappan cultures may be a reason for the extraction of gold.

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## 2.5 SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF EARLY FOOD PRODUCING (FARMING AND HERDING) SO- CIENTIES

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A Neolithic society is a tribal society. By tribe is meant a particular stage in social organisation as well as a particular type of society. It is not necessary that band societies (hunting-gathering) would evolve into tribal societies.

A tribal society, in contrast to bands, comprise larger numbers (100 onwards) of people held together by kinship relations, lineages, common ancestors and joint ownership of and equal access to resources, by descent groups. A tribe is composed

of a number of clans, which in turn comprises of different lineages/descent groups. The smallest social unit is the extended family, not the nuclear family. It enables the pooling of labour required to take care of diversified activities typical of Neolithic societies and to offset risks.

Socially, the tribal level of society is characterised by the importance given to kinship relations. Essentially egalitarian, there is little social stratification. Kinship relations not only govern most aspects of society, but also function as integrative mechanisms. Exchanges, for example, between close kin would act as safety nets against situations of stress and scarcity of food. Marriages between descent groups, bringing about alliances, act as forces of cohesion. At the tribal level, different forms (matrilateral, patrilateral, bilateral) of cross-cousin marriage (with frequent reversals of wife-givers and wife-takers) prevent the hierarchisation of lineages.

Another integrative force at the tribal level would have been pan-tribal associations, some of which cut across kinship ties. These would have included individuals bound together by common features, such as age and proficiency in ritual or warfare or healing. The fourth integrative force is that of inter-tribal warfare, where one tribe perforce unites against another. Inter-tribal warfare is chronic in tribal societies, and is never conclusive. Warfare in the form of raids or ambushes, aims at the capture of booty and the prevention of encroachment into favoured areas.

These integrative forces were necessary in the absence of political institutions binding the tribe together. Tribal leadership (Big Man) depends on personal charisma or qualities of individuals and is not permanent. There is no real power attached to this office; the role of a Big Man is as an advisor. Kinship relations also prevent the misuse of the position of a big Man.

Ancestor worship as forming part of religious beliefs assumes importance in the tribal level of society. Such beliefs involve the worship of immediate (at the family level) and more remote (at the level of the clan) ancestors. Ancestors are considered responsible for the well being of the members of society. Misfortunes require the placating of ancestors at family and clan levels by sacrifices and ritual exchanges.

Certain individuals within the tribe have skills perhaps not available to all- to communicate with the supernatural world, through a state of trance, to cure, to divine. Such skills may or may not be hereditary. These individuals, described in anthropology as shamans, occupy an important position in society.

The tribal level of society in a way provides the basis for most subsequent social development that we will see in the following Units.

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## 2.6 SUMMARY

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This Unit has dealt with hunting-gathering and food-producing societies. The archaeological evidence for a hunting-gathering society comprises of lithic tools, indicating a simple level of social organisation. The domestication of plants and animals was an important step, setting in motion a chain of subsequent development. Sedentarisation and its effects, and the integration into larger units in society provide for more varied material evidence. Social organisation is still at a fairly simple level, dealing with egalitarian societies. In the next Unit, we will see the beginnings of social stratification and a far more complex organisation of society.

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## 2.7 GLOSSARY

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**Stratigraphy:** The concept of stratigraphy rests on a basic principle of the deposition of consequent layers, where the uppermost layers would be the most recent while the lowermost would be the oldest. Continuity of human occupation at a place would imply that over time building, destruction/decay, levelling, rebuilding of structures and the discard and/or loss of objects would eventually result in a mound-like formation.

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## 2.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) Rice is one of the cereals for which wild species still exist in the subcontinent. Find out where wild varieties of rice are found. Do these areas correlate with the evidence for rice domestication in the subcontinent? How does our knowledge of the Neolithic Revolution help us to understand this picture?
- 2) Is there a Stone Age site in your vicinity? Or visit the nearest Museum to look at the finds for the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic or Neolithic. If you cannot do either, then study the report for Bagor. What kind of understanding of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic or Neolithic societies can be obtained from such finds?

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## UNIT 3 HARAPPAN CIVILISATION AND OTHER CHALCOLITHIC CULTURES

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### Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 The Background
- 3.2 The Harappan Culture
- 3.3 Urbanism
- 3.4 State Structure
- 3.5 Social Structure
- 3.6 End of the Harappan Civilization
- 3.7 Other Chalcolithic Cultures
- 3.8 Summary
- 3.9 Glossary
- 3.10 Exercises
- 3.11 Suggested Readings

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### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

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The purpose of this Unit is to investigate more complex social structures than those covered in the previous Unit. This complexity arises due to the emergence of the state in the 3rd millennium BC. This early state is an inchoate one, incorporating many elements of tribal societies. This Bronze Age state is also quite different from the states of later periods, in no small measure due to the lack of commoditisation and coined money in this period. That this period also witnessed the first experiments in urbanism in the subcontinent adds to its complexity. These developments were basically confined to the North-western parts of the subcontinent and one must be aware that other socio-political structures, like band, tribal or chiefship level societies, may have existed contemporaneously in this and other areas.

So far, we have seen incipient stages of social development, encompassing the band and tribal levels. In this Unit, we will discuss the other two stages of development, namely chiefdom (or chiefship) and state. Structurally, the chiefdom resembles the tribal level with the beginnings of social stratification, a political office and redistributive economy. On the other hand, there is a marked difference between tribal or chiefdom and state societies. Essentially, the chief enjoys ritual power and not political or economic control over people. In the case of a state, on the other hand, the ruler has actual control over resources and hence political authority. In a state, kinship no longer plays a determining role in social and economic transactions. This paves the way for enforcing decisions, rules and so forth over social entities larger than a kin group. In fact, there is marked social stratification, the beginnings of class structure, an institutionalized political office and occupational differentiation. These elements, indicative of increasing complexity, occur relatively late in human history, that is, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. At the same time, we need to be aware that some elements of tribal societies would continue into Bronze Age state societies.

In this Unit, we will be referring to Bronze Age and chalcolithic societies. The Bronze Age, a term used by V. Gordon Childe, should be seen not merely as a technological stage, but as one marked by a particular social form, that takes shape

within an urban context and has features of a state society, while the term chalcolithic would refer to food producing societies at the tribal level of social organization. While stone was used far more than metal for the major cutting tools in the chalcolithic, the Bronze Age is noted for a far more regular use of copper/bronze tools. Given that there are limitations to the forms possible in stone, the chalcolithic indicates a more basic toolkit (where chalcolithic metal objects largely imitated stone tool types), unlike the Bronze Age where a greater diversity in shapes and sizes of metal tools come into use. Moreover there are several other implications involved in bronze metallurgy. In contrast to stone, copper is not found commonly and even more rare is tin, the major alloying material used for making bronze. This would have necessitated regular long-distance trade networks, in turn requiring certain institutional mechanisms.

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### 3.1 THE BACKGROUND

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The Greater Indus Valley (Baluchistan, Sind, the Punjab and parts of Rajasthan) is the backdrop of cultural developments in the subcontinent until the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. We have already seen early developments in this region in the previous Unit, more specifically at the site of Mehrgarh, the Bolan Valley. There is continuous occupation at the site from neolithic to chalcolithic, with the beginning of the settlement going back to c.7000 BC. The chalcolithic is roughly dated from 4000 BC to 2200 BC but Mehrgarh has no Harappan occupation.

The period, roughly from 3300-2600 BC, is marked by what are called Early Harappan or Early Indus cultures, the Amri-Nal, Kot Diji, Sothi-Siswal and Damb Saddat cultures. Essentially differentiated on the basis of ceramics, there is some spatial overlap between these cultures (See Figure 1).

What is relevant is that most of the areas of the Greater Indus Valley are settled in this period. Wheat, barely, cattle, sheep and goat formed the major subsistence base. House building methods also show some continuity from this period in to the Mature Harappan period ( c.2600-1900 BC). Archaeologists like M.R. Mughal have pointed out similarities between the Early and Mature Harappan in ceramic shapes and designs, artifacts like terracotta toy-cart frames and wheels, cakes and cones.

The continuing elements have led archaeologists like B. Allchin, R. Allchin and J.M. Kenoyer to consider the Early Harappan as a stage of incipient urbanism, one that is formative in the development of the Harappan civilization. On the other hand, G.L. Possehl, J. Shaffer and D.L. Lichtenstein consider the Early Harappan to be pre-urban leading to a short (100-150 years) transitional period, culminating in the Harappan civilization. S. Ratnagar, however, points out the discontinuities. For one, only about one fifth of the Early Harappan / Early Indus Settlements continue to be occupied in the Harappan period. Moreover one-fifth of the Early Harappan / Early Indus settlements continue to be occupied in the Harappan period. Moreover, the size range of Harappan sites contrasts with that for the earlier cultures: in the case of the Harappan, site sizes range from less than 1 ha to 125 ha (some considering the latter figure to be more than 200 ha). For the earlier period, the range is from less than 1 ha to 30 ha. She also sees the difference between the two cultures in terms of social organization, where large fortified Early Indus settlements like Rahman Dheri, in Dera Ismail Khan District in the western plains of the Indus, may have been the locus of a chiefship. In contrast, the Harappan is seen in terms of an early state, which will be discussed below:

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## 3.2 THE HARAPPAN CULTURE

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The Harappan culture (also termed as the Indus Valley Civilization and the Mature Harappan) covers a large geographic area, comprising of Sind, the Makran, the Punjab, Northern Rajasthan, Kutch and parts of Kathiawad with some outlying sites such as Shortughai in northeast Afghanistan and Manda in Jammu & Kashmir (See Figure 2).

The Harappan culture is a proto-historic culture, where writing (limited to seals and other inscribed material) was known but there are no lengthy texts. Thus, for most interpretation of society and economy, we are dependent on the material record. The question is, what in the material record would enable us to recognise a Harappan site? Sites are classified as Harappan on the basis of the recovery of the following types of artifacts. Thick red pottery decorated with black paintings, square steatite seals with a boss, chert cubical weights adhering to a certain standard, burnt bricks with dimensions of a particular ratio (4:2:1), terracotta toy-cart frames and wheels, triangular terracotta cakes, steatite micro-beads, long cylindrical carnelian beads, etched carnelian beads with particular treatment of the surface and designs, long chert blades and so on. It is not the presence of one or two of these artefact-types, but the co-occurrence of a number of them, that comprises an archaeological assemblage, representing most spheres of human activity. Moreover, these artefact-types should come from a limited, defined and continuous geographical area and period of time and would comprise an archaeological culture. For example, etched carnelian beads with different designs can be found in the Iron Age (from 1000 BC) in Karnataka. That does not mean that those sites are Harappan. The Karnataka sites would belong to a different archaeological culture. Similarly, just finding a single artefact-type, like long chert blades, in a site belonging to the same period will not qualify the site to be called Harappan. To take a concrete example, beads of typical Harappan type found carefully kept in a pot in a chalcolithic site in Madhya Pradesh, Kayatha, would not mean that the site was Harappan. The entire material assemblage, apart from the beads, was chalcolithic in nature. Thus, the find of those beads would probably represent a hard, secreted away, indicating some interaction with the Harappan society. Moreover, finding an artefact with some vague resemblance to a Harappan artefact in shape or material in a distance area like eastern India would not mean the extension of the Harappan culture to that region. This is because there should be some rigour in recognizing artefact-types. Artefact-types should comprise of multiple attributes (and not just a single one) such as shape, size, material, colour, context and so forth.

Thus, in the Harappan case, we find the distribution of a somewhat uniform material assemblage over a large geographic area and period of time. In fact, early archaeologists, such as Stuart Piggott, considered Harappan products as standardized and uniform. However, with more excavations and research, regional variations have been delineated. Yet, one cannot deny that certain artefact-types do have a wide distribution. We need to go into the implications of such a distribution. There is a strong likelihood that we may be dealing with a state(s) in the Harappan period, a discussion that we will go into later in this Unit.

To go back to an earlier point, we had mentioned that in the Harappan period, there is a greater size range for sites, in contrast to the Early Indus period. So there are some very large sites such as Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Rakhigarhi, Ganweriwala and Dholavira. Second, the Harappan culture is marked also by a profusion of

crafts in scale and range. This expansion of non-subsistence production is a differentiating feature of the Harappan civilization from preceding and subsequent periods. This can be explained by the fact that the Harappan civilization provides the earliest evidence of urbanism in the subcontinent.

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### 3.3 URBANISM

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To quote Shereen Ranagar, “a city is a node where population chooses to concentrate, to create a settlement larger and more dense than most other contemporary settlements, not in order to make food production more efficient, but because of an engagement in non-subsistence activities such as crafts or trade, administration or ritual services”.

Let us take the example of a small rural settlement. According to geographers, like M. Chisholm, an area of land (upto a distance of 4 km) round a settlement would be used for locating agricultural fields. Areas further away would be used for other purposes such as pasture lands, forests and for other requirements, as it would be disadvantageous to locate fields more than an hour’s walking distance away from the settlement. This agricultural land would provide livelihood for the inhabitants of the village. If land for fields were available only further away, one would find fissioning of the village, with the ‘hiving-off’ or ‘budding-off’ of daughter settlements. In a nucleated settlement (a city/town) on the other hand, that amount of agricultural land that can conveniently be cultivated is unlikely to suffice for the entire population. Hence, there is a greater significance in the engagement of non-subsistence activities.

Why is there a need for population to nucleate? There could be ritual or political reasons, in an area being a ritual or political centre, or for defence purposes or to make non-agricultural production and transactions more efficient. In the case of the latter, let us contrast again a rural settlement from an urban one. In a rural landscape, each settlement may have a single potter or some may have no potter. Each potter would work in isolation, procuring his own raw materials, like clay, fuel and so forth, building his own facilities, and distributing his own products in the village and to nearby villages. In the case of nucleated settlement on the other hand, potters could cooperate to procure raw materials, share facilities like the kiln and distribution networks. Moreover, the larger consuming population would provide for expansion in production and perhaps enable a greater tendency for specialization.

Socially an urban situation provides for residence within the settlement as being more significant than kinship relations. due to nucleation of population, dealings within the city are more likely to be between strangers, unlike in a rural settlement. This would make way for changes in social structures and for the existence of a state.

Mohenjodaro and Harappa are clearly the two largest Harappan settlements. We will take the case of Mohenjodaro to illustrate a Bronze Age city. Mohenjodaro is divided into two sections, a higher and a smaller western section termed the Citadel and a lower and larger area to its east called the Lower Town (See Figure 3). These two sections are clearly spatially separated and may have been individually walled. Most large seemingly special purpose (non-residential) structures locate on the Citadel (such as the storage facility, the Great Bath), though some large structures occur in the Lower Town too. This may indicate the special nature of the Citadel as well as a possible attempt to segregate its functions and inhabitants from the rest of the city.

Social heterogeneity can be inferred from the lack of uniformity in house types and sizes. Within the Lower Town, large and small houses occur together. Material culture too indicates differences in consumption. For example, a long (upto 12 cm) bead in carnelian ( a favoured red coloured stone) appears to have been rare and copied in clay. Mohenjodaro also gives evidence for metallurgy, shell working, bead making and the production of seals and weights. These crafts are not practiced in every household, and many among them clearly required complex skills and facilities.

By and large scholars concur that there is an integral connection between urbanism and state societies. A state need not have urban centres, but the opposite does not generally hold true while the existence of urban centres generally necessitates a state structure, though here again there can be exceptions.

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### 3.4 STATE STRUCTURE

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To ascertain the existence of a state, one would have to look for markers of control over various spheres of society. Control could be over territory, in the form of mobilization of surplus and labour, and in the provisions of infrastructure for administration, exchange and production.

By using the term surplus we mean that part of the produce that is extracted by a social centre/authority and which is used by the social centre/elite for various purposes, such as for their own maintenance, for maintaining social relations, for the support of specialists and for promoting community enterprises.

Archaeologists have interpreted large storage facilities at Mohenjodaro and Harappa as granaries that would indicate that surplus was collected at least at these two centres. However, these structures need not necessarily have been used for manufactured goods and raw materials. While in a more developed state system, surplus mobilization termed as tax or rent would have existed (there is enough written evidence for later states like the Mauryan Empire), the Harappan situation is more ambiguous. There is a distinct possibility that the mobilization of labour may have been preferred mode of maintaining control. There are various indications of the control of labour. Urban settlements such as Mohenjodaro and Harappa have a fairly elaborate drainage system that would have required supervised construction and regular maintenance. The same would have been in the case of roads and streets. Similarly, storage facilities too would have required personnel for loading and unloading purposes. Various construction activities at the larger centres particularly the firing of millions of bricks would have envisaged the mobilization of labour. The work of craft specialists, the setting up of craft centres, some at remote distances (such as Shortughai) and the obtaining of raw materials perhaps through specially set-up expeditions may have been other ways of controlling production and exchange.

There is a certain amount of debate over the issue whether there was a single state or several in the Harappan period (W.F. Fairservis and J. Shaffer, in contrast, visualize the Harappan situation as a chiefdom.) S.P. Gupta, B.B. Lal and J.M. Kenoyer prefer to think of several city-states in the Greater Indus Valley in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, with Mohenjodaro at the centre of one, Harappa of another, and similarly with Rakhigarhi, Dholavira, Ganweriwala and so forth. This conception largely rests on a backward projection of the recorded evidence of city-states in the Early Historic period, and on what they perceive as the appearance of autonomy and a distinct regional identity for the large urban centre of the Harappan civilization.



On the other hand, J. Jacobson and S. Ratnagar have argued for the case of a single state. This rests on a more or less common material culture over a large geographic area, the provision of a uniform system of recording (the script) and mensuration (the weights), the provision of infrastructure such as a common metal and stone tool kit, the lack of regional clusters in animal symbols on steatite seals, the common appearance of the unicorn symbol on seals, the establishment of settlements at specific loci for particular purposes (like craft centres or for the procurement of raw materials) and the unevenness of large urban centres distributed over the map (Harappa, Rakhigarhi and Ganweriwala all clusters in the eastern part of the Harappan region).

Also significant is that we are dealing with a non-market economy and an absence of coinage, with an early state that would have vestiges of a tribal and chiefdom society. Aspects of a developed state system, such as a bureaucracy and a standing army, are markedly absent. In the following section, we will investigate the social structure that may have prevailed in the Harappan period.

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### 3.5 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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While in chiefdom societies, kinship determined social and economic relations, in state societies on the other hand, extra-kin relations have to be worked out. Political purposes could be served and the incorporation of communities could be achieved through mechanisms such as gift-giving, marriage alliances, patron-client relationships. Thus, in an urban situation, solidarity is not dependent on kinship but on interdependence and a common residence pattern. Yet, we cannot dismiss the continuance of kin groupings in society as is clear from Bronze Age Mesopotamia and China. Joint ownership of resources may have continued and the mobilization of labour too may have been on kin lines. Thus what is clear is that there would have been considerable social heterogeneity, particularly if population nucleated to form urban centres. Archaeologically, social heterogeneity can be distinguished in various ways.

In the first place, the fact that some Harappan settlements shown a separation between a Citadel and Lower Town (See Figures 3 and 4) may indicate not only functionally different areas within a settlement but also perhaps a degree of social segregation. Plans for Mohenjodaro in turn indicate a diversity of house forms and sizes. Variation in sizes may not necessarily indicate economic differences but could reflect household or family units. The Mohenjodaro house (See Figure 5) very often centred on a courtyard that was not immediately accessible from the entrance. This ensured the privacy of the courtyard and the inner rooms. It is, however, not quite clear whether a socially heterogeneous population necessitated such privacy.

As mentioned earlier, there is enough evidence to show that there was occupational differentiation in society. At the same time, we need to note that certain skills, particularly in craft, may have been promoted but these need not have meant full-time occupations. We need not presume that specialists would not have engaged in subsistence-procurement activities.

Diversity of types and materials of artifacts may indicate differences in consumption patterns: spindle whorls of terracotta or faience, vessels of terracotta or bronze, bangles and beads of clay, stone, bone, shell, faience, metal and so forth. At the

same time, it should be pointed out that there is no simple correlation between, say size of residence and seemingly wealth objects.

Practices of disposal of the dead largely comprise of burials though there may have been other methods less archaeologically identifiable. Even within burials, one finds some amount of variation: there is evidence of extended burials, burials in urns or large pots, in coffins and burials may also have been secondary or symbolic. Interestingly, Harappan burials show little evidence of social hierarchies, unlike Mesopotamian, Egyptian or Chinese Bronze Age burials, where some interments may indicate considerable wealth. Moreover, Harappan burials were confined to cemeteries located away from habitations. It is not yet if these cemeteries were limited to particular social groups.

Inference of Harappan religion and belief remain conjectural due to our reliance on material evidence alone. Artefacts like terracotta female figurines (Figure 6) termed as Mother Goddesses, have been found at major urban centres like Mohenjodaro. Pits with evidence of burning, sometimes associated with animal bones, were found from Kalibangan and Lothal and have been interpreted as fire altars. An image, on a seal and tokens, of a seated male in yogic posture was considered as a proto-Siva (Figure 7). This same figure has more recently been interpreted as evidence of shamanistic beliefs prevailing in the Harappan culture. Ritual practices may be depicted through certain motifs on steatite seals, such as the narrative scenes. The Mohenjodaro Great Bath, itself, has been considered as the locus of a public/royal ritual.

What is important is that religious beliefs or practices may not have been homogeneous for the Harappan civilization as a whole. If there was a fire cult, it was limited to a few centres. Mother Goddess figurines, for example, are not found in Kutch. Public rituals involving immersion in water may have been confined to Mohenjodaro. Neither can we eliminate the possibility of cults involving vegetation, nature or animals in certain areas.

Seals (see Figure 8) as class of objects, perhaps functioned as identity markers, indicating dealings with strangers or provided proof of authenticity. These steatite objects are provided with a pierced boss (protrusion) at the back through which string was probably threaded, enabling it to be perhaps worn. The front of the seal is generally engraved with a motif usually of an animal (or sometimes narrative scenes or vegetation motifs or of a seated human) along with signs of the Harappan script. While the unicorn- a mythical creature - is the most popular, none of the seal motifs concentrate regionally.

Seals are also significant because of their inscriptions. This earliest evidence of writing in the subcontinent has larger implications, of literacy in the society. The fact that seals, used for exchange purposes, were inscribed does not necessarily mean that literacy was widespread. It is quite likely that the knowledge of writing may have been limited to few individuals.

The Bronze Age is considered to be an expanding political economy primarily due to the need for materials of restricted occurrence such as copper and even more so tin. Moreover, large urban centres in the Harappan civilization indicate the use of a wide range of raw materials. Both these indicate wide interaction spheres in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, in other words, relations with the outside world. This could be with areas on the periphery such as chalcolithic settlements in the copper-rich

parts of Rajasthan (Ganeshwar-Jodhpura), or with settlements in Baluchistan, termed as Kulli culture sites. Farther away are Neolithic settlements in South Kashmir (Burzahom, for example). Interactions with regions much farther away (Mesopotamia, Oman, Bahrain) are known through Mesopotamian written records as well as archaeological material. These interactions would have been of varied nature; we know through ethnographical and historical accounts that interactions need not all be subsumed under trade alone. Hence, some interactions may have come under the form of expeditions to obtain raw materials, or political embassies to further diplomatic links. It is also clear that the state may have provided for the movement of people, in the establishment of settlements such as Shortughai, near the lapis lazuli mines in Afghanistan, and craft centres such as Chanhudaro in Sind and Lothal in Gujarat. *These interactions, epitomizing open expanding structures may have had other implications such as bilingualism or multilingualism.*

There is thus in the Harappan period a dramatic transformation in society. Centred on the city, this change reflects a considerable social heterogeneity. And yet there is cohesiveness and this may have been achieved through a common general code of rules and regulations that is imposed from above. One may think of this as a Great Tradition subsuming multiple Little Traditions. In a way this solidarity or cohesion appears to have been transitory, because with the disintegration of the Harappan state, the social structure reverts back to a tribal form. Perhaps this indicates that kin groupings in society would have retained their importance even in an urban situation with new social institutions.

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### 3.6 END OF THE HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

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Roughly around 1900 BC, there is a visible change in the material record. First, numerous Harappan settlements in the core areas of the Greater Indus Valley (Sind, Punjab and the Hakra Valley) are abandoned. For example, from Mughal's survey in the Hakra Valley, it appears that out of 83 Harappan habitation sites, only one continued to be occupied and 27 new settlements were established in the later period. Moreover, the material culture also undergoes a change: a far smaller, and that too more locally exploited, range of raw materials appears to have been utilized and diversity of types of artifacts also decrease. Characteristic Harappan artefacts that we listed above seem to disappear: cubical weights, long carnelian beads, etched carnelian beads, square steatite seals and so forth. These changes have been seen as 'decline' or the 'end' of the Harappan civilization. Various explanations have been offered for the above ranging from natural calamities (like floods), climatic change, environmental degradation, Aryan invasion and due to inherent weaknesses in the socio-political structure.

Leaving aside the Aryan invasion, a theory that has long ago been discarded, most prevailing ideas of environmental degradation or climatic change as responsible for the end of the Harappan civilization cannot be found to apply to the entire area covered by the Harappan culture. For example, the drying up of the Ghaggar/Hakra river resulted in the desertion of sites in the Cholistan Desert, but that would not have been a factor for the abandonment or desertion of sites in other areas.

It is clear that around 1900 BC, the Harappan state was collapsing or going through a crisis. This perhaps led to widespread desertion of sites (both rural and urban) in the core areas and considerable migrations of people to outlying areas, such as Kathiawad and eastern Punjab. We should not assume that all aspects of life

associated with the Harappan came to an end. Those aspects related to the state and urban living do disappear, but others, connected with basic subsistence practices or technologies seem to continue. Those social institutions that may have been created to forge ties between non-kin within urban settlements and between distant settlements appears not to have taken root. With the end of the Harappan state, these social institutions too collapse, resulting in a reversal to tribal institutions, that we note in the following period. This we will deal with in the next section.

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### 3.7 OTHER CHALCOLITHIC CULTURES

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Following the Harappan period, we find the Greater Indus Valley occupied by several regions chalcolithic cultures, such as the Cemetery H and Jhukar cultures (See Figure 9). In outlying areas, to the East and South (the Punjab and Kathiawad), we find material elements reappearing that had been there prior to the Harappan and continued contemporaneously with it. These cultures are largely distinguished on the basis of ceramics while other artifacts indicate the use of local raw materials and a limited range of types. The diversity of crafts visible in the Harappan is no longer present. Materially, there are a few new elements appearing: seals or amulets as Jhukar (differing from the Harappan in shape, material and possibly function), paintings on Cemetery H pottery, terracotta headrests at Jhukar, and so forth. These cultures comprise small rural settlements with houses of mud.

Outside the Indus Valley and Gujarat, there are other chalcolithic cultures occurring in various parts of the subcontinent. These are partly contemporary with the Harappan culture at the earliest and continue into later periods. These include the Banas/Ahar culture in eastern Rajasthan, an area known for copper deposits (with a major site, Ahar, giving evidence for copper smelting). Further to the east, in Malwa, we come across other chalcolithic cultures termed as the Malwa Culture, followed by the Jorwe Culture. However, Jorwe culture predominantly occurs in the northern part of the Deccan Plateau (see Figure 9). Again, pottery is a feature differentiating cultures from each other.

Most of these chalcolithic cultures appear to have had tribal social structures with the capacity to develop into chiefdoms. One clear case of the latter can be given of Inamgaon, a Jorwe Culture site that may have developed into the seat of a chiefship. A chiefdom level of organization refers to tribes with one or more status groups: chiefs (sometimes with a graded hierarchy) and commoners. Often, chiefly positions are hereditary. To quote M.D. Sahlins, “power resides in the (chiefly) office, in an organized acquiescence to chiefly privileges and organized means of upholding them. Included is a specific control over the goods and services of the underlying population. The people owe in advance their labour and their products. And with these funds of power, the chief indulges in grandiose gestures of generosity ranging from personal aid to massive support of collective ceremonial or economic enterprise”.

What could have been ways to archaeologically detect the presence of chiefships? These could be through the analysis of mortuary remains, settlement size hierarchies, structural remains and some organization of production. In the context of mortuary remains, one would look for the size of funerary monuments, the presence of wealth objects within graves as well as children’s burial of valuables, themselves rare in chalcolithic contexts, would mean their being taken out of circulation. Also, infants being buried with such objects would indicate an ascriptive, rather than achieved, status.

Settlement size hierarchies would rest on the understanding that certain settlements at the top of the hierarchy would be those where differently graded chiefs would reside. (The hierarchy of chiefs essentially depends on proximity to the common ancestor, with the senior-most descendent at the top of the hierarchy). At the bottom of the hierarchy may be numerous small settlements clustering around the seats of chiefships. The latter would be relatively larger in size because they would attract followers and loyal kinsmen. Structural remains within seats of chiefships may indicate differing social statuses. For example, a chief's house would tend to be larger in size than the others due to the need to entertain visitors. There would also be storage facilities attached to the house of chiefs, attesting to the significant redistributive role of chiefs. The chief is seen as a ritual leader, and is therefore offered tribute by their kinsmen and followers, which is termed as "first fruits". Much of this tribute goes back to the community through gift-giving or as aid in times of stress or for community works and inherently shows the non-appropriative role of chiefs. Essentially, this aspect of chiefships is necessary because of close kin relations.

Organization of production, clearly witnessed through ethnographic accounts, in the case of crafts is through sponsorship of certain skilled individuals for the manufacture of prestige goods. These individuals may be supported by part of the tribute collected by the chief. These skilled individuals may be supported by part of the tribute collected by the chief. These skilled individuals are not specialists in that they only work at crafts, but more in the context of skill. Prestige goods would often be displayed on ceremonial occasions to show the prestige of the chiefs and at times may also be given as gifts to other elites. There is another category of objects that function as primitive valuables. The main difference between prestige goods and primitive valuables would be that the latter can be used in more generalized exchanges, such as payment for death compensation, or war or alliances, or payment for the labour of craftsmen, or marriage payments and could be used to obtain a variety of subsistence goods. In contrast, prestige goods cannot be exchanged for subsistence goods but may move in their own separate sphere of exchange.

We will now take up the particular case of Inamgaon. M.K. Dhavalikar considered the site as representative of a chiefship centre on the basis of the analysis of burials and structural remains. Situated on the Ghod river in the Bhima Valley of Maharashtra, this site of about 5 ha was occupied from 1600-1700 BC. Its earliest occupation was the Malwa phase (1600-1400 BC) followed by the Early Jorwe 91400-1000 BC) and finally the Late Jorwe phase (1000-700 BC).

As far as structural remains are concerned, a large multi-roomed (5 rooms) house contrasted with the other single-roomed houses in the Early Jorwe period. This large structure (see Figure 10) was in the central part of the settlement and next to it was identified a granary with pit silos and round mud platforms. Two large fire-pits were found in the granary. In the courtyard of this house was also found a four-legged clay jar, enclosing a skeleton of an adult male sitting cross-legged with feet intact. This latter feature has been contrasted with other burials at Inamgaon, where bodies were buried without feet. A four-legged jar found in a slightly earlier level is considered to represent a symbolic burial as it contains no human skeleton. There was only an animal bone and the jar was covered with a knobbed lid. Close to this large structure has been found another burial comprising of two clay jars fitting into one another. Enclosed within the jars was the skeleton of a two-year old girl child with a necklace of alternating jasper and copper beads (Figure 11). The latter may provide an instance of ascribed or inherited status.

A possible irrigation channel (118 m long, 3.50m deep and 4 m wide) with an embankment of stone rubble (2-4 m wide, 240 m long) was apparently constructed in the Early Jorwe period. This evidence may indicate a community project involving some amount of labour mobilisation by the chief.

In the Late Jorwe phase, mostly round huts were uncovered while a four-roomed rectangular structure was found in the eastern margin of the settlement. This structure enclosed a double burial (one man, one woman), with intact feet, under the floor of one of the rooms. Dhavalikar proposed that the chiefship passed into a different family in this late phase due to the shift in location.

At a more general level, it may be pointed out that chiefships are inherently unstable polities. Rather than expanding and developing into a more elaborate structure, there is a greater tendency for chiefships to fission. The role of kinship as an enabling and a limiting factor to the power of chiefs essentially differentiates that social formation from a state. Thus, for a state society to develop, a new set of social institutions (overriding kin relations) needs to be set in place.

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### 3.8 SUMMARY

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In this Unit, we have attempted to analyse the possible form of the Harappan Bronze Age state. The role of the elite appears to have been of major significance in this early state, for obtaining non-local materials such as copper and tin that were required for the making of bronze, for supervising craft activities as well as subsistence production. It is also apparent that the collapse of the state, due to a combination of factors, marked a major disruption. The changes in social structure that must have formed a part of urbanism were clearly transitory. Kin networks would have been maintained despite the nucleation of populations into the major urban centres. The strength of these kin relations is indicated by the fact that the collapse of the state sees a reversal to tribal/chiefship societies.

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### 3.9 GLOSSARY

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**Archaeological culture:** Contemporary assemblages that come from a limited, defined and continuous geographic area and period of time. Artefact-types in assemblages should indicate most spheres of activity. The archaeological culture that we call Harappan is comprised of the assemblages from Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Kalibangan, Lothal, Chanhudaro, Rakhigarhi, Dholavira and so forth.

**Artefacts:** Humanly produced objects retrieved during excavations. Classified on the basis of attributes that characterize the nature of the object. Attributes can be shape, size, colour, raw material, design, context and so forth.

**Artefact-types:** Artefacts are seen more in terms of artefact-types or categories/groups for purposes of classification. Attributes help us to differentiate between artefact-types. Etched carnelian beads would be an example of an artefact-type.

**Assemblage:** A collection of contemporary artefact-types. For example, the assemblage of Mohenjodaro would comprise etched carnelian beads, chert blades, black painted red pottery, steatite seals, steatite micro-beads, chert weight and so forth.

**Context:** Of immense significance in archaeology, artifacts retrieved in excavation can have meaning only if found within a context. The exact locus of an artefact must be recorded in relation to its surroundings.

**Redistributive economy:** An economy where the movement of goods and materials takes place to and from a socio-political centre. Intrinsic to chiefships and state societies, such mobilization is used to fund elite activities.

**Wealth Objects:** Artefacts that are a measure of wealth, often personal in that they may be retained and not gifted.

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### 3.10 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the social structure in the Harappan period. After the disintegration of the state, why did post Harappan societies revert back to tribal forms?
- 2) Using archaeological evidence, how may we distinguish between tribal and state societies?

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### 3.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## UNIT 4 SOCIETIES REPRESENTED IN VEDIC LITERATURE

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Societies Represented in  
Vedic Literature

### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Development of Varna
- 4.3 Kinship Relations and the Consolidation of Patriarchal Structures
- 4.4 Rituals and Their Significance
- 4.5 Summary
- 4.6 Glossary
- 4.7 Exercises

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- identify some of the terms used in the Vedic literature which highlight the nature of Vedic society;
- understand how Vedic texts describe the society of the Vedic period; and
- grasp the process of reconstruction through which we have arrived at a conception of the Vedic society.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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The objective of this unit is to understand how Vedic literature has been used to reconstruct social history.

Vedic literature is the name given to a vast body of texts that primarily deal with rituals. These include the four principal Vedas, i.e. the *Rgveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*. While they all consist primarily of mantras, prayers or chants that were meant to be used on ritual occasions, each of these texts has certain distinctive characteristics.

The hymns in the *Rgveda* are generally addressed to Agni, the god of fire, identified with the sacrificial fire, Indra, a deity associated with warfare, and Soma, a plant from which a special drink was prepared. Besides these three principal deities, we find a wide range of other gods and few goddesses as well. The hymns are grouped into ten books or *mandalas*, of which the earliest are books 2-7, often referred to as the family books, as each one is supposed to have been composed and compiled by a single family or clan of priests.

The *Samaveda* consists of chants from the *Rgveda* arranged in keeping with requirements of melody. As such, it contains virtually no original material. In the *Yajurveda*, on the other hand, mantras are arranged in the sequence in which they were meant to be used in specific sacrificial rituals. While some of these are drawn from the *Rgveda*, others are new compositions, including some of the earliest works in Sanskrit prose. Finally, the *Atharvaveda* consists of prayers and chants addressed to the Vedic gods, and also to cure illness, as well as to attain success in affairs of the heart. It is often regarded as a text that provides insight into popular beliefs and practices.



These texts were composed and compiled over a very long period, possibly spanning a thousand years, from c. 1800 BCE onwards. As you can imagine, society was not static during this entire phase. Secondly, the *Rgveda* was probably compiled in the northwest of the subcontinent, the region of present-day Punjab, while the other texts have a more easterly orientation. As such, what we know from the texts pertains to a specific geographical region, and does not tell us about the history of the entire sub-continent. Thirdly, the texts were composed in Vedic Sanskrit (somewhat different from classical Sanskrit) by and for priests. This priestly perspective and the biases inherent in it have to be kept in mind when analyzing these texts to understand the social order.

Very often, we find a distinction being made between early and later Vedic literature. Here, the *Rgveda* is regarded as an early Vedic text, which attained its final form by c. 1000 BCE, while the other three Vedas are regarded as later Vedic. Other texts that are considered later Vedic include the *Brahmanas*, elaborate commentaries on the Vedas that explain and define the ritual, and contain myths and legends; the *Aranyakas* and the *Upanisads*, which are primarily philosophical works, are also regarded as later Vedic. The earliest of these texts were composed between c. 1000-500 BCE.

There is also a third category of literature, known as the *Vedangas* or the limbs of the Vedas. These include works on pronunciation, phonetics, grammar, etymology, astrology, and a huge corpus called the *Kalpasutra*, which in turn has four sub divisions: the *Srauta Sutras* which deal with major rituals such as the asvamedha and the *rajasuya*, the *Grhya Sutras* which lay down the norms for domestic rituals including rites of passage, the *Dhram Sutras* that lay down social norms, and the *Sulba Sutras* laying down principles of geometry that were used for constructing the sacrificial altar. These texts were also composed over a very long period of time, between c. 800 BCE to c. 200 BCE.

As you can see, the span of time related to Vedic literature is vast. Archaeologically, it includes the time frame covered by post-Harappan cultures, including those with Grey Ware, the Painted Grey Ware culture sites of the Ganga-Yamuna doab, and the Northern Black Polished Ware associated with the early urban centres in the Ganga valley and elsewhere in the sub-continent. The archaeological evidence is extremely rich and diverse; however, most of it comes from explorations rather than excavations, and even where there have been excavations, these are, with a few exceptions, small vertical trenches designed to co-relate chronologies rather than horizontal excavations that allow us to trace out the contours of the settlement. So while broad co-relations between textual and archaeological evidence have been attempted, detailed, meaningful comparisons are often difficult, given the specific character of the texts, and the nature of the archaeological record as available at present.

With these limitations in mind, we will explore three themes:

- Varna;
- Kinship structures; and
- Rituals and their significance.

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## 4.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF VARNA

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Varna is a term that literally means colour. However, in the Vedic context (and later as well), it is used to designate social categories. Such designations can be viewed from at least two perspectives. One, some people, in this case the priests, can claim the right to assign status/ranks to themselves as well as others. Two, these ranks or

labels can be accepted/ rejected/ modified by those to whom these are assigned. Let us examine the situations in which the term was used, and its implications.

One way in which the term is used in the *Rgveda* is to distinguish between two varnas, the *arya* and the *dasa*. There have been long debates on the distinctive features of these categories. Initially, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was suggested that the difference between the two varnas was racial. However, these racist perceptions have been called into question, and it is evident that while there were social differences in early India, these were not categorised in terms of race. What is likely is that the *aryas* and the *dasas* differed in language, cultural practices and in religious beliefs and practices.

References to the *arya* and the *dasa* occur in specific sections of the *Rgveda*: in hymns addressed to Indra, where the deity is invoked to ensure the victory of the *arya* over the *dasa* or praised for having defeated and overcome them. However, these references are not very plentiful: all told less than forty references in a text that runs into more than 10,000 verses.

More frequently, we find social groups being identified using two terms, which sometimes appear to be synonymous. One is the term *jana* (which is used till date in several Indian languages, and means people). The second is the term *vis* from which the word *vaisya* was derived. Both the terms refer to groups of people who constituted a community with shared interests — economic, political and ritual. Present-day scholars often consider these terms to be equivalent to our notions of tribes or clans. There are indications that the *jana* or the *vis* functioned as a militia, participating in raids on rival groups. It is also likely that they participated in assemblies, where the dominant role was probably played by priests or chiefs.

At this stage, the *jana* and the *vis* were not regarded as *varnas*. However, there is occasional mention of the *arya vis* and the *dasa vis*, which may suggest that sometimes the terms *vis* and *varna* were thought to be interchangeable.

There is, however, one spectacular and frequently cited reference to the four-fold *varna* order in the *Rgveda*. This occurs in the tenth *mandala*, one of the latest sections of the text, in a hymn known as the *purusasukta*. This describes the sacrifice of a primeval man and visualizes creation as emanating from this sacrifice. In this context, it is stated that the *brahmana* emerged from the mouth of this man, the *ksatriya* from his arms, the *vaisya* from his thighs, and the *sudra* from his feet. There are two ideas that are implicit in this conceptualisation: one, that the four fold order is of divine origin, and hence cannot be questioned, and second there is a clear cut hierarchy amongst the *varnas*, with the *brahmanas* at the top of the order, and the others ranked below.

Apart from the *purusasukta*, there are very few references to *varna* categories in the *Rgveda*. While we do have references to priests, they are not invariably identified as *brahmanas*. The term *ksatriya*, too, occurs infrequently. And the only reference to the *vaisya* and the *sudra* is in this single verse mentioned above. Therefore, scholars have argued that the idea of *varna* was relatively undeveloped in the early Vedic phase.

It is in the later Vedic phase that we find evidence of a number of new developments, and a growing preoccupation with identifying men in terms of *varna*, as well as defining the contents of *varna* identities. It is useful to visualize these identities as crystallizing around three concerns: access to the ritual domain, access to political power, and access to resources. As is obvious, these concerns were interwoven rather than watertight compartments. Besides, as mentioned earlier, the texts at our disposal are *brahmanical*, so we often get to see resolutions from the *brahmanical* point of view, which need not necessarily have been accepted by members of the

other varnas. Besides, not everybody necessarily accepted varna as a category of identity. These qualifying remarks need to be kept in mind in the course of the following discussion.

To start with the ritual domain, we notice two or three different issues being explored. One of these is the issue of ritual specialists: who were to be regarded as brahmanas? Here what emerged as a resolution was a combination of the criterion of birth and knowledge of the ritual tradition or *sruti*, in Sanskrit. It appears that birth was regarded as a necessary but not a sufficient condition. The proclamation and the acceptance of these criteria meant that effectively men who were assigned to other varnas, as well as women were excluded from legitimately acting as ritual specialists.

The second problem centred around participation in the ritual – on what basis were people to be involved in the proceedings? Here wealthy patrons (especially ksatriyas) were recognised as being of crucial importance. Others, including wives of the patrons, their sons, and their supporters, were also included in the ritual, where they were expected to play specific roles (see sections II and III below).

The third issue was of the significance to be assigned to rituals. During the later Vedic and post-Vedic periods, there was a move away from the actual performance of rituals to a contemplation of their inner significance, which in turn led to the philosophical speculation of the Upanisads. This, as may be expected, probably posed a challenge to the status of brahmanas as ritual priests.

By the time when the Dharma Sustras were composed, the brahmanas claimed exclusive control over the ritual domain. Six ‘means of livelihood’ were recognized for them: these included studying and teaching the Vedas, performing and getting sacrifices performed, giving and receiving gifts. At the same time, the texts recognized that these options could not be exercised in all situations, and included a series of provisions, catalogued as *apaddharma* or rules to be followed in a crisis, which could be adopted by brahmanas in situations where legitimate modes of livelihood were not available.

If the Vedic tradition records a systematic attempt on the part of the brahmanas to monopolize claims to the ritual domain, it is also marked by recognition that political power, which was becoming consolidated, should ideally belong exclusively to the ksatriya. Later Vedic literature is replete with myths, legends and rituals that discuss the regulation of access to political power. These explore two or three different possibilities.

The first possibility that is explored is that of rivalry, or competition between the brahmana and the ksatriya. As may be expected, the texts resolve these conflicts by suggesting that the brahmana is inevitably victorious. But, at the same time, the authors insist that the ideal situation is one not of competition but of co-operation between the two, and that the ideal ruler should acknowledge the supremacy of the brahmanas. We may never know whether this represented reality but it is likely that the relationship between the brahmana and the ksatriya varied in concrete situations.

The second situation that is discussed is the relationship between the ksatriya and the vis or vaisya. This is visualized less as a situation of rivalry and more as one where the basis of mutual support was being called into question. There is a constant refrain that in the early Vedic context the relationship between these two categories was harmonious and they were mutually supportive. However, in the later Vedic situation, the ksatriya is visualized as appropriating resources from the vis, and in this context, the resentment and resistance of the vis, as well as the threat of withdrawing support seems to have been real. So efforts were made to establish some kind of understanding between the two. One means of achieving this was by incorporating important members

of the vis within the administrative structure. We find this happening with the village headman, or the *gramani*, who was recognised as one of the supporters of the king.

The Dharma Sutras lay down the ‘means of livelihood’ for the ksatriya as well. Three of these, viz. studying the Vedas, getting sacrifices performed and making gifts, are common with the brahmana and the vaisya. The other pertain to collecting taxes, administering justice and protecting the people. Curiously, some of the major post-Vedic ruling lineages, such as those of the Nandas, Mauryas and Sungas are not recognised as ksatriyas. It is also worth noting that whenever the fourfold varna order is mentioned in Buddhist and Jaina traditions, the ksatriyas are invariably placed first, before the brahmanas. This would suggest that the norms for political relations that the brahmanas attempted to lay down were not invariably followed.

Turning to the question of material resources being tied to varna, it is evident that the brahmanas were ideally supposed to depend on gifts as a means of livelihood. For ksatriyas, resources were to be obtained from warfare, as taxes that could be levied as wages for protection that was to be offered to subjects, and as fines levied for offences. The vaisyas were conceived as the backbone of the system, with the Dharma Sutras prescribing that they could engage in agriculture, pastoralism and trade.

If we examine the archaeological record, it is evident that both agriculture and pastoralism had been practised in the region for a very long time. The evidence of sites associated with the NBP would indicate that trade was developing as well. This is suggested both by the evidence of the spread of this distinctive pottery, as well as by the wide dispersal of punch marked coins.

The ‘sudras’ figure marginally in the later Vedic tradition. They are occasionally mentioned as participants in rituals, but wherever they were present, this was viewed as a situation that required special ritual precautions. More often than not, they were assigned roles that underlined their subordination in society. And in the later Dharma Sutras, the only role assigned to sudras is that of serving the three higher varnas. We also find the beginnings of notions of untouchability, although these are not sharply crystallized at this stage.

Yet, the texts reluctantly acknowledge that there were alternatives, and that in some situations, sudras could be wealthy. We also know that ruling dynasties such as the Nandas were regarded as being of sudra origin by some. Therefore, it is clear that the varna order was not as fixed as the brahmanas may have ideally wanted it to be and that variations and contestations were possible.

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### 4.3 KINSHIP RELATIONS AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES

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The early Vedic context presents us with a variety of evidence on kinship relations. Gods (and occasionally goddesses) are visualized in kinship terms: as fathers, brothers, and even sons. We also have depictions of conjugal relations. It is likely that these images of the divine world were based on human practice.

The bond that figures most commonly is the father-son tie. This is envisaged as one of mutual support: just as the father supports the son when he is small, the son is expected to support the father in his old age. At another level, there are frequent prayers for brave sons in the *Rgveda*. Prayers for daughters are virtually absent, although there are several prayers for children in general.

This situation continues almost unchanged in the later Vedic context, where we find several rituals being prescribed to ensure the birth of sons as well as to reinforce the bonds between father and son. These include rituals like the *agnihotra* or the daily offering to the fire that was prescribed for the householder, as well as major rituals such as the *asvamedha* and the *rajasuya*. What is more, we begin to find statements viewing daughters as negative elements, as source of sorrow for their parents.

The father-son bond was also visualised as extending beyond the immediate pair. This idea was developed through the concept of the *pitr*, the patrilineal ancestor. The *pitrs* are relatively unimportant in the *Rgveda*, being mentioned most frequently in the tenth *mandala*, which, as noted earlier, is a relatively late section of the text. However, they are assigned far more importance in the later Vedic tradition, where they were invoked on virtually every ritual occasion. The *pitrs* were generally defined as three generations of male patrilineal ancestors: the father, the grandfather and the great grandfather. Offering prayers to them meant that their memories would be preserved, while those of other ancestors, including matrilineal kinsfolk, would be marginalised. It is likely that emphasizing the father-son bond was important in situations of resource control, where claiming to be part of a specific lineage was often a means of staking a claim to the inheritance of its resources.

While the emphasis on patrilineal ties seems to grow over time, relationships with other kinsmen are envisaged as being more complicated. We can look at these under two heads: kinsmen related through marriage (affinal relatives) and kinsmen who are visualized as potential rivals.

The first category would include the father-in-law and the maternal uncle. The latter is virtually unknown in the early Vedic tradition, and the former figures in a text known as the marriage hymn, which is part of the late tenth *mandala* of the *Rgveda*. Both are accorded respect and recognition, as well as special hospitality, especially in the post-Vedic tradition, which would suggest that bonds with these categories were regarded as increasingly important.

The second category included those designated as the *bhratravya* and the *sapatna*. The first term means brother-like man, while the second means rival (the literal meaning seems to be men who either share a common wife or are related through a woman who is the wife of one of them). Both these terms are extremely rare in the *Rgveda*, but become important in the later Vedic situation, where rituals were designed to resolve conflicts with the *bhratravya* and the *sapatna*. Usually the resolution was envisaged in terms of elimination/destruction and/or appropriation of the resources of these rivals.

Other kinsmen were designated as *samana* (literally equals), *sva* (one's own) or *sajata* (those who shared a common birth). Later Vedic rituals were often designed to win the support of these groups but at the same time to treat them as subordinates. What we can suggest then is that kinship relations were being envisaged in terms of conflict and inequality. The only important exception to this was the father-son bond.

Perhaps the most dramatic and systematic changes that were envisaged were those within the household. The *Rgveda* contains a variety of terms that were used to designate the household. Some of these may have been synonyms; in other cases, it is likely that the terms stood for different institutions. Two of the terms that have attracted considerable attention are *dam* or *dama* and *grha*.

The *dam* was envisaged as a household under the joint control of the husband and wife, who were called the *dampati* (dual). They were expected to be harmonious, and of one mind, to work in accord with one another. What is more, both sons and daughters seem to have been welcome in the *dam*.

The situation in the grha appears have been rather different. It was envisaged as an institution with a single male head, known as the *grhapati*. The grha is recognized as an important social unit in the later Vedic tradition, where references to alternative modes of household organization decline sharply. Ultimately, it becomes virutally the sole form of household that is recognized in texts such as the *Grhya Sutras*.

The ideal grha was expected to have three components: a **patni** or wife who was ideally a virgin belonging to the same varna as the pati, cattle– the basic productive resource, and sons. The functions assigned to the grhapati include offering hospitality and resources to the priest and the king, as well as to other both within and outside his home. He was also expected to perform rituals. The grhapati figures as an important social category in Buddhist tradition as well, where he was regarded as an ideal patron of the Buddhist *sangha*. It is evident that the later Vedic/post Vedic texts are preoccupied with consolidating a vision of the social order as patriarchal, with the grhapati as a nodal figure in the entire process.

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#### 4.4 RITUALS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

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Given the fact that we are examining ritual texts, it is perhaps necessary to look at their social significance more closely. As we have seen, there are two broad categories of texts under consideration: those that include mantras, and those that are explanatory or justificatory in nature.

The mantras are in the nature of prayers. The ability to learn and chant mantras was restricted to a select few, the priest, and in some situations the patron of the sacrifice or the *yajamana*. As such, access to the mantras in itself could have constituted a basis for social differentiation.

Mantras also tell us about the hopes, fears and aspirations of those who used them. While there are some prayers for intangibles, many of the prayers were designed for specific, material goals. These included acquiring cattle in particular and animals in general, winning battles, getting progeny. Interestingly, while many of these are visualized as collective goals in the *Rgveda*, the use of mantras and rituals in the later Vedic tradition seems to be more individuated, with provision for a single sacrificer/patron, who was expected to benefit from the performance of the ritual.

It has also been argued that the visualization of the deities in the ritual context might reflect the social order. For instance, if prayers are addressed to Agni, and if Agni is conceived of as a divine priest (as indeed is often the case), then one can argue for the importance of the priest in human society. It has also been suggested that given that goddesses are marginal in the Vedic tradition (in terms of numbers, prayers addressed to them, as well as invocation in the ritual context), it is likely that women were subordinated in society. While such reconstructions are plausible, we need to remember that the connection between religious imaginations and social realities is not always neat.

At another level, most rituals can be understood as occasions of public performances. These were significant in a variety of ways. Any ritual occasion, by definition, has an aura of sanctity associated with it, as it is a situation where gods and men (and occasionally women) are brought into contact with one another. As such, ritual performances may carry far greater weight than ordinary routine modes of social communication. While rituals can have a range of functions, they are also used to legitimize social relations.

As an extension of this, the roles performed by men and women in the ritual context acquire a heightened significance. We have seen how priestly roles were often defined as exclusive and central to ritual performance. It is likely that these could be

used to claim authority in other social contexts as well. The Dharma Sutras suggest that brahmanas claimed exemption from taxation, and from capital punishment. We do not know how far this was acquiesced in by rulers, but the possibility that such claims were influential cannot be altogether ruled out.

Other participants included the yajamana or the patron of the sacrifice. This could be an aspiring chief/king or the grhapati, ideally the head of a household and a man belonging to one of the first three varnas. A basic criterion for eligibility was access to resources required to perform the ritual, pay the requisite sacrificial fees, and offer hospitality to those who attended the ritual. Thus, an ability to perform a sacrifice was a public proclamation of status.

By extension, the success of the ritual required the participation of other people, apart from the yajamana. Some of these were probably simply spectators, who could be more or less adequately impressed by the ritual displays. Others were men and women who were connected with the yajamana, as his supporters, including his kinsfolk. In major rituals such as the *asvamedha* or the *rajasuya* they could be drawn from other varnas. Their presence was taken to be a public statement of their support for the yajamana as well as an implicit and at times explicit recognition of their subordination.

Similar principles evidently operated as far as the presence of kinsfolk was concerned. For instance, men who were identified as the sva or the sajata were assigned roles that can be designated as supportive but subordinate. The wife too, had an identical role. What is more, she was visualized as somewhat instrumental. Her presence in the ritual was frequently envisaged as a situation that was conducive to procreation. In other words, she was regarded as a symbol of fertility that could be used in the ritual context.

These inclusions and exclusions hold true for the rituals that were designated as *srauta* (derived from the word *sruti* or revealed tradition), and which included a range of sacrifices such as the daily *agnihotra*, the fortnightly new and full moon sacrifices, and grand, elaborate rituals such as the *asvamedha* and the *rajasuya*. Unfortunately, we do not have the means of assessing whether and how often such rituals were performed. Buddhist tradition and the epics indicate that some of the elaborate sacrifices may have taken place, but even in these narratives, the historicity of specific accounts remains unverifiable.

What we do know is that in the post Vedic situation, a whole range of domestic rituals were brought within the purview of the brahmanical tradition, through the composition and compilation of texts such as the *Grhya Sutras*. Here, two or three trends are in evidence. On the one hand, many *srauta* rituals were simplified, so that they could be performed by the average householder. On the other hand, a wide range of rites of passage, associated with occasions such as birth, marriage and death, were brahmanized. This was done through a three fold strategy: by recommending the use of Vedic mantras, by suggesting that a priest should be present on such occasions, and by insisting on the setting up of a sacrificial fire. As may be expected this was probably intended as a strategy for introducing the ideals of varna and gender hierarchies within the household.

The extent to which such strategies succeeded is uncertain. Post-Vedic brahmanical texts produced long lists of “deviants”: people who violated social and ritual norms. These included brahmanas who did not learn the Vedas, who performed sacrifices for those who did not meet the criteria laid down in the texts, who did not perform the soma sacrifice and so on. The lists grow longer with the passage of time.

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## 4.5 SUMMARY

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It is important to keep in mind that the Vedic texts are vast and diverse, and that they span an enormous period. As such differences are to be expected in these texts. In so far as social histories are concerned, they permit us to reconstruct brahmanical perceptions and prescriptions about the ideal society. These need not necessarily correspond entirely with social realities. As far as varna is concerned, it was of marginal importance during the early phase, and acquired importance as a classificatory system during the later Vedic period. However, it is clear that varna identities were never the sole identity available to men. It is also evident that the contents of these identities were reformulated over time. Kinship relations were also subjected to definition and crystallization during this period. We can trace the consolidation of patrilineal identities, and the emergence of a gṛhapati centred household. The Vedic texts envisage rituals as a mode of communication of social norms and values. These included notions of social hierarchy, of support and subordination. However, there is evidence of deviation and change, and these messages were probably not automatically accepted.

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## 4.6 GLOSSARY

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- Sacrificial Fire** : Fire lit up at the ritual of sacrifice in which grains or whatever the material to be sacrificed is put.
- Vertical Trenches** : Small diggings in archaeological excavation done vertically at specific points rather than the excavation of whole sites.
- Militia** : A band of armed men.
- Primeval man** : Man of the first age of the world

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## 4.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the role varna played during the Vedic times. Was it the sole identity available to men of this period?
- 2) What was the significance of *pitr*?
- 3) How was the relationships with the other kinsmen getting more complicated in this period?
- 4) Discuss the role of rituals in the Vedic texts.



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## UNIT 5 IRON AGE CULTURES

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### Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 The Archaeological Evidence for the Iron Age in North India
- 5.3 The Introduction of Iron and its Implications
- 5.4 Social Structure
- 5.5 The Archaeological Evidence for the Iron Age in Peninsular India
- 5.6 Social Structure
- 5.7 Summary
- 5.8 Glossary
- 5.9 Exercises

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### 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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Following features will be seen in this Unit:

- the focus will be on a period that sees the emergence and use of a new material, iron. Our emphasis will be to analyse the kind of impact this new material could have had on society, economy and polity.
- you must be aware that from this period (1000 B.C. onwards), literary records are now available. Their availability does not mean that we have a complete picture of the past, due to the nature and authorship of the texts. So we will have to depend on multiple sources, literary and archaeological, as well as anthropological theories about evolution of social systems.
- this is a period of marked changes: increasing social stratification; ushering in of what is termed as the ‘second urbanisation’; integration at various levels and degrees of vast areas of the subcontinent under the Mauryan Empire through the active hand of the state and private trading groups. These linkages in the subcontinent largely stay in place, even after the disintegration of the Mauryan Empire.

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this Unit, we will be dealing with the Iron Age Cultures in the subcontinent. In the earlier Units, we have talked about stone and bronze ages, where the major cutting tools were of stone, copper and bronze. A new metal comes into the picture in the Iron Age that eventually replaces the earlier materials to make implements for major productive activities. Stone, copper and bronze do continue but their use is now more restricted.

There is some debate over the chronological span of the Iron Age in the northern part of the subcontinent. According to T.N. Roy, the Iron Age can be divided into two phases, an Early (800 to 400-300 BC) and a Late Phase (400-300 TO 100 BC). In a later publication, he refined his division of the Iron Age into three phases, by dividing his Early Phase into two, now calling them Early and Middle Phases. D.K. Chakrabarti and A. Ghosh differ in preferring to leave out the Early Historic period in the ambit of the Iron Age. Thus, they adopt a date range of perhaps as early as 1300 BC to 700 BC. Georgy Erdosy divides the Iron Age into two phases, the

Early Phase from 1000-600 BC and the second between 550 and 100 BC. In peninsular India, the Iron Age roughly covers the period from 600 BC-100 AD, though evidence may be available for a larger time bracket covering 1000 BC-1000 AD.

Thus, archaeologically we are dealing with a period from 1000 BC to 100 A.D. This is also a period for which textual evidence is available. Hence, scholars differ in their approach by working only with the archaeological evidence or incorporating the available textual evidence. The Iron Age in North India is archaeologically represented by assemblages that mainly contain particular pottery types such as Painted Grey Ware (PGW) and Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). In peninsular India, it is essentially the megaliths, sometimes associated with habitation sites that comprise the Iron Age in the region. Iron is also found from Central India (Malwa, with sites like Nagda and Eran and Ahar in Southeastern Rajasthan) roughly dated between 750-500 BC and from the Middle and Lower Ganga Valley in post-chalcolithic pre-NBPW levels (Pandu Rajar Dhibi, Mahisdal, Chirand, Sonpur) (see Figure 1) dated to around 750-700 BC. However, in this Unit, we will only deal with the PGW and NBPW assemblages in North India and with the megaliths in South India.

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## 5.2 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE IRON AGE IN NORTH INDIA

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The earliest occupations of the Iron Age, associated with the PGW, are found from the Ghaggar/Hakra River in eastern Pakistan and northern Rajasthan to the Ganga-Yamuna Divide (Figure 1). There may have been PGW levels of occupation with no iron, particularly those overlapping with Late Harappan occupations at sites like Bhagwanpura. Broadly, PGW sites have been dated between 800-400 BC, though there is a possibility that at some sites PGW levels may go back to 1100/1300 BC.

In the material assemblage, various ceramics have been identified, such as Black Slipped Ware, black-and-red ware and red ware, the last that is most commonly found. Associated with these ceramics is PGW that is the most distinct. It, however, comprises just 10% of the total pottery assemblage. It appears to have been a deluxe pottery made of very fine clay, its grey colour resulting from firing in reducing (in absence of oxygen) conditions, and is painted in black. Iron objects appear to have been largely used as weapons or for defence/offence (hunting) purposes, while agricultural tools and household implements are far fewer in number. On the whole, iron appears to be limited in usage. Copper continues to be used, for tools, weapons and ornamental purposes. Apart from iron, a new material, glass, comes into focus in his period, and is used for making bangles and beads.

On the basis of the material assemblage and the fact that this found from a compact geographical area and period of time, we may consider PGW sites as representing a common archaeological culture that is often termed as the PGW culture. However, as we noted in Unit 3 of Block I, finding a few shreds of PGW at isolated sites would not imply those sites belonged to the same culture.

Essentially the PGW represents Early Iron Age rural settlements. Structures mainly comprise houses of mud, mud-brick and wattle and daub. Very few crafts seem to have been arrested and the range of materials utilized appears to be largely local, such as clay, bone, stone and a little shell and ivory. Subsistence practices involved a combination of agriculture, herding and hunting. Rice is evident among the plant remains while bones of horse, cattle, buffalo, sheep, pig and deer are found.

The late Phase of the Iron Age largely coincides with what is known as the Early Historic period (600 BC-300 AD). This phase of the Iron Age is represented in north India by the NBPW along with other elements of architecture and material culture.

Chronologically, the NBPW is found between 600 and 100 BC. Elements of material culture appearing at various stages could be terracotta ring-wells, soak-pits, baked brick structures, fortifications (Figure 2), coinage, arecanut-shaped terracotta beads and etched beads of agate and carnelian. The NBPW is a pottery distinctive due to its surface treatment of a glossy luster. Scholars point out the similarities between NBPW and PGW in clay preparation, firing techniques and typology, and in their probable function as deluxe or table wares.

Ring-wells are also characteristic of the Late Phase of the Iron Age (Figure 3). Three types have been identified, one that consists of shafts dug down into the soil, lined up to a point with earthenware (terracotta) rings; the second that are lined throughout with terracotta rings; and the third that consists of large soakage jars placed one above the other with their bases perforated. The exact function of such ring-wells is not quite clear, as some may have been used as sewage pits or draw-wells. Drains of burnt bricks or consisting of pottery pipes have also been found.

Iron objects increase in quantity and diversity through this phase, with ultimately iron being used for specialized purposes. An increasing and varied use of glass is also attested. The use of moulds for forming terracotta figurines gradually comes into use, enabling a certain degree of mass production.

The Late Phase of the Iron Age is also a period of urbanism and state societies. Unlike the Bronze Age that required elite procurement networks, iron metallurgy could be more local with little necessity for state intervention in procurement of raw material or production. Therefore, iron could truly replace stone for the major implements, something that bronze or copper could never do.

The technology of iron metallurgy is different from copper/bronze metallurgy. Iron is a metal that can melt only at very high temperatures: 1540°C whereas copper melts at 1083°C. Smelting (breaking down the ore to attain the pure metal) temperatures of copper and iron are 400° and 800° respectively. Iron, moreover, has a strong attraction to oxygen that corrodes it. Thus, the smelting of iron, unlike copper, is very different as increasing the temperatures in the furnace (usually by drafts of air) would be counter-productive due to this attraction for oxygen. Thus the furnace design has to be such as to maintain a temperature between 1200° and 1300°C, as temperatures exceeding 1300° would oxidize the iron. Iron, then, can only be smelted by completely covering the ore with large quantities of fuel and by closing the vents in the furnace, thus creating a concentration of carbon monoxide, and a reducing atmosphere in the furnace. Also, since iron cannot ideally be melted with pre-industrial techniques, ironworkers would not use the casting technique, one that was popular with bronze.

The implications of iron technology would hence rest on the introduction of the reducing furnace as well as the capacity to construct high-temperature kilns. This development would have been a necessary pre-condition for the production of potteries such as PGW, black slipped wares and NBPW, all made in reducing conditions. At the same time, the introduction of the craft of glass working was also significant as it largely depended on iron tools, as well as a high temperature kiln.

The full advantages of iron do not appear to have been recognized immediately, primarily because social conditions did not favour more specialized use of the metal. Early use of iron appears to have been limited to basic subsistence purposes, for hunting and agricultural tools and for implements of defence. It is only in urban situations that iron in more specialized forms would begin to be used for varied crafts.

The implications of iron metallurgy in the development of urbanism and state structures have been debated on. It is R.S. Sharma's contention that the introduction of iron enabled large-scale clearance of forests and the use of the iron ploughshare that

would have impacted on the extension and intensification of agriculture. This in turn would have created a greater surplus ushering in state structures.

Sharma's position was contested by N.R. Ray, who pointed out that clearance of land could have been done by burning the vegetation. Wooden shares could have been used instead of iron. Hence, iron was not necessary for either land clearance or plough agriculture. Moreover, he showed that early iron tools were mainly hoes and spades that could not have been used in extensive agricultural operations and hence no urbanization was possible. For A. Ghosh and D.K. Chakrabarti, other social institutions, instead of iron, would have brought about urbanization. Ghosh very validly points out that the availability of a surplus cannot bring about urbanization, that surplus is a 'social product', requiring administrative mechanisms and coercion for its collection. Thus, it is only the state that can extract a surplus; iron technology by itself is not going to create a social surplus. For Makkan Lal, there were no fundamental changes in iron tools between the PGW and NBPW periods. New tools types come into use only in the Late Phases of the NBPW. Moreover, on the basis of his survey in the Kanpur district, Lal finds that bigger settlements locate along the Ganges River where open land was in any case available. Thus, large-scale clearance of forests would not be required. Hence, other factors need to be considered for the rise of urbanism.

To conclude, unlike the Bronze Age where we have seen an inextricable link between bronze and a state society, no such link is necessary in the Iron Age. Thus, the introduction of iron metallurgy did not necessitate the involvement of a state. From this we can also point out that when a state did develop in the Early Historic period, its structure was very different from the Bronze Age state. Where the latter depended on distant links for the procurement of copper and tin, long-distance trading links in the Iron Age were for different reasons and with different areas. With commodification evident in the later phase of the Iron Age (particularly with the introduction of coinage), it would have been specialized merchant guilds/groups, rather than the state, what would not be responsible for much of the trade. Also with varied requirements, such as forest (gums, wood, resins, honey) and animal products (leather, wool), different parts of the subcontinent would not be opened up. Unlike the Bronze Age where there was a westward orientation (due to the need for copper and tin), in the Iron Age, the development of trade routes now connect most regions of the subcontinent. Many urban centres now emerge as nodes along these trade routes. Interestingly, these trade routes remain in place from now on and many urban centres preserve, unlike in the Bronze Age.

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## 5.4 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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Archaeological data can only inform us upto a certain point on social structures, as you may know by now. It has been mentioned earlier that literary evidence is available for this period. Yet it may be pointed out that the nature of the literary evidence (the *Rigveda*, the Later Vedic literature [including the other three Vedas, the *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*, and the *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and the *Upanisadas*], the two Epics, the Sutra literature, Panini's *Astadhyayi*, the Buddhist literature and the *Arthashastra*) is selective and cannot be used to reconstruct every aspect of socio-political structures. Hence historians of early India have also used anthropological theory to reconstruct past social institutions.

The Later Vedic literature has been correlated by some scholars with the PGW culture. This correlation (between the Later Vedic literature or separate lineages with the PGW) has been done on the basis of the geographical area covered by the PGW sites. According to Romila Thapar, the Later Vedic period was characterized by a combination of a lineage society and a householding economy. The term lineage society has been preferred over tribal society due to problems with the latter term,

which has been used in multiple contexts, such as for hunting-gathering as well as peasant societies. Lineages are central to such a society particularly in relation to power and access to resources. Her contention of social stratification between senior (*rajanya*) and junior (*vis*) lineages that begins in the Early Vedic period (as represented by the Rigveda) would obviously continue into this period. A householding economy (a term borrowed from Karl Polanyi) is used for a context where the household functions as a unit using family labour as well as the labour of others for various productive tasks. For R.S. Sharma, on the other hand, this period represents a chiefship along with elements of an incipient state. Archaeologically, George Erdosy suggests the presence of chiefdoms in the PGW phase of the Iron Age. This was suggested on the basis of a survey in Allahabad district that revealed a two-tier hierarchy of settlements, the latter indicating differences between the settlements.

The two lineages from the Early Vedic period undergo a change in the Later Vedic period. The rigvedic *rajanyas* give way to the *ksatriyai* of the Later Vedic period, where the focus appears to be on power through control of people and territory; the *brahmans* emerge as ritual specialists; the *sudras* and the *dasas* emerge as a category performing labour services for the *vis*. There appears to be both ritual and social exclusion of the *vis*, making them clearly socially subordinate. The *vis* is now expected to offer tribute and prestations (*bali*, *bhaga*, *sulka*) to the *ksatriya* – that is in turn given as *dana* and *daksina* to the *brahmans*. This can be considered as a case of redistributive economy with exploitative undertones. The demands of the *ksatriyas* for the produce of the *vis* imply increased production necessitating a requirement of labour outside the family. This then explains the emergence of the *sudras* and *dasas*. This increasingly socially stratified society was being arranged in this period into a framework of *varna*.

To understand the developments in the next phase of the Iron Age (c.6<sup>th</sup> century BC-100 BC), we can rely on the Buddhist literature as well as the archaeological evidence of NBPW sites that indicate the Middle Ganga Valley as the focus. However, the archaeological evidence is wholly inadequate to understand socio-political developments because of the kinds of excavations so far undertaken coupled with the fact that many Early Historic sites continue to be inhabited even today (many as cities), thus limiting the chances of excavation. Hence, for this discussion, we will have to rely on historical interpretations in particular Romila Thapar's.

Essentially, in this period, there are two kinds of polities, the *ganasanghas* or chiefships and monarchies. The *ganasanghas* (Sakyas, Vrijjis, Koliyas, Mallas) seem to have been confined to the *terai* or the foothills while the monarchies (Kosala, Magadha, Kasi, Kausambi) prefer the river valleys. The *ganasanghas*, while essentially a lineage/tribal society, differed from the lineage society of the preceding period. Unlike the latter where there were two lineages (senior and junior), now there appeared to be only a single lineage, that of the *ksatriyas*. Also, unlike the earlier situation where *ksatriya* control rested on cattle raids and prestations, now *ksatriyas* also owned land (though not individually but through the lineage). There is now a very clear distinction between the *ksatriya* lineage that owned land and others (non-kin) who worked the land or provided the labour. There is also evidence for cross-cousin marriage (for example among the Sakyas), a means of controlling wealth. Interestingly, the organization of social status within the framework of *varna* appears to have been absent in the *ganasanghas*. There is also no householding system – social relations are structured around kin relations and lineages. Fissioning of *ksatriya* lineages provided an avenue for the settling of new lands. Fissioning is also a characteristic of chiefship polities, making for its inherent instability.

The element of control over non-kin and the clear difference between the ruler and the ruled marks the monarchical form of polity. Scholars have identified four essential attributes of a state: authority within a territorial limit, delegation of power and duties, a regular income obtained through coercion that is used for basic maintenance and

the integration of diverse socio-economic groups. The last is accomplished through the *varna* framework, that is used to arrange and maintain a social hierarchy. Integration and the creation of social order can also take place through laws and rules. Many of the laws pertain to the maintenance of the *varna* system and are eventually systematized in the *Dharmasutras*. Yet at the same time, the incorporation of customary laws in these texts indicates attempts to prevent fissioning of society. We now find clearly three distinct groups in the upper levels of society – the *khattiya* (*ksatriya*), the *Brahman* and the *gahapati* (*grihapati* or the *vaisya*). At the lower levels are *sudras* and *slaves* (few in number and primarily limited to the household). Finally at the bottom of the hierarchy were *candelas* or untouchables.

Much of the social and economic changes taking place in this period can be linked to urbanism. It is the city that provides the background for the movement of *gahapatis* into trade. Earlier these were essentially householders, but the wealthier among them transferred their resources to trading initiatives. It is this social group that in fact provides the main support to the newly emerging religions of Buddhism and Jainism, in themselves urban faiths. In the orthodox Brahmanical fold, the economic wealth of the *gahapatis* was obviously not commensurate with their social position in the *varna* framework. Patronising these new religions would provide an avenue for upward social mobility. Moreover, urban features such as usury (that only later would enter the rural sphere), prostitution, common eating-houses, and so forth would have been strongly disapproved of by the orthodox. Institutions such as the *sreni* (merchant and artisan guilds), systems of commodification such as coinage would now find their place. Thus, it is clear that the city ushers in new social structures, institutions and adjustments.

The expansion of trading networks and movement of commodities may perhaps explain finds of luxury wares such as NBPW from various parts of the subcontinent. This feature can be attributed to c.4<sup>th</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. This period largely coincides with that of the Mauryan Empire (321-180 BC).

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This brings us to the Mauryan Empire and its impact on social structure. As Romila Thapar worked out, the Mauryan Empire can perhaps be conceived as comprising of three component units: a) Magadha or the metropolitan state, b) the core areas (such as Gandhara or Bharuch or Ujjain) that were either states themselves or centres of exchange and c) the peripheral areas (including primarily hunting-gathering societies or tribal societies), areas that may not have known a state system. The Mauryan Empire may have been primarily concerned with extracting resources and not with restructuring the existing framework, except in Magadha.

Two important points must be taken note of. One is that there would have been obviously diverse societies existing contemporaneously – band level, tribal societies, chiefships and states, including the Mauryan, a complex state. Thus, any discussion of social structures would need to take into account their basic heterogeneity. This would also have been a situation prevailing in the Harappan Bronze Age and would continue to be a feature in later state societies as well.

The other important point is that the lack of basic social restructuring in the core and peripheral areas would mean that the disintegration of the Mauryan empire would not essentially affect these areas. Perhaps the most immediate impact may have been felt in Magadha. Yet, we find that in the post-Mauryan period when control shifted to the Sunga dynasty, there do not seem to have been marked disruptures in Magadha. This last point may lead us to understand the difference between the Bronze Age

state and the Early Historic situation. In the case of the Harappan, most aspects of production were under state control and the break-up of the state, and the lack of successor state, would have led to a disruption as noted in an earlier Unit. In the case of the Early Historic state, most productive activities were largely in the hands of other institutions such as the guilds and perhaps even monastic establishments. The break-up of the Mauryan Empire would not have had so drastic an impact with the more immediate and direct control over Magadha passing on to a succeeding authority.

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## 5.5 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE IRON AGE IN PENINSULAR INDIA

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Megaliths, according to *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, include a variety of sepulchral and commemorative monuments that are either built of large stones, rude or chiseled or else associated with a somewhat homogenous group of black-and-red ware and an equally homogenous group of iron tools and weapons. Largely these represent collective burials of remains (bones) that have been first exposed to the elements. This class of funerary monuments may sometimes not be associated with large stones or with black-and-red ware or iron implements or human remains. Thus, one may not find all these traits together in every case. Finding a single trait has provided justification to some scholars to term these as megalithic complexes.

These burials are generally located in forests or wastelands. These range from a single internment to small clusters and occasionally extend over large areas (for example at Adichanallur where the complex extends over 46 hectares with several thousands of burials. As far as distribution is concerned, megaliths are found in most parts of the subcontinent, except for the Punjab plains, the Indo-Ganga divide, the Ganga Valley, Rajasthan desert and the North Gujarat plain. However, their main concentration is in peninsular India (Figure 1).

On the basis of radiocarbon dates and stratigraphic record, megaliths can be largely dated between 600 BC and 100 AD, though individual sites may give every early or late dates (for example Hallur with a date of 1000 BC and Pykara with a date of 1000 AD). Largely megalithic sites are burial sites with habitations and habitation-cum-burials in a minority. We have some sizes for burial-cum-habitation sites in Vidarbha region. Takalghat covers 2.25 ha, Naikund 10 ha, Bhagimahari 8.2 ha and Khairwada 10.7 ha (Figure 1).

Megalith burials cover a wide diversity of types. Let us look at the major types of burials (Figures 4a, 4b and 5). The types that are variously called as a cist, dolmenoid-cist and dolmen essentially consist of a chamber made of upright stone slabs, called orthostats, that enclose a space that may be square, rectangular, oblong or trapezoidal on plan. Horizontally covering the upright slabs is a covering slab called a capstone. This whole structure may be either completely below ground or partially below ground or completely above ground in which cases it would be called a cist, dolmenoid-cist and dolmen respectively, the dolmen meaning a stone table. These structures may sometimes be surrounded by a circle of stones. Very often, if the structure is a cist, the surface evidence would just comprise the stone circle. These three types of structures also called as chambered tombs, are usually reinforced from the outer side by rubble packing. These types of megaliths are commonly found from North Karnataka where there is an ample supply of building material.

In certain other cases (found from all the four southern Indian states) one of the stone uprights or orthostats, more usually the eastern one, has in it a hole, termed as a port-hole. This port-hole ranges in size from 10-50 cm in diameter and may have provided some sort of access to the inner part of the tomb. Sometimes port-holed

cists are approached through a slabbed antechamber and are hence called transepted cists, very common in the Pudukottai district of Tamil Nadu.

Pit burials comprise burials in ovaloid, oblong or cylindrical pits dug into the ground that contain the usual skeletons, pottery and iron objects. Pit burials associated with stone circles but without any rubble packing are also found. One may in certain areas find pit burials with a single upright stone. These standing upright stones are called menhirs (a word meaning long/tall stone).

Urn burials are another type of megalithic monument, often not associated with large stones. These consist of burials kept in pyriform jars buried underground. This is a type of burial very commonly represented in the Madurai-Tirunelveli area of Tamil Nadu. Sometimes the urn is covered with a stone slab.

In Kerala some unusual megalithic burial types were recovered. One of these is called topical or umbrella/hat stone. Made of local laterite, the umbrella stone comprises a low cone with a wide circular flat base resting on four slabs joining up into a square below the balanced cone. Hoodstone resemble the topical but are not supported – they rest directly on the ground. These resemble a handleless umbrella popular in Kerala and may conceal an urn burial.

In Kerala (and also parts of South Kanara) are found rock-cut caves, a type of megalith that is suited to the local rock conditions. The soft laterite can be easily hollowed out into a stepped rectangular pit that opens out towards the eastern side of the pit, the entrance being from the ground surface. The floor may be roughly circular, semicircular or oblong.

In peninsular India are also found megalith types comprising of a terracotta sarcophagus. Boat-shaped terracotta troughs sometimes with legs (that could number from 4 to 12) and with a separate covering lid of pottery have been found.

Finally, one also find alignments of stones or menhirs that are usually huge boulders (more rarely slabs) that are aligned in parallel lines in a particular pattern. Hence upright stones are from 1-3 m in height. These stone alignments may be erected over a few funerary pots containing bones or sometimes can enclose within them stone circles.

Thus, there is a wide diversity of megalithic burial types. Certain types are confined to a particular region while in other areas, one may find more than a single type. The region of Vidarbha, that has the majority of megalithic sites in Maharashtra, has only one type, the stone circle with a cairn filling. No cists are found perhaps because slabs cannot be cut from the local rock formation is the Deccan Trap. That reminds us that some megalithic types may be localized because of certain ecological factors. Thus, chamber tombs and cists are common in Andhra and Karnataka where there is plenty of quartzitic sandstone whereas rock cut caves tend to be found in Kerala where the laterite allows for easy excavation.

From the above description of the various types of megaliths, it is clear that not only is there a regional diversity, the mode of disposal may differ within the same cemetery. As we have seen, these burials do not always occur in contexts with large stones, hence the use of the term megalith is not entirely appropriate. For this reason, L.S. Leshnik proposed the term 'Pandukal complex' (*Pandu* in Tamil means 'old man' and *kal* means stones, thus implying the traditional name given to burials). Given the wide spatial distribution of these burials, it is open to question whether these belonged to one culture complex or several. Much more work needs to be done on the megaliths.



Pottery comprises a major component of the grave goods. The pottery termed as black-and-red ware with a crackled appearance (probably due to salt-glazing), is found in many of the megaliths of peninsular India. There may be other associated ware, red ware, black ware, russet-coated painted ware, and other potteries that are clearly regional in nature. Iron objects range from celts or axes with crossed iron bands, flanged spade, arrowheads, tridents, swords, lances, spearheads, spikes, wedges, billhooks, sickle, hoes, chisels, horse-bits, knives/daggers, blades, lamps and so forth.

Copper/bronze also was used for making vessels, elaborate lids with sculpted figures of birds and animals, bells, horse furniture and so on. Whole shells and shell objects decorated with patterns are sometimes found. Gold is also found from South Indian megaliths, from sites like Maski, Nagarjunakonda, Brahmagiri, Janampet and Adichanallur. Largely these are beads, bangles, leaf and diadems. Semi-precious stone beads, including etched beads of carnelian, are also found. Terracotta object such as cones, figurines, spindle-whorls are found, as well as querns and pestles of stone.

Evidence for plant remains from habitation sites consists of common pea, black gram, wheat lentil, jujube, barley, *kulthi* (a kind of gram), green gram, *ragi* and rice. Wheat is largely found in the Vidarbha region in the northern part of peninsular India, whereas from more southern sites, *ragi* and rice have been recovered. Regarding animal remains from habitation sites in Vidarbha region, cattle bones predominate followed by goat, sheep, buffalo and pig. Horse bones are very few but their significance will be discussed later. Bones of wild species such as fowl, sambhar and pig suggest hunting and fishing may have been practiced, as suggested by the find of fishbones.

From the plant and animal remains and the types of agricultural tools (in particular the absence of the ploughshare), as also the paucity of habitation sites, it may be suggested that agro-pastoralism, involving a combination of herding and hoe cultivation, may have been the basic subsistence strategy. Hunting and fishing as pointed out may have supplemented this practice. Such a subsistence strategy may have involved mobility and that may also explain why more habitation sites have not been identified. If sites are short-lived, then they tend to accumulate little cultural material and hence it becomes difficult to identify such sites in the landscape. The role of the horse is an enigma and needs further research and investigation.

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## 5.6 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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The evidence of the 'megalithic' burials indicates a change from the preceding chalcolithic burial practices where the dead were disposed of within the settlement area and more specifically under house floors. Now there are separate cemeteries. This shift is obviously intriguing as are the diverse modes of disposal within the same cemetery. These may be all related to social practices but little work has been done on these issues. Hence not much can be spelled out.

In the same context, could the fact that 'megalithic' burials are largely collective have something to do with extended families or descent groups? These two levels of social structures are inherent components of tribal societies. This suggestion may be plausible as it is unlikely for unrelated individuals to be interred together. Thus, indications of reuse may be the provision of portholes and linking passages along with surface markings to point out locations of burials.

Largely, burials contain pottery vessels and iron implements and weapons suggesting interment of personal possessions and perhaps a belief in life after death. Some burials seem to contain more distinctive objects that could be made from materials such as gold, copper/bronze, semi-precious stones, shell and so forth. It is the form

that many of these objects take that makes them distinctive – bronze lids with sculpted figures of birds and animals, etched carnelian beads, and other such objects. Similarly, at Takalghat-Khapa in Vidarbha, one burial alone revealed horse bones, horse-bits and horse-ornaments. This was also the largest burial circle. At Mahurjhari, 4 out of 12 burials revealed horse remains. The burial of horses and horse furniture may thus indicate that the animal may have been a status-marker. The excavations at Brahmagiri in Karnataka have given some evidence of a diversity of grave goods. Thus, burials could range from those with no iron objects and only a few pots to those with numerous iron objects and pottery. A single burial at Brahmagiri, clearly the richest, had 33 gold and 2 stone beads, 4 copper bangles and 1 conch shell. Differential finds of special artifacts may suggest that they were status goods.

Keeping in mind that little contextual or comparative analysis has been done on ‘megalithic’ grave goods, one cannot say much about the social organization we are dealing with. Yet, it is tempting to consider that these may have been tribal/chiefship societies.

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## 5.7 SUMMARY

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As we have seen in this Unit, multiple sources, archaeological and literary, as well as anthropological theories, can be used to understand the Iron Age. Materially, the Iron Age manifests in various ways in different parts of the subcontinent. Thus, in the North, one finds occupations with PGW and NBPW pottery while in peninsular India we find burials associated with black-and-red ware. A common element is the presence of iron used now for major tools of production and for weapons. Increasing socio-economic stratification is suggested by the literary texts, eventually crystallizing in the *varna* system. Correspondingly, this period in North India is associated with urbanization that in turn would have impacted on social structure. We will see in subsequent Units this particular impact, especially regarding the emergence of new religions such as Buddhism and Jainism, as well as new urban and agrarian classes. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, we see the linkages between different parts of the subcontinent, brought about by trade as well as the Mauryan polity. Materially, the distribution of NBPW in this phase well illustrates the widening links that are discernible.

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## 5.8 GLOSSARY

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- Urbansim** : Phenomenon of urban centres i.e. towns as distinct from village settlements emerging.
- Contextual Analysis** : in archaeology analysis made by keeping the surrounding or context in focus.

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## 5.9 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the implications of iron metallurgy in the development of urbanism and state structures.
- 2) The Units studied so far have indicated varied methods of disposal of the dead. What are the social implications for this diversity?

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## UNIT 6 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS FERMENT IN NORTH INDIA: BUDDHISM AND JAINISM

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### Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Political Context
- 6.3 Economic and Social Context
- 6.4 Socio-religious and Intellectual Ferment
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Glossary
- 6.7 Exercises

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### 6.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the context in which Buddhism & Jainism arose;
- understand that this context had a vital role in the formation of the society at that time; and
- understand that the spirit of religious reform and doctrines of these two sects had a bearing on the social change taking place at that time.

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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The rise of two prominent heretic sects, Buddhism and Jainism in the northern India in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. marks a crucial point in the early historic context of India. It was a period of change in many aspects of life. It was the remarkable intellectual and socio-religious ferment within the society created by changing politico-material milieu, that led to the emergence of a number of schools of thought, of which, two, Buddhism and Jainism assumed definite shape of independent religions. Both these nearly contemporary sects followed anti-Brahmana, anti-Vedic, anti-ritualistic, anti-caste, ascetic tradition, which laid more emphasis on moral conduct than the lengthy and expensive Vedic sacrifices of the period. Both appeared in and were confined to the areas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh or the Ganga valley in their early period of history. The founders of both the sects, Buddha and Mahavira, were the *kshatriyas* from powerful clans of the times. Largely the trading community patronized both the sects. Many factors were responsible for such a rise against the established order of the contemporary society. Though these factors were operating for a considerable time, the final change appeared in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

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### 6.2 POLITICAL CONTEXT

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The political context of northern India in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was in a state of flux. The spate of migrations and settlement was over and the process of state formation gained a considerable momentum. The political focus had shifted from the northwest and Punjab to the Gangetic plain. The preceding period had witnessed confrontations between the polities based on clan organisation. However, permanent settlement in

a particular area gave a geographical identity to a clan, which assumed concrete shape by the emergence of a territorial entity with a definite political organisation of either chiefdom or a kingdom. Thus, the tribal clans were gradually making way for a territorial state.

India was divided into a number of *janapadas* (political units), which included monarchies as well as the so-called republics or tribal chiefships, popularly known as *gana-sanghas*. Of these, sixteen were *mahajanapadas* as referred to in Buddhist texts. These were Anga, Magadha, the Vriji confederacy and the Mallas in the middle Ganges valley; Kasi, Kosala and Vatsa to its west; Kuru, Pancala, Matsya and Surasena further west; Gandhara and Kamboja in northwest, Avanti and Chedi in western and central India and Assaka (Asmaka) in the Deccan. The *mahajanapadas* mentioned in the Jaina texts are spread over much wider geographical area, the list probably having been compiled at a later date.

*Gana-sanghas*: The compound term *gana-sangha* has a connotation of *gana* - those claiming equal status and *sangha*-an assembly. These were the systems, where the heads of families of a clan governed the territory of the clan through an assembly. In some cases, a few clans formed a confederacy, where the chiefs of all the clans constituted an assembly to govern the territory of the confederate clans. The assembly was presided over by the head of the clan. This office was not hereditary. The actual procedure of governance involved the meeting of the assembly, located in a main city. The *gana-sanghas* with their egalitarian character were less opposed to individualistic and independent opinion than the kingdoms and were more ready to tolerate unorthodox views.

These *gana-sanghas* were *Kshatriya* clans. Their social organization was simple, with a preponderantly *Kshatriya* population and a marginal non-*kshatriya* population composed of brahmanas, artisans and the *dasa-karmakara* or slaves and labourers forming the clan and the support unit. The land was owned in common by the clan, but was worked by the hired labourers and slaves. The *dasa-karmakaras* were not represented in the assembly and had virtually no rights.

Of the sixteen *janapadas* of the period, Vrijiis, Mallas and Chedis were *gana-sanghas*. A number of other *ganas* such as Sakyas, Koliyas were also prevalent.

**Vrijiis:** This *gana-sangha* was a confederacy of eight or nine clans. Of these, the Videhans, the Lichchavis, the Jnatikas and the Vrijiis were the most prominent clans. Vaishali (Basarh, north Bihar) was the headquarters of this powerful Vrijiian confederacy.

**Malla:** It was a powerful tribe of eastern India. It was the confederacy of nine clans. Kusinagara (Kasia, near Gorakhpur) and Pava (Pandaraona, near Kasia) were prominent cities of this chiefdom.

**Chedi:** It was one of the most ancient tribes of India.

**Kingdoms:** In contrast to the *gana-sanghas*, the kingdoms had a centralized government with the king's sovereignty as its basis. Power was concentrated in the ruling family, which became a dynasty as succession to kingship became hereditary. The crucial difference between the State and the Chiefships was that the membership of the former was not based on the kin group or the kin position. The king was advised and assisted by ministers, advisory councils and an administration manned by officers. The officers assessed and collected the revenue, which was redistributed in the form of salaries and public expenses. Clan loyalty weakened in the kingdoms giving way to loyalties to the caste and the king. The already prevalent idea of attributing divinity to kingship was reinforced from time to time by elaborate ritual sacrifices. Thus, both *brahmanas* and *kshatriyas* joined hands in establishing power and monopolized the highest positions in the society.

The kingdoms were concentrated in the fertile Ganges plain, while the *gana-sanghas* were ranged around the periphery of these kingdoms, in the Himalayan foothills, and in the northwest and western India. They tended to occupy the less fertile hilly areas, which may suggest that their establishment predated the transition to kingdoms since this area would have been easier to clear than the marshy jungles of the plains. Alternatively, it is possible that more independent minded settlers of the plains moved up towards hills and established communities more in keeping with egalitarian traditions as against newly emerging, orthodox, powerful kingdoms. The rejection of vedic authority by the *gana-sanghas* and general disapproval of these chiefdoms in brahmanical sources indicate that they may have been maintaining an alternative tradition.

This period was marked by constant struggle for power between the monarchies and also between monarchies and *gana-sanghas*. However, by this period, *gana-sanghas* were gradually on decline and the kingdoms were gaining prominence. Magadha, Kosala, Vamsa and Avanti were important kingdoms. All four were in constant conflict with each other in spite of close matrimonial alliances between them. The *gana-sanghas* offered strong resistance to expansionist policies of kingdoms by forming confederacies. Finally it was Magadha, which appeared as most powerful state. Magadha was ruled by the powerful king, Bimbisara, who conquered Anga and gained control of part of Kasi as the dowry of his chief queen, who was the sister of Prasenjit of Kosala. His son and successor Ajatasatru waged war against Prasenjit and finally incorporated Kosala. After this conquest, he turned his attention to the Vriji confederacy. Following a long war, lasting for almost six years, he succeeded in occupying their chief city, Vaishali after weakening them by treachery. Finally, he incorporated their territory and Magadha emerged as an imperial state, controlling all the surrounding regions. Magadha continued to hold the foremost position for centuries to come.

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### 6.3 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

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The process of state formation was influenced and accelerated by major economic changes. The period was marked by expansion of economy caused primarily by marked agricultural expansion leading to a wave of urbanization, which started in the Ganges valley and spread to other parts of the country. This phenomenon is generally referred to as second urbanization, the first being the urbanized civilization of Indus valley, dated back to the middle of 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C.

It was believed that the expansion of agriculture was caused by introduction of iron. The new iron technology was instrumental in clearing the large tracts of marshy Ganges valley, which was not possible with copper tools. The theory was first expounded by D. D. Kosambi and was strongly supported later on by R. S. Sharma. However, in the light of new evidences, it is now believed that iron technology did not play such a decisive role. The archaeological excavations at a number of sites have pushed back the antiquity of iron to 1200 B.C., There are stray references to iron in Samhita literature, dated roughly to 1000-800 B.C. Thus, it is argued that if iron appeared as early as 1200 B.C., how did it affect the economy as late as 600 B.C. Again, most of the iron implements found from the archaeological excavations are weapons and very few agricultural tools have come to light. Thus, role of iron in clearing the jungles of Ganga valley is much debated, though it definitely gave fillip to already established rural economy. Moreover, almost simultaneous appearance of iron in South Indian Megalithic culture did not lead to expansion of agriculture in this region. Thus, it was the functioning of multiple processes operating in the Ganga valley, which initiated a phase of major change during this period.

It is certain that there was definite expansion of agriculture during this period, which was caused both by improved climatic conditions and refined iron technology leading to surplus production. There was definite increase in population as attested by tremendous increase in the number as well as the size of settlements of this period as evident from archaeological explorations and excavations. From staying close to the banks of rivers, some settlements moved into the interior where they cleared land for cultivation. Though all the important crops were known from the chalcolithic period, there was considerable improvement in agricultural techniques. The introduction of wet-rice cultivation was beneficial as it provided a higher yield. The wide flood plains of northern Bihar were well suited for rice-cultivation. Since cultivation of rice was necessarily a single-crop agriculture, it was important to produce substantial excess at each harvest. To achieve this aim, more and more land was brought under cultivation with improved techniques and intensified labour. These factors, along with the rise of organized state with proper administrative machinery, were responsible for agricultural surplus. The surplus could support a large population. It accelerated the process of urbanization and state formation. This period also witnessed the beginning of the network of inland trade and some amount of foreign trade with Achaemenid Empire. The commodities involved in the early trade included metals, salt, pottery and textiles. The trade activities opened up routes to various interior parts and also to the far off places of the sub-continent. The trade was carried out both by river and road routes. The increased trade activities led to the development of metal currency in the form of silver bent-bars.

The population rise, agricultural surplus and beginning of trade leading to expanding economy initiated the early phase of urbanization. A number of different kinds of cities emerged in Ganges valley. Some grew out of political and administrative centers such as Rajagriha in Magadha, Sravasti in Kosala, Kausambi in Vatsa, Champa in Anga and Ahichhatra in Panchala. All these cities were located on major routes, land and/or riverine. The rise of Magadha was not solely due to its powerful rulers. It occupied very strategic location, commanding all major routes. Its land was fertile and naturally irrigated. The forests of the Rajamahar hills provided supplies of timber and elephants and major iron ores were located to its south. Thus, expanding economy also contributed in the emergence of imperial state. Other cities grew out of markets, usually located where there was agricultural surplus that could enter into regular exchange nexus. The strategic location of some of the settlements on the trade routes helped their development into towns of significance. Another important aspect of this changing economy was the beginning of craft specialization. Textual sources refer to some villages specializing in blacksmithing, pottery, carpentry, cloth weaving, basket weaving and so on. These were the villages close to the raw materials and linked to routes and markets. Thus, specialized craftsmen gathered at one place because of facilitated access to resources and distribution of the craft items. Such places eventually developed into towns, which in turn expanded their production to become commercial centers. The literary sources mention *grama* (village), *nigama* (local market), *nagara* (town), and *mahanagara* (large city). Introduction of iron technology brought about technical improvements in various craft activities. The archaeological evidence indicates striking increase and qualitative improvement in the making of the items from bone, glass, ivory, beads of semi-precious stones etc. as compared to earlier chalcolithic period.

The period in question was the beginning of the process of state formation and urbanization, which culminated with the establishment of Mauryan empire in 321 B.C. and subsequent development of trade of highest volume with the western world, accelerating the growth of large cities in all parts of the country between 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. to 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.

These major changes in politico-material aspects naturally brought many changes in the society. Brahmanas still held the highest position in *varna* hierarchy. However, the emergence of various republics and monarchies, most of which were ruled by

kshatriyas, led to the rise of kshatriyas to a prominent status. Moreover, the urbanization and expanding trading activities witnessed the beginning of the emergence of vaishyas or trading community as a powerful caste. There are numerous literary references to 'gahapati' (*grihapati*), who was an affluent 'house-holder', as a growing powerful community. The changed economy led to the proliferation of a number of occupational groups and craft specialization. This resulted in the assimilation of many 'tribal' or marginal groups into mainstream brahmanical society, which were absorbed at the lower level of the society. Thus, gradually a well-stratified society was emerging with Brahmanas-Kshatriyas-Vaishyas and various artisans, landless labourers and others.

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## 6.4 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS AND INTELLECTUAL FERMENT

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As far as the religious context is concerned, Vedic Brahmanism was most prominent. However, old vedic religion had been reduced to an extremely formalized ritualism in the hands of Brahmanas. The emphasis was on the rigid observance of the rules prescribed for the performances of the sacrificial rites, which had become the most important aspect of the religion. These sacrifices had become very lengthy and expensive affair, affordable only to the high and rich classes of the society. The Brahmanas, who monopolized the reading and interpretation of Vedas, were the most powerful and prominent caste.

The changing politico-economic-social scenario naturally invoked much change at intellectual level. The period was marked by proliferation of ascetic sects with a wide range of ideas spanning from annihilations (*ucchedvada*) to eternalism (*sasvatavada*) and from fatalism to the materialism. Though the ascetic tradition and the ideas propagated by various sects had a long history, their appearance in a concrete shape of definite sects in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was provoked by the changes of contemporary society.

The emergence of imperial state against the decline of republics provoked much discussion. The kingdoms came to be favoured by mainstream brahmanical society, which advocated the ideal of 'Universal Ruler'. However, another thought process protested against such domination, which later on came to be manifested in the philosophy of Buddhism and Jainism. Some scholars even go to the extent of suggesting that the political troubles of the age provided its more sensitive souls with incentive to withdraw from the world, which accelerated the popularity of ascetic tradition.

The newly emerging castes of kshatriyas and vaishyas resisted the highest status claimed by the brahmanas as they also aspired to rise in the social hierarchy. This conflict between the established orthodoxy and the aspirations of new groups in the urban centers intensified the intellectual process, which resulted in a remarkable richness and vigour in thought, rarely to be surpassed in the centuries to come. Moreover, so many changes produced a sense of social stress and awakened the spirit of questioning. The experience of social change and suffering is undoubtedly connected with the quest of new pathways in religion and philosophy. Social change is an effect rather than a 'cause' of spiritual change.

There is no doubt that the older Vedic gods and sacrifices were conceived in the midst of rural and agricultural landscape. In the new atmosphere of town-life, much of the symbolism of the older religion derived from natural phenomena and pastoral-agricultural functions would become dim, the gods less convincing and the rituals obscure. The changing milieu witnessed the appearance of new concepts and ideas.

**Brahmanism:** A sharp contrast had developed within brahmanism between formalistic, ritualistic tendencies of Vedas and the new trend towards an esoteric and ascetic

direction visible in the Upanishadas. In these texts, the doctrine of ritual act was often replaced by that of knowledge and sometimes by that of theistic devotion as well as moral conduct. Ritualism was receding, while ascetic renunciation and creed of life of virtue and devotion was gaining importance. Thus, there was growing cleavage of ideas within brahmanism itself.

**Rise of Asceticism:** A religious tradition parallel to brahmanism was the tradition of asceticism, which was prevalent for a long time. The ultimate origins of this ascetic tradition are obscure. There are traditions about ancient teachers, often in very remote period, but their historicity has not been established as yet. Its definite history can be traced from 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The growth and spread of asceticism in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. is the most characteristic feature of the new religious life that sprang up. This new movement was led by the non-Brahmanas. Some Brahmanas also joined it, but they thereby left the brahmanical tradition. The philosophers of these new schools of asceticism were called '*Sramanas*' or '*Parivajrakas*'. They were the men who had left the society and become wanderers. They lived on alms and practiced rigorous penance of various forms. They rejected the Vedas and the authority of the Brahmanas. They ridiculed the complicated rituals and tried to show the absurdity of the Veda as a canon of ultimate truths by pointing out contradictions in it. They declared that the entire brahmanical system was a conspiracy against the people by the Brahmanas for the purpose of enriching themselves by charging exorbitant fees for rituals. In place of this authoritarian tradition, the Sramanas sought to find explanations by own investigations. Even if the life of wandering in the forests was old, most of the philosophies of the period were new, taking account of major changes at all levels of life. The establishment of organised communities of Sramanas as opposed to individual wanderers was an innovation of the period. Debate, discussion and teaching were important aspects of these schools. Audiences gathered around the new philosophies in the *kutuhala-salas*, the place for creating curiosity.

**Sramana Philosophy:** Though there were a number of ascetic schools with independent concepts, most followed a general pattern. Their conception of the Universe was that it was a natural phenomenon, evolving itself according to ascertainable natural laws. It was not subject to the control of gods or a God and had not been created by such supernatural powers. If there were gods, as some of them admitted might be the case, they were natural beings on a level with humans and animals, inhabiting in different region, but just as subject to natural laws as humans. The gods were not immortal, but lived and died as humans did. However, the most schools denied the existence of God.

Most of the Sramanas believed in transmigration in some form, either of a 'soul' or of a stream of consciousness from a dying body to a newly conceived one. By this period, Brahmanism also had accepted this idea. Most of these schools regarded life as on the whole unhappy, filled with sufferings, concluding that their aim should be, not to be reborn in it in better circumstances, which any way would be temporary, but not to be reborn at all. Though the methods to achieve this aim differed, the emphasis was primarily laid on the moral conduct and personal efforts of an individual, rather than complicated rituals with the help of Brahmanas.

A number of such schools are mentioned in the literature of subsequent period. In Pali literature of Buddhists, there is reference to 62 doctrinal views before Buddha, while the Jaina canons refer to 363 sects. However, of these, a few groups were most prominent and influential.

**Ajivikas:** This sect was founded by a group of prominent teachers in Kosala. The leader of this school was Makkhali Gosala. Other important teachers were Purna and Kakuda. The Ajivikas believed in transmigration on a grand scale. Their key doctrine was that '*niyati*' or impersonal 'destiny' governed all; such that humans had no ability



to affect their future lives by their karma as actions were not freely done, but were predetermined. The destiny controlled even the most insignificant action of each human being and nothing could change this. Thus, they believed in rebirth, but not in karma. They practiced rigorous asceticism such as fasting and nakedness.

**Lokayatas:** The followers of this school were materialists. The main spokesman was Ajita Kesakambala. They denied any kind of self other than the one, which could be directly perceived. Each act was seen as a spontaneous event without karmic effects and spiritual progression was not seen as possible. Man was made of dust and returned to dust. Thus they denied soul, transmigration and also destiny. This school was also known as Do-as-you-like school (*yadrachavada*). They believed that the aim of living beings was happiness and highest happiness was of pleasures of the senses. Unlike other schools, they maintained that there was more happiness than unhappiness in life. Later on, Charvaka became the prominent leader of this theory.

**Skeptics:** Their spokesman was Sanjaya Belatthaputta. They avoided commitment to any point of view. They held that no conclusive knowledge was possible and did not even commit them to saying that other people's views were wrong. One of the primary concerns of these Sramanas was whether moral actions would have any affect on the person who performed them, in other words, the existence and functioning of karmic cause and effect. If moral actions did have effects, then the religious practitioners had to investigate how he might break his karmic bonds and free his mind or soul and achieve final release from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Such was the cultural milieu in which Buddhism and Jainism rose.

**Buddhism:** Buddha (566-486 B.C.) was the Kshatriya prince of the republican clan of Sakyas and was known as Siddhartha in his worldly life. He was born at Lumbini, on the Nepalese side of Indo-Nepal border. After living a life of an aristocrat, he encountered sickness, suffering and death as well as asceticism for the first time in his life through famous four visions of a sick, an old and a dead person and an ascetic. Highly dissatisfied with the transitory nature of life, he finally left his house, wife and the child at the age of 29 and became an ascetic. He joined various ascetic groups and followed different types of asceticism prevalent at the time. He wandered around for six years. When nothing worked, he decided to discover his path through meditation. He achieved enlightenment at the age of 35, while meditating under a tree at Bodhagaya. He gave his first discourse at Sarnath, near Varanasi, where he gathered his first five disciples. For 45 years, he wandered around, mainly in Bihar region, preaching his creed in the local language, Pali. The religion was soon adopted by many important dignitaries of the period as well as a number of common people. He died at the age of 80 years at Kapilavatsu after establishing his sect on firm footing.

Buddha promulgated a doctrine, which had all the main characteristics of the Sramana movement. He rejected all authority except experience. One should experiment for himself and see whether the teaching is true. The Universe is uncreated and functions on natural laws. It is in continuous flux. He denied the existence of soul, though accepted the process of transmigration and karma. According to him, in transmigration, the new life arises as part of the chain of events, which included the old. The only stable entity was Nirvana, the state of infinite bliss. The aim of human life was to achieve this nirvana and end transmigration. The path to achieve this aim constituted most important part of teaching. The basic principles of Buddhism are Four Noble Truths: 1) world is full of suffering, 2) suffering is caused by human desires, 3) renunciation of desire is the path to salvation, 4) salvation is possible through Eight-fold path, which comprised of eight principles, emphasizing on moral and ethical conduct of an individual. Buddha preached the 'Middle Path', a compromise between self-indulgence and self-defeating austerities.

The religion was essentially a congregational one. Monastic orders were introduced, where people from all walks of life were accepted. Though Buddha was initially against the entry of women into asceticism, an order of nuns was established eventually. Monks wandered from place to place, preaching and seeking alms, which gave the religion a missionary flavour. The organisation of *Sangha* was based on the principles of a *gana-sangha*.

**Jainism:** Jainism has longer history than Buddhism. Jaina ideas are said to have been prevalent since time immemorial as twenty-three tirthankaras or makers of fords are recorded to have lived before Mahavira in remote past. Though the historicity of these tirthankaras is not proved, the 23<sup>rd</sup> tirthankara, Parsvanatha could have been a historical personage of 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. However, it was Mahavira who reorganized the sect and provided it with historical basis. The sect was initially known as 'Nirgrantha' ('knotless' or free from bonds), but later on came to be known as 'Jaina', after Jina-the Conqueror, which refers to Mahavira.

The life of Mahavira (540-468 B.C.) has striking similarities with that of Buddha. He was also a Kshatriya prince of Jnantrika clan, which was a part of famous Vriji confederacy. He was born at Kundugram, a suburb of Vaishali and was known as Vardhamana. In Buddhist texts, he is also called Nataputra and Videhan, son of Jnatras and resident of Videha. He too, after living a life of an aristocrat, renounced the world at a young age of 30. He practiced rigorous asceticism for twelve years in search of truth. He wandered in Bihar and parts of Bengal. He finally achieved enlightenment outside the town of Jambhiyagama after which he preached his doctrine for 30 years. He mainly traveled in Bihar, spending maximum time at Vaishali and Rajagriha. He met with great success in Bihar and parts of western Bengal also came under his influence. Many important personalities of his time and rich merchants are said to have accepted his creed. Many ordinary people were also brought into the fold. He found the orders of monks and nuns. He too preached in the local language, Ardhamagadhi. He died at the ripe old age of 72 at Pawa.

The Jainas also rejected the existence of God. According to the Jaina philosophy, the Universe is uncreated and moves in a cyclic motion of decline and progress. During each epoch, twenty-four tirthankaras are born who revive the Jaina religion. The universe functions through the interaction of living souls (*jivas*) and five categories of non-living entities (*ajiva*), which are *akasa*, *dharmā*, *adharma*, *kala* and *puḍgala*. Not only the human, animal, and vegetable organisms, but also things like earth; fire and water have souls. By nature, the soul is bright, pure and conscious, but it gets covered by the matter of karma, which accumulates by any and every activity. Only by removing this karma, one can achieve *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of transmigration, which is a state of inactive bliss. The annihilation of karma comes through prevention of the influx and fixation of karma in soul by careful, disciplined conduct of right knowledge, right vision and right conduct. Unlike Buddhism, Jainism laid great emphasis on self-mortification and rigorous austerities, mainly fasting. It differed from Buddhism and also Brahmanism in believing that full salvation was not possible for the laymen as total abandonment was necessary for attaining nirvana. The path to nirvana was observance of five vows, non-killing (*ahimsa*), non-stealing (*achorya*), non-lying (*astyeaya*), non-possession (*aparigraha*) and celibacy (*brahmacharya*). While Parsvanatha preached the first four vows, Mahavira added the last one. The Jainas laid great emphasis on ahimsa and formulated a number of rules for observing ahimsa in daily life.

Thus, the emergence of these two similar ascetic sects, which emphasized the transitory and painful nature of human life and preached the salvation as the final solution, to be achieved by observing moral conduct, entirely through an individualistic effort as against by complex rituals through a priest, was a reaction to a changing society and an attempt to fulfill the needs of new society.

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## 6.5 SUMMARY

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After reading this unit you saw:

- how the changes in politics material aspects was bringing in the change in society during this period.
- how the socio-religious ferment was itself was giving rise to new ideas and schools of thought
- how Buddhism & Jainism as crystallization of this ferment themselves gave a thrust to social changes of this period.

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## 6.6 GLOSSARY

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- Heretic** : rebelling against established norms and values especially of religion.
- Assimilation** : here refers to integration of tribal groups into mainstream society.
- Ascetic Renunciation** : refers to the giving up of worldly life, by that is householder's life and adopt a path of piety, spiritual salvation and wandering.

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## 6.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the changes in material culture taking place around 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.
- 2) What were the different trends of the thinking which emerged in the wake of the socio-religious ferment?
- 3) What were the changes taking place in the society in the (6<sup>th</sup> B.C.).

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## UNIT 7 EMERGENCE OF BUDDHIST CENTRAL AND PENINSULAR INDIA

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### Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Spread of Buddhism
- 7.3 Emergence of Buddhism in Central and Southern India
- 7.4 Andhradesa (Modern Andhra Pradesh)
- 7.5 Peninsular India
- 7.6 Popularity of Buddhism in Central and Peninsular India
- 7.7 Summary
- 7.8 Glossary
- 7.9 Exercises

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### 7.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit is to:

- familiarise you with the spread of Buddhism in Central and Peninsular India; and
- give you an idea of the social factors which led to popularity of Buddhism in this region.

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### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

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The rise of Buddhism in Gangetic valley during 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. was an interesting phenomenon set against the changing milieu of the period. Even more striking was the subsequent spread of Buddhism in almost all parts of the country as well as Ceylon and various southeastern countries where it rose to a foremost position. The process of this spread makes a fascinating study.

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### 7.2 SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

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**Early Phase:** Buddhism was well established in Bihar during the lifetime of Buddha. He moved from town to town, village to village and *janapadas* to *janapadas* throughout this region, preaching his creed. He wandered in Magadha, Kosala, Anga, Sakya and Vajji territories. By his commanding personality and excellent techniques of communicating with the people, he soon gained the patronage of many kings, chiefs, important dignitaries as well as people from all walks of life. He organised the orders of monks and nuns, who were recruited from various layers of the society. Magadha king Bimbisara and his son Ajatsatru were close to Buddha and had leanings towards Buddhism. Thus, during this period, *Majjhimadesa* (*Madhyadesa*) was the limit of Buddhism. *Majjhimadesa* was the region which was travelled over by Buddha, comprising of mainly modern Bihar. All the important cities of the region such as Sravasti, Kapilvastu, Lumbini, Kusinagara, Pava, Vaisali, and Rajagriha emerged as powerful centers of the sect. However, the monks and lay disciples were forbidden to travel beyond this region, into the *pacchantima janapada*, which was said to be inhabited by *milakkhas* or barbarians. This region was the area outlying *Majjhimadesa*, possibly tribal areas such as the forested regions of the Vindhya.

The monks were forbidden to mix with them as tribesmen often followed a primitive means of livelihood incompatible with the basic principles of Buddhism. However, it held pre-eminent position in Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh with a large following.

After Buddha, the religion slowly expanded and spread, both in numerical and geographical terms, though it split into various sub-sects owing to conflicting attitudes and practices of different groups of monks. Immediately after the death of Buddha, the first Buddhist council was called by Magadha king Ajatasatru near Rajagriha under the presidency of the aged Maha Kassapa, one of the first members of the Order, to draw up the canons. The second council was held at Vaisali, about 100 years after the first, for settling differences over the practices followed by the monks of Vaisali. This council marked the first open schism in the sect, which came to be divided into 18 sub-sects. During this period too, the sect was more or less confined to its earlier limits, though small communities of brethren may have come into existence as far south as Ujjain. At the time of second council, invitations were sent to communities in distant places like Patheya and Avanti.

**Later Phase: Role of Asoka (273-232 B.C.):**

However, it was under the Mauryan king Asoka that the sect spread to distant lands. Asoka is held to be the greatest follower and the first royal patron of the sect. He is believed to have converted to Buddhism after the great war of Kalinga in the 8<sup>th</sup> regnal year of his reign, when he was filled with remorse at the loss of a number of lives in the fierce battle and turned to Buddhism. He had the moral preaching of Dhamma written on specially built pillars or rocks all over his empire. He appointed *dhammamahamatras* (religious officers) to go round the country on religious missions. Though a few scholars believe that the Dhamma preached by Asoka with emphasis on moral conduct and tolerance towards all the sects was a general ethical teaching rather than Buddhist Dhamma, the similarity between some portion of a few edicts with passages from Pali Buddhist literature and his highly acclaimed position as a patron in the Buddhist literature indicate that he definitely had leanings towards Buddhism. He is also said to have paid visit to the places associated with Buddha, such as Bodhagaya, Lumbini, and Sarnatha, places of Buddha's enlightenment, birth and first sermon, and the presence of his pillars at last two places point at the Buddhist affiliation of his edicts. He is said to have erected a large number of *stupas* and Buddhist monasteries, but none are extant today, though the beginning of some of the famous *stupas* such as those at Bodhgaya, Sarnatha in Bihar and Sanchi, Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh might date back to the Mauryan period. He also organised the third Buddhist council under the presidency of famous monk Moggaliputta Tissa at Pataliputra to establish the purity of the Canon, which had been imperiled by the rise of different sects and their rival claims. In this council it was decided to dispatch missionaries to different countries for the propagation of the sect. Consequently, the missions were sent to the land of Yavanas, Gandhara, Kashmir and Himalayan regions in the North, to Aparantaka and Maharattha in West, to Vanavasi and Mysore to South and to Ceylon and Suvarnabhumi (Malay and Sumatra) further southwards. Asoka sent his son Mahendra and daughter *Sanghamitra* to Ceylon. It is clear that the efforts of Asoka were largely responsible for the spread of Buddhism in distant parts of the country and outside the country.

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### 7.3 EMERGENCE OF BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN INDIA

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**Central India:** Buddhism was introduced in central India soon after Buddha. As stated above, Avanti with its capital at Ujjaini was an important centre of Buddhism as the invitation for the second Buddhist council was sent to the community of monks here.

During Maurya and post-Maurya period, Buddhism gained popularity and emerged as a stronghold of the sect. The greatest centers came up at Sanchi and Bharhut, which emerged almost as pilgrimage sites. A number of *stupas* were built here. Although these *stupas* were enlarged and renovated over a long period, its beginnings were perhaps made during Mauryan period. The additions in the form of stone encasing, stone railings, stone toranas (gateways) and finally the icons of Buddha were made during Sunga-Kusana and Gupta periods. Thus, both these site continued to be a significant centres of Buddhism from the Mauryan period to Gupta period.

**Southern India:** The South India was traditionally known as Dakshinapatha, which was generally considered to be the country South of Vindhya, though there are different traditions about its exact northern limit. A number of *janapadas* of this region such as Asmaka, Mulaka, Bhogavardhan, Andhra and people of the region such as Damila (Tamila), Pandya, Chera, Chola are known from literary texts, both Brahmanical and Buddhist, as well as early inscriptions. The definite date of the introduction of Buddhism in South India is not clear. There are stray literary references to the presence of Buddhism in pre-Mauryan period. A few later Buddhist traditions associate some sites in south India with the visit and preaching of Buddha himself, though they are treated as later fables. Although Buddhism might have been introduced here in pre-Mauryan period, the Mauryan period is considered the datum line. As stated above Asoka sent missions to South India. His edicts are found at a number of sites. The Chinese traveller, Hieun Tsang, who visited India in 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D., has recorded traditions about association of Asoka with many *stupas* and monasteries of South India. Thus, Buddhism gained ground in South India during Mauryan period.

**Deccan:** The modern states of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, forming the traditional Deccan region, were actually group of different geographical units known by separate appellations.

**Pre-Mauryan and Mauryan phase:** There are scanty references to Aparanta and Maharattha in early Buddhist texts as a region beyond Majjhimadesa. Aparanta was the coastal region of northern Konkan in modern Maharashtra or the entire western seaboard. Aparanta with its capital at Surparaka (Sopara, suburb of Mumbai city) was an important political unit of the ancient India, mentioned in various literary texts as well as in numerous early inscriptions including the Asokan edicts. Maharattha more or less denoted to the plateau region to the east of Sahyadris of modern Maharashtra. Not much is known about Buddhism during pre-Asokan times in these regions. At the end of third Buddhist council, Yonaka Dhammarakkhita and Mahadhammarakkhita were deputed by Moggaliputta Tissa for propagating the religion here. Yonaka Dhammarakkhita is said to have converted a large number of people. The occurrence of Asokan Rock Edict and a *stupa* at Sopara and a structural *stupa* at Pauni, Bhandara district, both of which might date back to the Mauryan period, point at the presence of Buddhism during Mauryan period in this region.

**Post-Mauryan Phase:** The post-Mauryan period witnessed a phenomenal expansion of Buddhist sites and the rise of Buddhism to a prominent position in this region. Under the Satavahanas and western Kshatrapas, Buddhism received royal patronage. But more than the royal patronage, it was the popular support and patronage of the common people from all classes of the society that led Buddhism to such a high position. Buddhism continued to be a popular and prominent sect under Vakatakas and subsequent period, at least up to 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

**Hinayana Faith:** Buddhism was powerful and popular sect during the early period from around 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., when Hinayana faith, characterized by symbol worship, was prevalent. Sopara and Pauni were the earliest centers of the sect in this region. Subsequently, a large number of Buddhist sites emerged. These sites are in the form of rock-cut caves excavated in the hill ranges of mountainous region of western Maharashtra. These caves were primarily *viharas*, the rain retreats

or residential cells meant for monks to stay during the four months of rainy season, when they were forbidden to travel and expected to stay at one place. Though originally a residence for a specific period of time in a year, it gradually turned into permanent residence for the monks. To each *vihara* complex was added one or two *chaitya* caves, which was the worship area for both, the monks as well as laity. The *chaitya* cave contained a *stupa*, originally a funeral monument and a memorial relic later on, which was the main object of worship in Buddhism before the introduction of image worship. The *chaitya* cave contained either an apsidal, vaulted-roofed or a square, flat-roofed hall with the rock-cut *stupa* at one end having circumambulatory formed by a row of pillars around and a verandah. A *vihara* was basically a hall with a number of cells along all sides and with or without a verandah. These caves were simple with sparse decoration in the form of ornamental pillars, elaborate façade and a few auspicious symbols occurring above the cell doors.

About 800 such rock-cut caves were excavated at various sites in western Maharashtra during a span of about four centuries. Some important centres were Junnar, Karle, Bedsa, Bhaja, Shelarwadi (Pune dt.), Nasik (Nasik dt.), Kanheri (Thane dt.), Mahad, Kondane, Kuda (Raigad dt.) and Ajanta (Aurangabad dt.). Some of the sites such as Karle, Bedsa, Bhaja, Kanheri and Ajanta have very large and highly embellished *chaitya* caves, while most of the sites have very simple caves. The largest cluster of caves was at Junnar with 184 caves, excavated in the hills encircling the town of Junnar within a radius of 8 kms. Kanheri with more than 100 caves was another large centre, which also have caves of later period. Nasik and Karle also were sites of considerable size with about 20 to 30 caves. These caves contain a large number of donative inscriptions recording the excavation of the cave or a part of the cave such as pillar or a cell and water cistern and endowments to the monastic establishments in the form of land, money or commodities for the maintenance monks. The caves at Nasik and Karle record royal donations of Satavahanas and western Kshatrapas. A few caves at Nasik were excavated and endowed with donations by famous Satavahana rulers such as Gautamiputra Satkarni, his wife Balasri and his son Vashisthiputra Pulumavi. A cave at Nasik was excavated by Usavadatta, son-in-law of famous western Kshatrapa ruler Nahapana, while a cave at Karle was endowed with a donation by Nahapana himself. However, most of the caves were excavated and supported by the people from all layers of the society such as traders, craftsmen, farmers etc.

The number of caves and spread of these sites give an idea about the numerical strength of Buddhist monks as well as laity and the popularity of the sect during this period. It is also clear that the sect was well organised with proper orders of monks, who maintained the donations in cash as well as kind.

**Mahayana and Vajrayana Faith:** The Mahayana or later phase of Buddhism, which was characterized by the introduction of icon worship, was confined to much less sites compared to the earlier period. While a few Hinayana centres such as Kanheri, Nasik and Ajanta continued to be significant, few new sites such as Ellora and Aurangabad (Aurangabad dt.) appeared. A new cave type, *chaitya-vihara*, appeared owing to the demands of Mahayana faith. A *chaitya-vihara* cave contained a pillared verandah, square hall with cells along three sides and a shrine with an icon of Buddha in the back wall of the hall. Thus, it was the combination of residential and worship areas in a single cave. The caves of this faith were very ornamental monuments with a large number of icons of Buddha-Bodhisattvas and decorative architectural components. The famous caves at Ajanta, datable to 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. are most elaborate structures filled with beautiful paintings, while the caves at Ellora are large monuments, some of them being double and triple storeyed. The later caves at Aurangabad, Ellora, Kanheri and Panhale kaji (Ratnagiri dt.) also display a retinue of Buddhist deities of Vajrayana faith, which had tantric influence. Most of these sites except, Kanheri and Panhale kaji in coastal Maharashtra, declined by 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

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## 7.4 ANDHRADESA (MODERN ANDHRA PRADESH)

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**Pre-Mauryan and Mauryan Phase:** Andhra is the country of the Andhras, an ancient tribe of the Deccan. The Andhras of southern India are mentioned in many Sanskrit and Pali texts and also Greek texts. Andhra has been variously identified at the different points of time with the region of Krishna district or the country lying to the northern and southern bank of Krishna river. Andhradesa can be identified with the modern state of Andhra Pradesh.

Unlike Maharashtra, there are a few literary traditions about the presence of Buddhism in Andhra Pradesh during pre-Mauryan period. The famous Buddhist sites of Amaravati and Dhanyakataka are associated with Buddha, as a birthplace of one of the previous births of Buddha and a preaching site of Buddha respectively. However, as stated above, these could have been later fables, suggested to assign sacred nature to some famous sites. Another literary evidence is the occurrence of 'Andhaka' sub-sect of Mahasanghika School of early Buddhism, which is mentioned in the 'Kathavatthu', a text included in the Pali canon. According to the text Mahavamsa, this canon was written during the third Buddhist council convened at the time of Asoka. Thus, there already existed a community of monks in Andhra Pradesh known to be belonging to Andhaka sub-sect at this time. Again, the relic casket inscription from the famous *stupa* at Bhattiprolu is believed to be pre-Mauryan, recording the preparation of the casket to deposit the relics of Buddha and the bone relic from the *stupa* is believed to have been that of Buddha himself. These are scanty and indefinite references and are debatable. However, with the Mauryan period, the history of the sect in this region acquires a firm and definite footing.

Though there is no specific mention of any mission sent to Andhradesa by Asoka, its location between Magadha and Ceylon, where an important mission was sent, must have helped in the establishment of Buddhism here. Asoka's Thirteenth Rock edict refers to the Andhras along with Pulindas and other southern people. His *dhamma-vijaya* prevailed among the Andhras. His edicts are found at Amaravati and other sites. The *stupas* at Amaravati and Bhattiprolu definitely had early beginning, dating back to the Mauryan period and were important centres of the sect since then.

**Post-Mauryan Phase:** As Maharashtra, Andhradesa or Andhra Pradesh also emerged as stronghold of Buddhism in post-Mauryan period. It reached the zenith of its popularity roughly during 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. under the Satavahana-Ikshvaku rulers. A large number of Buddhist sites emerged during this period. Nearly 60 Buddhist sites dated to the early centuries of the Christian era were located in the Krishna-Godavari delta and distributed along the east coast. These sites with structural *stupas* as well as monasteries were important centres of Buddhism, where a large number of monks resided. Some of the important sites were Amaravati, Bhattiprolu, Chezrala, Goli (Guntur dt.), Jaggayyapeta, Gudiwada, Ghantasala (Krishna dt.), Guntapalle (West Godavari dt.) and Bezwada or Vijayawada (Vijayawada dt.). These sites contained stone-built *stupas*, *chaityas*, brick or stone-built *viharas*, apsidal-circular-square temples and other structures, built during the period from 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. These were relatively plain structures, though some of the *stupas* covered with minutely carved stone slabs, were quite elaborate monuments. Since many of the sites continued to hold significance over a long time, these relics came up in successive stages as the site developed. A number of sites have also revealed icons of Buddha. Other than these structural monuments, some rock-cut caves were also excavated near the hilly region of Vijayawada at Mogalarajapuram, Sitaranagam and Undavalli, which are believed to have been Buddhist. These are plain *viharas*, but of substantial size. The caves at Undavalli are multi-storeyed. A large number of donative inscriptions found from many of these sites reveal that



while a few sites like Nagarjunakonda received royal patronage of Ikshvakus, most of the sites were primarily patronised by a variety of people from all classes of society. Of these sites, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda with a large number of structures were the most important sites of the period.

**Amaravati and Dhanayakataka:** Amaravati, about 29 km from Guntur was a great Buddhist center of the region, famous for its exquisitely carved *stupa* and structural monuments. Amaravati and Dharanikota, both formed part of ancient Dhanyakataka, the capital of later Satavahanas. However, the *stupa* at Amaravati dates back to Mauryan period as attested by presence of an Asokan edict at the site. This *stupa*, the largest in Andhra Pradesh and referred to as a '*mahachaitya*' in inscriptions, was built over successively in later centuries with major additions of ornamental vedika railings, stone encasing, other embellishments and enlargements. At least five phases of construction are known, datable to Asokan, post-Asokan, Satavahana, Ikshvaku and early Pallava or late medieval periods. It received endowments as late as the 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The site was the stronghold of Mahasanghika school of Theravada Buddhism.

**Nagarjunakonda (ancient Sripurvata) and Vijayapuri:** Nagarjunakonda, 'hill of Nagarjuna', a site of outstanding importance in the history of Buddhism, is situated on the south bank of the Krishna river in Guntur dt. All round the site is a girdle of lofty hills, which forms a natural, secluded valley. In the middle of the valley was situated the ancient city of Vijayapuri, the capital of Ikshvakus. The site contained a large number of monuments containing at least nine *stupas* of various sizes, numerous *viharas*, stone or brick-built apsidal temples, halls, cloisters, *ayaka* (auspicious) pillars and other structures, all decorated with beautiful carvings and sculptures. The site assumed importance under the Ikshvakus from the second quarter of 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., before which Dhanyakataka under later Satavahanas was epicentre. The Ikshvakus, mainly the ladies of royal family, built a number of structures and made elaborate donations to monastic establishments here. It was a large centre with large monastic orders. It emerged as a great pilgrimage centre and a seat of learning as pilgrims and visitors came from all parts of India, Ceylon and even China. Almost all the important structures were built during the Ikshvaku period. After this period, though the site continued to exist, it lost its earlier glory.

**Mahayana Faith:** Andhra Pradesh is considered to be the birthplace of Mahayana philosophy. It was propounded by famous Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.). However, a very few dominant sites of this faith flourished, though a number of Buddha icons have come to light from Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and other sites.

After the Ikshvakus, the heydays of Buddhism were over, though it continued to exist as late as 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

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## 7.5 PENINSULAR INDIA

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Unlike Deccan region, Buddhism never gained great popularity and support in the peninsular states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, though it flourished in few pockets from 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

Karnataka: Buddhism in this region was introduced by Asoka, who sent Mahadeva to Mahishmandala and Rakkhita to Banavasi, both in Karnataka. A number of Asokan edicts are found from Karnataka such as at Siddhapura, Brahmagiri and Jatinga in Chitradurga dt., Nittur and Udgola in Bellary dt., Koppal in Raichur dt., Maski, Sannathi in Gulbarga dt.

The post-Mauryan period witnessed the spread of Buddhism in various parts, though none of the sites were as prominent or famous as the sites in Maharashtra and

Andhra Pradesh. However, Chandravalli and Banavasi were important centres. Among the monks, who took part in the ceremony of consecration at Bhattiprolu, Andhra Pradesh, Candagutta Maha-Thera belonged to Banavasi. Except a few donative inscriptions and icons of Buddha from Chandravalli, no other structural remains have come to light, though Hieun Tsang (7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) refers to many monasteries of both Mahayana and Hinayana faiths at Banavasi. A double-storeyed structural Buddhist *vihara* exists at the famous temple-site of Aihole built during the early Chalukya period.

There are a number of direct and indirect references to Buddhist temples, monks and Buddhism in the literature and inscriptions of early and late medieval periods, especially late Chalukya period (973-1189 A.D.). Few Buddhist temples must have existed at Balligave, Dambal, Terdal etc. The presence of Vajrayana faith is indicated by discovery of icons of a few Vajrayana deities such as Tara. However, none of these were great centres.

**Tamil Nadu:** Asoka mentions Tamil country of Codas and Pandyas where his *dhamma-vijaya* prevailed. One of the monks, who took part in the ceremony of consecration at Bhattiprolu, Andhra Pradesh, Mahadeva Maha-Thera belonged to Pallavabhoga. The famous Tamil epic Manimekhalai is a great saga of Buddhism. There are very few references to the position of Buddhism in this region during early period, when Jainism was prevalent.

However, a few important Buddhist settlements of early medieval period were at Nagapattam, Kanchi and Kaveripattam. A king of the Sumatran empire of Srivijaya erected a large monastery at Nagapattam for the use of his subjects when they visited the region, as Nagapattam was the first South Indian port from Malaya and Indonesia. This monastery was endowed with a donation by the Chola king Rajaraja. Hieun Tsang refers to the presence of 100 Buddhist monasteries with 10,000 brethren at Kanchi. However, except five Buddha images from around Kamakshi temple, no remains have come to light. It is believed that Kamakshi was originally a temple of Buddhist goddess Tara. Kanchi continued to be an important centre of Buddhism as late as 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

**Kerala:** Very little is known about Buddhism in Kerala. Asoka mentions Keralaputyas. According to a tradition, one of the Bana rulers of Malbar converted to Buddhism. A few monasteries must have existed. The Tamil epic, Manimekhalai, refers to wide prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Kerala and there were *chaityas* at Vanji.

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## 7.6 PROCESS AND FACTORS OF THE SPREAD/POPULARITY OF BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL AND PENINSULAR INDIA

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It is clear from the above survey that Buddhism appeared in central and southern India by Mauryan period and was most prominent during 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., though it continued to flourish till 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. in fewer pockets before declining by 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and surviving insignificantly at stray sites as late as 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. What were the reasons behind such development of the sect? Why and how did Buddhism gain such prominence in these regions during early historic period?

The spread of Buddhism to distant lands of peninsular India, central India and also to other countries is often associated with the mechanism of expanding trade networks and empire building activities. There is no doubt that it was primarily the proselytizing efforts of dynamic and enterprising monks, who ventured through unknown lands to preach the creed, that led to the spread and popularity of Buddhism in far-off lands.

But the process of second urbanisation, which spread from the Gangetic valley to the rest of the country, with its growing trading networks, definitely accelerated the spread of Buddhism.

The phenomenon of urbanisation and trade, which started in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., gained momentum in the subsequent centuries. The volume of trade increased immensely as the trade with the Mediterranean world, which probably existed for a long time, was intensified. By 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., almost all parts of the country experienced a phase of urbanism, accompanied by the emergence of a powerful imperial state, agricultural expansion and growing economy characterised by increased volume of trade, appearance of metal currency as well as craft specialization. The marginal areas or 'prohibited areas' outside the pale of mainstream Brahmanical culture of Gangetic valley became accessible through various trade routes. The knowledge of the earliest routes comes from the religious texts, which mention the travels of stray persons from place to place. With the intensification of trade, especially with the Mediterranean world, the western texts mention a number of cities and urban centres. Much information is also gathered from the archaeological evidences testifying to long-distance exchange of goods. Thus, a broad, but indistinct picture of a network of trade routes emerges. The most important among these was the 'Dakshinapatha', a route to south, which opened up the areas south of Vindhyas. So important was this route that the whole country to the south came to be designated 'Dakshinapatha'. A large number of articles, primarily raw material of different type, were exported to the Mediterranean world, while a few were also imported. The southern region comprising of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with its long coastline actively participated in this trade mechanism. A number of large cities emerged on strategic locations of trade routes and also as ports. Thus, the expanding trade definitely opened up distant lands for the monks to venture out and preach.

This process was accelerated and strengthened by emergence of powerful imperial states. During this period emerged the Mauryan empire, the first major example of the centralised kingdom controlling large geographic areas. The extent of Mauryan empire is known from the locations of Asokan edicts, which are found as far south as Chitradurga district in Karnataka and Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh. It is postulated that subsequent emergence of the powerful state of Satavahanas and Ikshvakus in Deccan, helped the spread of Buddhism in this region, which is marked by proliferation in Buddhist monastic sites during this period.

The association of trade, urbanism and powerful states with Buddhism is indicated by occurrence of most of Buddhist sites of the period on strategic locations, either on trade route or near large urban centre. Bharhut in central India occupied the northern end of the valley, in an area rich in mineral resources. The sites in Maharashtra were located on major trade routes. Junnar, with largest cluster of caves was located at the head of Naneghat, an important pass. Similarly, Kanheri, another important site, was located in the vicinity of port of Kalyan. Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh were located near the flourishing capital cities of Satavahanas and Ikshvakus. The other sites were located within rich, fertile, rice-growing Krishna delta and along arterial routes.

Buddhism came to be favoured by traders. Buddhism, with its opposition to the Brahmanical taboos on purity and contamination, encouraged travel and in turn accelerated long distance trade. The literary and archaeological records link Buddhism with king and the merchant. These sources portray the social milieu of Buddhism as a complex urban environment with kings, wealthy merchants, craftsmen and professionals. There is large number of references to urban centres in Buddhist literary sources as opposed to stray references to rural settlements. The largest number of monks and nuns of early *sangha* came from large towns and from powerful, wealthy families. There is a marked preference to trade over other professions in the Buddhist literature. The donative inscriptions from almost all Buddhist

sites in central and southern India record donations primarily by traders, and various craftsmen, occasionally from far off places.

Buddhism also provided much-needed support system to the changing cultural milieu. At the ideological level, it influenced and encouraged the accumulation and reinvestment of wealth in trading ventures by lay devotees, at the social level, donations to Buddhist monasteries provided status to traders and other occupational groups, while at the economic level, the Buddhist monasteries were repositories of information and essential skills such as writing. Moreover, the organised institution of Buddhist *sangha* brought monasteries into closer contact with lay community and provided identity and cohesiveness to trading groups.

Thus, Buddhism spread against the background of expanding trade network and empire building process of early historic period, both of which opened up routes to distant lands of southern India. The well-organised institution of Buddhist *sangha*, the proselytizing efforts of dynamic monks and the nature of Buddhism, which favoured trade and urban life-style, were some of the factors that led to immense popularity of the sect during this period in central and southern India. A large number of monasteries emerged on major trade routes and/or near large urban centres and thrived on the large-scale donations, primarily by the trading community. When the trade dried up and trade routes became inactive, the sect declined, though continued to survive in stray pockets till very late.

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## 7.10 SUMMARY

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We took you through the process of the spread of Buddhism in Central and Peninsular India. We described to you some of the evidences we encountered in the examination of this spread. Finally we gave you a picture of the social and economic milieu which underlined the spread of Buddhism in this region.

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## 7.8 GLOSSARY

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- Edicts** : Stone or pillar inscriptions which conveyed the orders of the king.
- Symbol Worship** : The worship of icons representative of animate and inanimate forces.

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## 7.9 EXERCISES

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- 1) Examine some aspects of spread of Buddhism in central and peninsular India.
- 2) Discuss some of the social factors which account for the spread of Buddhism in central and peninsular India.

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## UNIT 8 URBAN CLASSES: TRADERS AND ARTISANS, EXTENSION OF AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS

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Marriage and Family Life,  
Notions of Untouchability,  
Changing Patterns in  
Varna and Jati

### Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 The Second Urbanization in India
- 8.2 Extension of Agricultural Settlements
- 8.3 Traders Artisans and Guilds
- 8.4 Guild Laws
- 8.5 Guild Structure
- 8.6 Functions of the Guilds
- 8.7 Summary
- 8.8 Glossary
- 8.9 Exercises

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### 8.0 INTRODUCTION

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The period from sixth century B.C. to fourth century A.D. represents a crucial phase in Indian history. It is in this period that the impact of 'second urbanisation' was felt in India. This period witnessed the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, formation of early states, emergence of an imperial system, development of caste and class distinctions, intensification of inland and overseas trade, emergence of numerous urban centres and expansion of agriculture with the effective use of iron technology and the adoption of Brahmi script. The initial focus of the second urbanization process was on the Ganga Valley and, it spread to other parts of India around the early centuries of the Christian era, e.g., the Deccan and the extreme south. Around 600 B.C. the large territorial entities — known as Mahajanapadas — were active in the Ganga-Yamuna Valley. The metropolitan state of the Mauryas came into existence towards the end of fourth century B.C. and it continued to control most part of sub continent till about second century B.C. The Maurya rule attained its zenith under Asoka. Several new states emerged in the sub continent as the decline in the Mauryan Imperial System set in.

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### 8.1 THE SECOND URBANIZATION IN INDIA

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Urbanization is a complex socio-economic process by which 'cities' emerge amidst/ from rural settlements. Traditionally the urban-rural dichotomy dominated the urban studies though now scholars question the binary conceptual distinction between urban and rural in the context of the studies in the area of urbanisation. Hence the focus has shifted to the study urbanization process.

How can we decide whether traces of urbanization are present in a particular historical context? A number of parameters are used to ascertain the presence of urbanisation in a particular situation. Gordon Childe lists the following ten criteria for determining the presence of urbanization:

- 1) Permanent settlement in dense aggregations;
- 2) Nonagricultural specialists;
- 3) Taxation and wealth accumulation;

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Century A.D.**

- 4) Monumental public buildings;
- 5) Ruling class;
- 6) Writing techniques;
- 7) Predictive science;
- 8) Artistic expression;
- 9) Trade for vital materials; and
- 10) Decline in importance of kinship.

These have been supplemented by other indicators as well and the list grows. Here we are more concerned with the processes of urbanisation and the new classes it threw up in the early historic phase of Indian history. The Indus Valley/Harappan Civilization which flourished in third millennium B.C to middle of second millennium B.C. witnessed the first phase of urbanization in India. The genesis of the second phase of urbanization can be located in the state formation in Magadha in the sixth century B.C. This phase lasts till the fourth century A.D. During this phase, several urban centres, which functioned as political headquarters besides functioning as the nuclei of traders and artisans, make their appearance across the sub continent. The epi-centre of the early phase can said to have been in the region of Magadha which occupied the rich gangetic belt and straddled the river route.

Most of the criteria proposed by Childe to detect the existence of urbanization process are evident in the period from 600 B.C. to 400 A.D. Many urban centres with dense population appeared, with a few having fortification wall around. Use of Brahmi script also began in this period.

Buddhism and Jainism grew and spread and these sects criticized the rituals and sacrifices and questioned the dominance of Brahmanas. Thus they became popular among the groups placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Buddhism made attempts, though unsuccessfully, to do away with the caste system. Buddhists also admitted women in their monasteries. Long distance trade began to flourish from the beginning to the Christian era. The trade with the Roman Empire and the Southeast Asian countries was active. We hear from Greek writers that the balance of the Indo-Roman trade was in favour of India.

The Caturvarna system further transformed and strengthened in this period. Merchants, artisans and peasants were incorporated into system under broad caste categories. As a result of urbanization merchants and artisans were treated as distinct social groups. The wealth brought by trade activities enabled the merchants to move up in the social hierarchy, which consisted of Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. The merchants received support from the Buddhist monasteries and in turn they gave material support to these establishments. The alliance between the merchants and monasteries saw their successful spread in parts of Deccan and south and Sri Lanka from the Ganga-Yamuna Valley. The peasants also gained some importance, as farming began to play an important role. Most of the artisans and craftsmen were placed in the Sudra group. The social hierarchy became stringent in due course and with caste began to play a major role the way of life of the people. Individuals could not change the castes, but the castes could move up in the social hierarchy.

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## **8.2 EXTENSION OF AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS**

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Extension of agricultural settlements was one of the key factors that supported the second urbanization. The increased, effective use of iron technology and the demand for agricultural produce to feed the non-agricultural specialists living in the towns and



the population increase led to the necessity of bringing more untamed lands under cultivation and occupation. *Satapatha Brahmana* (800-600 B.C.) mentions the clearing forest using fire. The agricultural activities during the second urbanization generally focused on the river valleys, for example the Ganga-Yamuna valleys.

Archaeological evidence also indicates the proliferation of settlements in this period. The pottery called 'Northern Black Polished Ware' (NPW) is dated to the period of second urbanization. Settlements with this pottery are found in abundant number, when compared to the pottery of previous phase, i.e. Painted Gray Ware.

The presence of Mahajanapadas in North India also supports the expansion of agricultural settlements. The same institutions are absent in the Deccan perhaps due to the lack of intensification of agricultural activities. Though agricultural activities might have been undertaken in these areas, their intensity was low.

From the Pali texts we know that there were agrarian fields with peasant settlements (*gramas*) in the jungles. They cultivated wheat in the winter and rice in the summer. References in the Pali texts indicate that the villages were controlled by the chiefs known as *gamasvamiko* who had slaves (*dasas*) and other craftsmen (*kammakaras*) and artisans (*karukas*). Mostly Brahmanas and other upper castes were in control of such settlements and the workers belong to sudra group. The non-kin labour controlled by the upper classes made possible the necessary produce to feed the cities.

In the south, the agriculture expansion took place slightly later than the north. Though evidence for cultivation during the pre-Iron Age context is available, extension of agriculture perhaps took place around the beginning of the Christian era. The number of settlements in the Krishna-Godavari and Kaveri Deltas increased. There are also references to heaps of rice, using elephants and cattle for threshing rice in the Sangam literature. We hear of the Chola king Karikalan of Sangam Age converting forest lands into cultivable lands. He is also said to have built a bund across the Kaveri to prove water for cultivation.

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### 8.3 TRADERS ARTISANS AND GUILDS

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With the advent of urbanization, traders and artisans emerged as strong communities. The Mahavamsa speaks of South Indian traders in pre-Christian times who were also politically powerful and who in fact dominated the region. There are references to 18 guilds of artisans and smiths and carpenters and leather workers were organised into guilds. There are also references to carpenter's village in the neighbourhood of Varanasi. There also references to dishonest elements in artisan groups. *Arthashastra* speaks of the means trapping fraudulent artisans.

Romila Thapar informs us that "The sources frequently refer to the system of guilds which began in the early Buddhist period and continued through the Mauryan period. .... Topography aided their development, in as much as particular areas of a city were generally inhabited by all tradesmen of a certain craft. Tradesmen's villages were also known, where one particular craft was centered, largely due to the easy availability of raw material. The three chief requisites necessary for the rise of a guild system were in existence. Firstly, the localization of occupation was possible, secondly the hereditary character of professions was recognized, and lastly the idea of a guild leader or *jetthaka* was a widely accepted one. The extension of trade in the Mauryan period must have helped considerably in developing and stabilizing the guilds, which at first were an intermediate step between a tribe and a caste. In later years they were dominated by strict rules, which resulted in some of them gradually becoming castes. Another early incentive to forming guilds must have been competition.

Economically it was better to work in a body than to work individually, as a corporation would provide added social status, and when necessary, assistance could be sought from other members. By gradual stages guilds developed into the most important industrial bodies in their areas.

“Having arrived at a point when the guilds controlled almost the entire manufactured output, they found that they had to meet greater demands than they could cater for by their own labour and that of their families; consequently they had to employ hired labour. This consisted of two categories, the *karmakaras* and the *bhrtakas* who were regarded as free labourers working for a regular wage, and the *dasas* who were slaves. Asoka refers to both categories in his edicts when he speaks of the *bhrtakas* and the *dasas*. Thus by the Mauryan period the guilds had developed into fairly large-scale organizations, recognized at least in the northern half of the sub-continent if not throughout the country. It would seem that they were registered by local officials and had a recognized status, as there was a prohibition against any guilds other than the local co-operative ones entering the villages. This suggests that a guild could not move from one area to another without official permission.”

Thapar explains that the distribution of work was not only organized in terms of the professions living in the town but also in terms of the physical occupation by different professions of different parts of the town. Each *sreni* had its own professional code, working arrangements, duties and obligations and even religious observances. Matters relating to wider areas of dispute were sometimes settled by *srenis* among themselves. Social mobility among such groups, where an entire group would seek to change its ritual status based on an improvement of actual status, would be more frequent, since the economic opportunities for improving actual status would be more easily available, particularly in periods of expanding trade. It is not coincidental that the greatest activity of heterodox sects and of religious movements associated with social protest was in periods of expanding trade.

U.N. Ghosal informs us that Narada prohibits mutual combination and unlawful wearing of arms as well as mutual conflicts among the groups. Brihaspati lays down the extreme penalty of banishment for one who injures the common interest or insults those who are learned in the Vedas. According to Katyayana, one committing a heinous crime, or causing a split, or destroying the property of the groups, is to be proclaimed before the King and ‘destroyed’. On the other hand, all members, we are told by Brihaspati, have an equal share in whatever is acquired by the committee of advisers or is saved by them, whatever they acquire through the King’s favour as well as whatever debts are incurred by them for the purpose of the group...The evidence of the late Smriti law of guilds is corroborated in part by a certain type of clay-seals, which, have been recovered from the excavations of Gupta sites at Basarh ( Vaisali) and Bhita (near Allahabad). These seals bear the legend *nigama* in Gupta characters (Bhita) and more particularly the legends *sreni-kulikanigama* and *sreni-sarthavaha-kulika-nigama* (Basarh). These names are often joined with those of private individuals. We have here a probable reference to the conventions or compacts made by local industrial and trading groups with private individuals or individual members. Such documents would be called *sthitipatras* or *samvitpatras* in the technical sense of the late Smritis.

Thaplyal shows that both Merchant Guilds as well the Craft Guilds were very much present and played a vital role in the prevalent socio-economic structure. His database is literary evidence as found in the scriptures, texts and also archaeological findings. Thaplyal sketches a brief historical review and discusses various aspects of the laws, apprenticeship, structure, offices, accounts and the functions of these guilds. He also shows the relationship of the guild to the state. Reference is made to the cobblers’ guild, the oil millers’ guild, potters guild, weavers’ guild, and hydraulic engineers’ guild.

It has been argued that Buddhism and Jainism, which emerged in the 6th century BC, were more egalitarian than Brahmanism that preceded them and provided a better environment for the growth of guilds. Material wealth and animals were sacrificed in the Brahmanical *yajnas*. The Buddhists and Jains did not perform such *yajnas*. Thus, material wealth and animals were saved and made available for trade and commerce. Since the Buddhists and Jains disregarded the social taboos of purity/pollution in mixing and taking food with people of lower *varnas*, they felt less constrained in conducting long distance trade. The *Gautama Dharmasutra* (c. 5th century BC) states that “cultivators, herdsmen, moneylenders, traders, and artisans have authority to lay down rules for their respective classes and the king was to consult their representatives while dealing with matters relating to them.” The *Jataka* tales refer to eighteen guilds, to their heads, to localization of industry and to the hereditary nature of professions. The *Jataka* stories frequently refer to a son following the craft of his father. Often, *kula* and *putta* occur as suffixes to craft-names, the former indicating that the whole family adopted a particular craft and the latter that the son followed the craft of his father. This ensured regular trained work force and created more specialization. Here it is pointed out that the hereditary nature of profession in Indian guilds makes them different from the European guilds of the middle Ages whose membership was invariably based on the choice of an individual. It may, however, be pointed out that adopting a family profession was more common with members of artisans’ guilds than with members of traders’ guilds.

Scholars are divided on the issue of whether the guild system was in existence in the early Vedic period. Some consider Vedic society sufficiently advanced to warrant the existence of such economic organizations and consider terms, like *sreni*, *puga*, *gana*, *vrata* in Vedic literature as indicative of guild organization and *sreshthi* as president of a guild. Others consider early Vedic society to be rural with nomadism still in vogue and opine that the Aryans, preoccupied with war as they were, could not produce surplus food-grains, so vital for enabling craftsmen to devote their whole time in the pursuit of crafts. They hold that neither terms like *sreni* and *puga* in Vedic literature denote a guild, or *sreshthi*, the ‘guild president’. Agriculture, animal husbandry and trade, the three occupations of the Vaisyas, in course of time developed as separate groups.

Kautilya considers the possibility of guilds as agencies capable of becoming centers of power. It has been pointed out that the Mauryan Empire (c. 320 to c. 200 BC) witnessed better maintained highways and increased mobility of men and merchandise. The state participated in agricultural and craft production. The government kept a record of trades and crafts and related transactions and conventions of the guilds, indicating state intervention in guild-affairs. The state allotted guilds separate areas in a town for running their trade and crafts. The members of the tribal republics that lost political power due to their incorporation in the extensive Mauryan Empire took to crafts and trades and formed economic organizations.

The decline of the Mauryan Empire (c. 200 BC) led to political disintegration and laxity in state control over guilds, allowing them better chances to grow. The epigraphs from Sanchi, Bharhut, Bodhgaya, Mathura and the sites of western Deccan refer to donations made by different artisans and traders. Guilds of flour-makers, weavers, oil-millers, potters, manufacturers of hydraulic engines, corn-dealers, bamboo-workers, etc. find mention in the epigraphs. The period witnessed a closer commercial intercourse with the Roman Empire in which Indian merchants earned huge profits. The evidence of the *Manusmriti* and the *Yajnavalkyasmriti* shows an increase in the authority of guilds in comparison to earlier periods. Epigraphic evidence of the period refers to acts of charity and piety of the guilds as also their bank-like functions.

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## 8.4 GUILD LAWS

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Apart from their socio-economic importance, the guilds must have exercised considerable political influence as well in those times as can be demonstrated quoting from the texts and the scriptures at length. It has been stated that the guilds had their laws, based on customs and usage, regarding organization, production, fixation of prices of commodities, etc. These rules were generally recognized by the state. The laws were a safeguard against state oppression and interference in guild affairs. The *Gautama Dharmasutra* enjoins upon the king to consult guild representatives while dealing with matters concerning guilds. In Kautilya's scheme, a Superintendent of Accounts was to keep a record of the customs and transactions of corporations. Manu enjoins that a guild member who breaks an agreement must be banished from the realm by the king. According to Yajnavalkya, profits and losses were to be shared by members in proportion to their shares. According to the *Mahabharata*, for breach of guild laws, there was no expiation. Yajnavalkya prescribes severe punishment for one who embezzles guild property. According to him, one who does not deposit in the joint fund money obtained for the corporation was to pay eleven times the sum by way of penalty. The guild rules helped in smooth functioning of the guilds and in creating greater bonds of unity among guild members.

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## 8.5 GUILD STRUCTURE

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The structure and organisation of the guild looked something like this:

a) **The General Assembly**

All the members of the guild constituted the General Assembly. *Jataka* stories give round figures of 100, 500, 1000 as members of different guilds. There is a reference to 1000 carpenters of Varanasi under two heads. This could be because the number was considered large enough to make the guild unwieldy, though it may be pointed out that a few references to 1000 members of a guild, without division, do occur. The Nasik Inscription of the time of Nahapana refers to two weavers' guilds at Govardhana (Nasik). Mention of bickering within large guilds is not infrequent and it is possible that a place had more than one guild of the same trade.

b) **The Guild Head**

The head of a guild is often referred to as the *jetthaka* or *pamukkha* in early Buddhist literature. Often he is referred to after the occupation followed by the guild of which he was the head, e.g. 'head of garland makers' (*malakara jetthaka*), 'head of carpenters' guild' (*vaddhaki jetthaka*), etc. Apparently the guild Head exercised considerable power over the members of his guild. *Setthis* were merchant-cum-bankers and often headed merchant guilds. The guild head could punish a guilty member even to the extent of excommunication. Texts do not seem to specify whether the office of the head of a guild was elective or hereditary though there are positive references to either. It appears that normally headship of a guild went to the eldest son. Succession is mentioned only after the death of the head and not in his lifetime, which would suggest that the head remained in office life-long. The evidence of two Damodarpur Copper-plate inscriptions of the 5th century AD shows that one Bhupala held the office of *nagar sreshthi* for well nigh half a century supports this.

c) **Executive Officers**

To assist the guild head and to look after the day-to-day business of the guild, Executive Officers came to be appointed. The earliest reference to Executive Officers is met with in the *Yajnavalkyasmriti*. Their number varied according to need and circumstances. Yajnavalkya says that they should be pure, free from avarice and

knower of the Vedas. It is not specially stated whether the Executive Officers were elected by the Assembly or were nominated by the guild head.

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## 8.6 FUNCTIONS OF THE GUILDS

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Besides serving the purpose of keeping the members of a trade together like a close community, the guilds undertook many useful roles such as administrative, economic, charitable and banking functions. The guilds had a good deal of administrative control over their members. Looking after the interests of their members making things convenient for them was their prime concern. The trained workers of the guilds provided a congenial atmosphere for work. They procured raw materials for manufacturing, controlled quality of manufactured goods and their price, and located markets for their sale. Although the *Arthashastra* does not contain any reference to guilds loaning money to the general public, yet there are references suggesting that the king's spies borrowed from guilds on the pretext of procuring various types of merchandize. This shows that guilds loaned money to artisans and merchants as well. Guilds established their efficiency and integrity, and epigraphic evidence shows that not only the general public, even the royalty deposited money with them. However, the guilds had limited scope in banking in comparison to modern banks. A Mathura Inscription (2nd century AD) refers to the two permanent endowments of 550 silver coins each with two guilds to feed Brahmins and the poor from out of the interest money. Of the two Nasik Inscriptions (2nd century AD) one records the endowment of 2000 *karshapanas* at the rate of one per cent (per month) with a weavers' guild for providing cloth to *bhikshus* and 1000 *karshapanas* at the rate of 0.75 per cent (per month) with another weavers' guild for serving light meals to them. Apart from these more epigraphs and inscriptions are mentioned as evidence in this regard. In addition to this the guilds engaged in works of charity as well. Guilds worked to alleviate distress and undertook works of piety and charity as a matter of duty. They were expected to use part of their profits for preservation and maintenance of assembly halls, watersheds, shrines, tanks and gardens, as also for helping widows, the poor and destitute.

Besides these functions, the guilds could try their members for offence in accordance with their own customs and usages, which came to acquire almost the status of law. A guild member had to abide by both guild and state laws. The *Vasishtha Dharmasutra* holds the evidence of guilds as valid in settling boundary disputes. However, the jurisdiction of guild courts was confined to civil cases alone. All guilds acted as courts for their members but either only important ones, or representatives of various guilds authorized by the state, would have acted as courts for general public. Guilds, being organizations of people of different castes following the same profession, would also have had some Brahmin members, some of whom would have been Executive Officers and probably they, with the help of members or Executive Officers of other *varnas* would have formed the courts of justice.

Considering the distinction between the caste and the guild some historians hold that though similar in some respects, they were basically different. Guilds were economic institutions; castes were social groups. Whereas caste is necessarily hereditary, the guild membership is not so. One could be a member of only one caste, but one could be a member of more than one guild. However, in areas populated by people of the same caste membership of guild and caste coincided and the head of the guild presided over the meetings of both guild and caste.

Yajnavalkya lays down that such rules of corporations as are not against sacred laws should be observed. Even Kautilya, a champion of state control over all spheres of activity, lays down rules for the protection of artisans. Since the state earned a sizable income from taxation through guilds, it naturally provided facilities to them by maintaining roads for transport of merchandise and also granted subsidies and loans to them.

Some prosperous merchants, as members of the guilds, or otherwise, must have extended financial support to kings in times of emergency. Kings honored guild heads by offering gifts. Guild heads were present at important state ceremonies.

There is no evidence of a guild or a combination of guilds attempting to capture political power. The guilds of the period were local in character, with no central organization. Interests of different guilds were of different kinds, sometimes even conflicting and so they could hardly form a joint front against the state. However, in case of contests for succession to the royal throne, they might have helped the claimants of their choice in acquiring it. However, Kautilya advises the king to see that heads of different guilds do not unite against him, and win the support of the guilds by means of reconciliation and gifts, and to weaken the ones as are inimical to him. He also advises the king to grant land, which is under attack from enemy to the guild of warriors. Guild quarrels, both internal and external, provided the king with appropriate opportunities to interfere in guild affairs. Yajnavalkya enjoins that a king should settle quarrels among guilds according to their usages and make them follow the established path.

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## **8.7 SUMMARY**

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Thus the early historic phase of Indian history witnessed a robust phase of a process of urbanisation and the increase in trade and expanding agrarian structure. The new class of merchants and artisans organised in the guilds, exerted pressure over polity as well on the religious structures in the society. This phase of urbanisation was thus qualitatively different than the previous one witnessed in the Indus valley.

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## **8.8 GLOSSARY**

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- Guilds** : A distinct occupational or professional organisation which looks after the interests of the professional or occupational activities and the individuals connected with it.
- Chaturvarna System** : Here it is the same as the Varna system which had a four fold division of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.

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## **8.9 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Discuss the nature of the second urbanisation as it was taking place in India.
- 2) Examine the emergence of guilds in this period. What was their structure and organisation?

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## UNIT 9 CHAITYAS, VIHARAS AND THEIR INTERACTION WITH TRIBAL GROUPS

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Marriage and Family Life,  
Notions of Untouchability,  
Changing Patterns in  
Varna and Jati

### Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Chaityas and Viharas: Expressions of Organized Religion
- 9.2 The 'Tribal' Problematic
- 9.3 Summary
- 9.4 Glossary
- 9.5 Exercises

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### 9.0 INTRODUCTION

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The rise of two prominent, sects, Buddhism and Jainism in the northern India of 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. mark a crucial point in the history of ancient India. Both these nearly contemporary sects followed anti-Brahmana, anti-Vedic, anti-ritualistic, anti-caste, ascetic tradition, which laid more emphasis on moral conduct than the lengthy and expensive Vedic sacrifices of the period. Both appeared in and were confined to the areas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh or the Ganga valley in their early period of history. The founders of both the sects, Buddha and Mahavira, were the *kshatiryas* from powerful ganasangha clans of the times. Both the sects were patronised largely by the *vaishya* or the trading community.

Buddha promulgated a doctrine that more or less outlines all the main features of the Sramana movement. He rejected all authority except experience. According to the Buddhist doctrine one should experiment for himself and see whether his teaching was true and relevant. Buddhist doctrine states that the human life was full of suffering. This suffering was caused by desires, and hence desires were the cause of sufferings. The only way to overcome the suffering was to conquer desire and aim for a life that was sans desires. This could also be stated as the basic principles of Buddhism the Four Noble Truths: 1) world is full of suffering 2) suffering is caused by human desires 3) renunciation of desire is the path to salvation 4) salvation is possible through Eight-fold path, which comprised of eight principles.

The religion was essentially a congregational one. Monastic orders were introduced, where people from all walks of life were accepted. Though Buddha was initially against the entry of women into asceticism, an order of nuns was established eventually. Monks wandered from place to place, preaching and seeking alms, which gave the religion a missionary flavour. The religion was soon adopted by many important dignitaries of the period as well as a number of common people.

The important cities of the region such as Sravasti, Kapilvastu, Lumbini, Kusinagara, Pava, Vaisali, and Rajagriha emerged as powerful centers of the sect. However, in the initial phase the monks and lay disciples were forbidden to travel beyond this region, into the *paccantima janapada*, which was said to be inhabited by *milakkhas* or barbarians. This region was the area outlying *Majjhimadesa*, possibly tribal areas such as the forested regions of the Vindhya. According to some scholars, monks were forbidden to mix with them as 'tribesmen' often followed a different mode of livelihood incompatible with the basic principles of Buddhism. However, it held pre-eminent position in what is modern Bihar today and in parts of Uttar Pradesh with a large following.

After the death of Buddha, the religion slowly expanded and spread, both in numerical and geographical terms, though it split into various sub-sects owing to conflicting attitudes and practices of different groups of monks. Immediately after the death of Buddha, the first Buddhist council was called by Magadha king Ajatasatru near Rajagriha under the presidency of the aged Maha Kassapa, one of the first members of the Order, to draw. The second council was held at Vaisali, about 100 years after the first, for settling differences over the practices followed by the monks of Vaisali. This council marked the first open schism in the sect, which came to be divided into 18 sub-sects. During this period too, the sect was more or less confined to its earlier limits, though small communities of brethren may have come into existence as far south as Ujjain. At the time of second council, invitations were sent to communities in distant places like Patheya and Avanti.

However, it was under the Mauryan king Asoka that the sect spread to distant lands. Asoka is supposed to be the greatest follower and the first royal patron of the sect. He is believed to have converted to Buddhism after the great war of Kalinga in the 8<sup>th</sup> regnal year of his reign, when he was filled with remorse at the loss of a number of lives in the fierce battle and turned to Buddhism. He had the moral preaching of Dhamma written on specially built pillars or rocks all over his empire. He appointed *dhammahamatras* (religious officers) to go round the country on religious missions. Though a few scholars believe that the Dhamma preached by Asoka with emphasis on moral conduct and tolerance towards all the sects was a general ethical teaching rather than Buddhist Dhamma, the similarity between some portion of a few edicts with passages from Pali Buddhist literature and his highly acclaimed position as a patron in the Buddhist literature indicate that he definitely had leanings towards Buddhism. He is also said to have paid visit to the places associated with Buddha, such as Bodhagaya, Lumbini, and Sarnatha, places of Buddha's enlightenment, birth and first sermon, and the presence of his pillars at last two places point at the Buddhist affiliation of his edicts. He is said to have erected a large number of *stupas* and Buddhist monasteries, but none are extant today, though the beginning of some of the famous *stupas* such as those at Bodhagaya, Sarnatha in Bihar and Sanchi, Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh might date back to the Mauryan period. He also organized the third Buddhist council under the presidency of famous monk Moggaliputta Tissa at Pataliputra to establish the purity of the Canon, which had been imperiled by the rise of different sects and their rival claims. In this council it was decided to dispatch missionaries to different countries for the propagation of the sect. Consequently, the missions were sent to the land of Yavanas, Gandhara, Kashmir and Himalayan regions in the North, to Aparantaka and Maharattha in West, to Vanavasi and Mysore to South and to Ceylon and Suvarnabhumi (Malay and Sumatra) further southwards. Asoka sent his son Mahendra and daughter *Sanghamitra* to Ceylon. It is clear that the efforts of Asoka were largely responsible for the spread of Buddhism in distant parts of the country and outside the country.

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## 9.1 CHAITYAS AND VIHARAS: EXPRESSIONS OF ORGANIZED RELIGION

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The use of the term Chaitya suggests a pre Buddhist sacred enclosure that was a regular part of the worship in the gana-sanghas. The *chaitya* complex also at times contained a *stupa*, originally a funeral monument and a memorial relic later on, which was the main object of worship in Buddhism before the introduction of image worship. The *chaitya* cave consisted of either an apsidal, vaulted-roofed or a square, flat-roofed hall with the rock-cut *stupa* at one end having circumambulatory formed by a row of pillars around and a verandah. A *vihara* was basically a hall with a number of cells along all sides and with or without a verandah. These caves were simple with sparse decoration in the form of ornamental pillars, elaborate façade and a few auspicious symbols occurring above the cell doors. This visible form of architecture



was possible due to the nature of the patronage received by the sect from its patrons. These patrons were linked to the process by which the religion spread across the parts of India in post Mauryan phase.

The spread of Buddhism to distant lands of peninsular India, central India and also to other countries is often associated with the mechanism of expanding trade networks and empire building activities. There is no doubt that it was primarily the proselytizing efforts of dynamic and enterprising monks, who ventured through unknown lands to preach the creed that led to the spread and popularity of Buddhism in far-off lands. But the process of second urbanization, which spread from the Gangetic valley to the rest of the country, with its growing trading networks, definitely accelerated the spread of Buddhism.

The phenomenon of urbanization and trade, which started in 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., gained momentum in the subsequent centuries. The volume of trade increased immensely as the trade with the Mediterranean world, which probably existed for a long time, was intensified. By 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., almost all parts of the country experienced a phase of urbanism, accompanied by the emergence of a powerful imperial state, agricultural expansion and growing economy characterized by increased volume of trade, appearance of metal currency as well as craft specialization. The marginal areas or 'prohibited areas' outside the pale of mainstream Brahmanical culture of gangetic valley became accessible through various trade routes. The knowledge of the earliest routes comes from the religious texts, which mention the travels of stray persons from place to place. With the intensification of trade, especially with the Mediterranean world, the western texts mention a number of cities and urban centres. Much information is also gathered from the archaeological evidences testifying to long-distance exchange of goods. Thus, a broad, but indistinct picture of a network of trade routes emerges. The most important among these was the 'Dakshinapatha', a route to south, which opened up the areas south of Vindhya. So important was this route that the whole country to the south came being designated 'Dakshinapatha'. A large number of articles, primarily raw material of different type, were exported to the Mediterranean world, while a few were also imported. The southern region comprising of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with its long coastline actively participated in this trade mechanism. A number of large cities emerged on strategic locations of trade routes and also as ports. Thus, the expanding trade definitely opened up distant lands for the monks to venture out and preach.

This process was accelerated and strengthened by emergence of powerful imperial states. During this period emerged the Mauryan empire, the first major empire of the sub continent controlling large geographic areas with differing polities and societies at various levels of social stratification in its fold. The extent of Mauryan empire is known from the locations of Asokan edicts, which are found as far south as Chitradurga district in Karnataka and Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh. It is postulated that subsequent emergence of the powerful state of Satavahanas and Ikshvakus in Deccan, helped the spread of Buddhism in this region, which is marked by proliferation in Buddhist monastic sites during this period.

Buddhism came to be favoured by traders. Buddhism, with its opposition to the Brahmanical taboos on purity and contamination, encouraged travel and in turn accelerated long distance trade. The literary and archaeological records link Buddhism with king and the merchant. These sources portray the social milieu of Buddhism as a complex urban environment with kings, wealthy merchants, craftsmen and professionals. There is large number of references to urban centres in Buddhist literary sources as opposed to stray references to rural settlements. The largest number of monks and nuns of early *sangha* came from large towns and from powerful, wealthy families. There is a marked preference to trade over other professions in the Buddhist literature. The donative inscriptions from almost all Buddhist

sites in central and southern India record donations primarily by traders, and various craftsmen, occasionally from far off places.

Buddhism also provided much-needed support system to the changing cultural milieu. At the ideological level, it influenced and encouraged the accumulation and reinvestment of wealth in trading ventures by lay devotees, at the social level, donations to Buddhist monasteries provided status to traders and other occupational groups, while at the economic level, the Buddhist monasteries were repositories of information and essential skills such as writing. Moreover, the organised institution of Buddhist *sangha* brought monasteries into closer contact with lay community and provided identity and cohesiveness to trading groups.

The association of trade, urbanism and powerful states with Buddhism is indicated by occurrence of most of Buddhist sites of the period on strategic locations, either on trade route or near large urban centre. Bharhut in central India occupied the northern end of the valley, in an area rich in mineral resources. The sites in the Deccan were located on major trade routes. Junnar, with largest cluster of caves was located at the head of Naneghat, an important pass. Similarly, Kanheri, another important site, was located in the vicinity of port of Kalyan, similarly at Karla and at Kondane. Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh were located near the flourishing capital cities of Satavahanas and Ikshvakus. The other sites were located within rich, fertile, rice-growing Krishna delta and along arterial routes.

Thus, Buddhism spread against the background of expanding trade network and the empire building process of early historic period, both of which opened up routes to distant lands of southern India. The well-organised institution of Buddhist *sangha*, the proselytizing efforts of dynamic monks and the nature of Buddhism, which favoured trade and urban life-style, were some of the factors that led to immense popularity of the sect during this period in central and southern India. A large number of monasteries emerged on major trade routes and/or near large urban centres and thrived on the large-scale donations, primarily by the trading community. When the trade dried up and trade routes became inactive, the sect declined, though continued to survive in stray pockets till very late.

As the religion took a more organized form, especially once it obtained patronage from the imperium as well as the mercantile community, the religion also visually expressed it self through the architecture.

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## 9.2 THE 'TRIBAL' PROBLEMATIC

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In this context where do we place the tribes in relation to the Chaityas and the Viharas? We need to have clarity about the term 'tribe itself before we can articulate any possible relationship between the visible expressions of Buddhist structures and the 'tribes'.

The label "tribe" has been an unstable category that has been deployed within multiple networks of power relations, such as state-society, local-national and national-global spheres. We need to question the contending meaning of tribes, variously defined as indigenous, aboriginal, primitive, underdeveloped, disempowered and marginalized.

The term *Adivasi* was coined as a translation to the colonial category of aboriginal. The tribal and the aboriginal are not synonymous categories. They are in fact two different categories altogether. The term tribe refers to the political organization of the community while the term aboriginal means one present from the beginning (origin) or of the sunrise (literal meaning). Any identification of a particular people with the area implies a genetic sub text and a continuity of between them and the first human populations of those regions. This hypothesis may have some limited

validity in the New World but none in the Old World. The equivalence of the aboriginal to the tribal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the theory of race (in Africa especially), where it was argued that the Africans were quite incapable of progressing beyond tribal organizations, unless forcibly integrated into societies dominated by superior races. This led to the aboriginal –tribal and vice versa.

In fact the opening of the first millennium BC saw the prevalence of hunting and gathering, pastoralism and agriculture as the three varying strategy as per the demands of the eco-niche in the subcontinent. We cannot place the ‘tribal’ in the hunter-gatherer context always. These were responses determined by the eco-niche and the limitations of manpower and technology.

The state too had an uneasy relationship with the people who lived in the forests. The forest produce was crucial to the state, and the control over the same was desirable. The Mauryan State for instance, in one telling stroke warned the forest dwellers thus, *“and the forest folk who live in the dominions of the Beloved of Gods, even them he entreats and exhorts in regard to their duty. It is hereby explained to them that, inspite of his repentance, the Beloved of the Gods possesses power enough to punish them for their crimes so that they would turn from their evil ways and would not be killed for their crimes.* The 13<sup>th</sup> rock edict is remarkable for its clarity and ruthlessness. An empire had to be run and the resources had to be marshaled. It was in that context that the people were being warned. Needless to state that similar attitudes still prevail that lead to the utter dehumanization of our tribal populations.

Let us now consider the so-called tribal, in the context of the above. According to Shereen Ratnagar though we cannot argue from the perspective of the indigenous, certainly we can form the perspective of the marginalized. The first question to be asked pertains to the defining elements of the term ‘tribal’. It is not ethnicity that marks out any group as a tribal society, but its social organization. One way of looking at the topic is to focus on the fact that tribes are societies without caste hierarchies. Not all tribesmen or tribeswomen are ever equal in talent, industriousness, or wealth. By definition, all members of a tribe hold their natural resources jointly, these are agricultural land, forests, pasture grounds, fisheries, or water resources. A tribal family tills a plot of land because it has the right to do so by virtue of birth in that tribe. No family is deprived of access to these resources; all members have rights to land, or to graze their animals on open ground in the tribe’s terrain. On the other side of the coin, no member of a tribe has the right to dispose of his plot to an outsider or to sell it off. The social stratification in the tribal society results due to a complex process of appropriation of respect, of authority and of a capacity to participate in the cycles of reciprocities. Thus tribal tenure is joint tenure, and qualitatively different from private property in land. Tribal cultures do not make commodities of their natural resources! In other words the term tribe can said to be applied to that specific context where individual rights were embedded in the community rights, where production was for consumption and where there existed authority but not power. Where did this society prevail in the context of the early history of the subcontinent? Can we speculate on the nature of any relationship between the tribal world and Buddhism? These are interesting issues that need a greater commitment to research. These cannot be left as speculative matters.

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### 9.3 SUMMARY

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Buddhism, initially a response to the regressive Brahmanical ideology and closed vedic practices of ritual gradually turned into a religion patronised by the newly emerging classes, the merchants and the artisans, the traders and the new rulers. The seeds of the decline of the religion too were embedded into the nature of the

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patronage extended to the religion. In this process it would be interesting to study the nature of its relationship with the tribes, if any. We must leave that to the courageous breed of researchers.

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## **9.4 GLOSSARY**

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**Purity and Contamination :** In Brahmanical ideology the distinction made between what was considered to be pure and impure. Some scholars like Louis Dumont in fact regard the hierarchy of purity and pollution as central to formation of caste system in India.

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## **9.5 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Comment on the location of the Chaityas and the Viharas.
- 2) What is a tribe?
- 3) Can we speculate on any relationship between the Chaityas and the tribal world?

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## **UNIT 10 EARLY TAMIL SOCIETY – REGIONS AND THEIR CULTURES AND CULT OF HERO WORSHIP**

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**Marriage and Family Life,  
Notions of Untouchability,  
Changing Patterns in  
Varna and Jati**

### **Structure**

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Sources
  - 10.1.1 Sangam Literature
  - 10.1.2 Foreign Accounts
  - 10.1.3 Archaeological Materials
  - 10.1.4 Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions
  - 10.1.5 Coins – Indian and Roman
- 10.2 Regions and their Cultures (Aintinai/Five Fold Landscape)
  - 10.2.1 Tinai Concept
  - 10.2.2 Kurinji
  - 10.2.3 Mullai
  - 10.2.4 Marutam
  - 10.2.5 Neytal
  - 10.2.6 Palai
- 10.3 Polity
- 10.4 Cult of Hero Worship
- 10.5 Summary
- 10.6 Glossary
- 10.7 Exercises

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### **10.0 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit we will study the Early Historic period in the Tamil country that witnessed significant developments in a number of areas. One of the important contributions of this period was the composition of the early Tamil texts, collectively known as the Sangam literature. The other important characteristics of this period include the Indo-Roman trade, which became active from the first century A.D. onwards, introduction of Tamil Brahmi script, beginning of urbanisation, and the continuing tradition of megaliths. The Early Historic period, which is also called the Sangam Age, is generally placed between fifth century B.C. and fifth century A.D. We are particularly concerned with the cult of hero worship in the context of the regions and their cultures.

Geographically, the ancient Tamil country was bounded by Venkatam (Tirupathi Hills in Andhra Pradesh) in the north, Kumari (Kanyakumarai or Cape Comarin) in the south and the seas (the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea) on the east and the west. Thus the ancient Tamil country covered the modern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

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### **10.1 SOURCES**

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Here we will familiarise you with various sources of studying the early Tamil society.

#### **10.1.1 Sangam Literature**

The Sangam literature forms the main source of information for the Early Historic period. The literature derives its name from Sangam, where it is believed to have been composed or compiled. According to Tamil tradition, there were three Sangam

Ages, each extending over a period of thousands of years and these Sangams were patronised by the Pandya rulers. The Sangam perhaps functioned as an academy or assembly, where a number of poets were present. The extant works, which are attributed to the third Sangam Age, were compiled in the early medieval period. All the Tamil works that were produced in the first two Sangams are said to have been lost. However, there is very little historical or linguistic evidence to prove the authenticity of this legend. It has also been stated that the term 'Sangam' is of very late origin.

The Sangam literature is the oral bardic literature of the ancient Tamils. Most of the works were composed by the bards and poets who praised the kings and received their patronage in return. They are also the emotional outpourings of the poets. The literature offers vital information for reconstructing the socio, economic and political history of the Early Historic Tamil country. Though the situations in the poems were described according to the poetic conventions, the poets have taken real life situations and the happenings in the society for similes, metaphors and other codes and symbols. The symbols and codes have hidden meanings, which are not obvious. A careful analysis of these symbols and codes can offer valuable information.

These works are preserved mainly due to the efforts of scholars including U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, who collected the manuscripts and published them in the modern period.

The major works produced during this era are grouped into *Pathinenmelkanakku* (eighteen major works - narrative) and *Pathinenkilkanakku* (eighteen minor works - didactic). *Pathinenmelkanakku* is divided into *Ettutokai* and *Paththupattu*. Besides these works, there is *Tolkappiyam*, an ancient Tamil grammatical treatise.

There are five major Tamil epics, *Silappadikaram*, *Manimekalai*, *Sivaka cintamani*, *Valaiyapati* and *Kundalakesi*, which postdate the Sangam Age. Among these, *Silapatikaram* and *Manimekalai* are the famous works. There are also five minor epics, *Yasodhara-kaviyam*, *Chulamani*, *Perunkathai*, *Nagakumara-kaviyam* and *Nilakesi*, written by Jain authors.

#### *Tolkappiyam* – Grammatical Work

*Tolkappiyam*, the ancient extant Tamil grammar work, was written by Tolkappiyar, who was believed to be a disciple of the mythical sage Agasthya. The *Tolkappiyam* lays down the rules and regulations for Tamil literature. The *Tolkappiyam* is divided into three components:

*Eluttatikaram* (Orthography)

*Collatikaram* (etymology and syntax) and

*Porulatikaram* (deals with *akam* [the inner life] and *puram* [outer life] and prosody).

Chronology of *Tolkappiyam* is debatable. Some scholars date it to around the beginning of the Christian era, while others place it in fifth century A.D.

*Pathinenmelkanakku* (the Eighteen Major Works)

*Pathinenmelkanakku* comprises *Ettutokai* (eight anthologies) and *Paththupattu* (ten Idylls), which are the earliest Sangam works.

*Ettutokai* (the eight anthologies)

The *Ettutokai* is a collection of eight long and short poems. The *Ettutokai* works are:

- 1) *Narrinai*: The general theme of *Narrinai* is love and it consists of 400 stanzas, composed by 175 poets.
- 2) *Kuruntokai*: It is a 'short anthology', consisting of 402 love poems.
- 3) *Ainkurunuru*: This 'short five hundreds' deals with love songs of five fold landscape.

- 4) *Pattirrupattu*: The 'ten tens' consists of ten long poems divided into ten sections. It is a *puram* work praising the valour of the Chera kings. The work is valuable for reconstructing the history of the early Chera rulers.
- 5) *Paripatal*: It is a composition of devotional songs dedicated to deities such as Vishnu and Karthikeya.
- 6) *Kalitokai*: It consists of 150 stanzas with most of the songs dealing with love theme and a few songs on moral values.
- 7) *Akananuru*: It contains 401 stanzas of poems composed by nearly 145 poets. All the songs deal with love theme.
- 8) *Purananuru*: It comprises of 400 heroic poems, composed by 157 poets.

#### Paththupattu (Ten Idylls)

The *Paththupattu* is a collection of ten long poems. Out of them, five belong to the *arrupatai* class in which a bard directs another to a person/king for the acquisition of wealth. They are:

- 1) *Tirumurukarruppatai*: A bard directs another to the abode of Lord Muruga, to acquire spiritual wealth. All the important shrines of Lord Muruga are described in this work. It was composed by Nakkirar.
- 2) *Porunararruppatai*: It praises the valour of the Chola king Karikala. It was composed by Muttatamakanniyar.
- 3) *Ciruppanarruppatai*: In this work, the bard directs the minstrel to the court of Nalliyakotan, a chieftain. While describing his kingdom, the work also portrays the capital cities of three major kingdoms, namely, the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas. It was written by Nattattanar.
- 4) *Perumpannarruppatai*: This *arrupatai* is in praise of the ruler of Kanchi, written by the poet Uruttirakkannanar. Administration of the city of Kanchi and its trading activities are widely described in this work.
- 5) *Mullaipattu*: The shortest of ten idylls, containing 103 lines was composed by Naputtanar. This work deals with the *akam* concept.
- 6) *Maturaikanci*: The longest of ten poems, contains 782 lines. Mankuti Marutanar praises the valour of the Pandya king Netunceliyan and describes in detail the trade, commerce and administrative aspects of the Pandya Kingdom.
- 7) *Netunelvatai*: This *puram* work was written by Nakkirar in praise of Netunceliyan, the Pandya ruler.
- 8) *Kurincipattu*: Kapilar's work deals with *akam* concept.
- 9) *Pattinapalai*: In praise of the Chola ruler Karikala, this work was composed by Uruttirankannanar. This work deals with the trade relations between ancient Tamil country and foreign countries.
- 10) *Malaipatukatam*: Composed by Perumkaucikanar, the work is an *arrupatai*, directing the fellow bard to the kingdom of Nannan.

#### Pathinenkilkanakku (Eighteen Minor Works)

The eighteen minor (*Kilkanakku*) works which are didactic in nature are later than the *Melkanakku* works. They show more influence of Prakrit and Sanskrit cultural traditions than the *Melkanakku* works. The impact of Jainism and Buddhism is also seen in these works, which mostly contain codes of conduct for kings and people. The *Kilkanakku* literature was composed in fourth-fifth centuries A.D., when the Tamil country was under the Kalabhra rule. The most famous among these works is *Muppal* or *Tirukural*, written by Tiruvalluvar. It deals with philosophy and maxims.

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The eighteen minor works are:

- 1) Naladiyar;
- 2) Nanmani Kadigai;
- 3) Palamoli Nanuru;
- 4) Aintinai Elupathu;
- 5) Aintinai Aimbathu;
- 6) Tinai Malai Nurrambathu;
- 7) Acharakovai;
- 8) Tinaimoli Aimbathu;
- 9) Muppai (Tirukural);
- 10) Tirikadugam;
- 11) Cirupanchamulam;
- 12) Kalavali Narpathu;
- 13) Kar Narpathu;
- 14) Inna Narpathu;
- 15) Iniyavai Narpathu;
- 16) Kainilai;
- 17) Innilai; and
- 18) Eladi.

### **10.1.2 Foreign Accounts**

*The Periplus Maris Erythraei (The Periplus of Erythrean Sea)*, compiled in first century A.D., serves as an important source of Indo-Roman Trade. The anonymous author of this work was a Greek merchant or sailor from Egypt. This work mentions about the major ports and towns in India during the Early Historic period and also the items of Indo-Roman trade.

Accounts of the Roman Writer, Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.) are also useful for investigating the Indo-Roman trade. Pliny speaks about the draining of wealth of the Roman Empire due to the demand for spices, especially pepper, in Rome. These accounts are quite useful in knowing about the Indo-Roman Trade.

Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* is another important source for Indo-Roman Trade. He was a Greek. He lived in Alexandria, the Roman capital of Egypt and was the head of the renowned library at Alexandria from 127 to 150 A.D.

Certain important information is also available in the Buddhist chronicles of Sri Lanka, namely, *Mahavamsa* and *Deepavamsa*.

### **10.1.3 Archaeological Materials**

The archaeological evidence includes megalithic burials or monuments, coins and excavated sites, especially urban centres.

Megaliths are a class of burial or memorial monuments, erected as a part of ancestral worship. The term 'Megalith' means 'large stone'. Since the monuments were made of large stones, they are called megaliths. The megaliths are found all over the Tamil country. The dead were buried with grave goods like iron objects, black-and-red ware pottery and beads and other materials, and monuments were erected. Sometimes precious materials were also placed along with the remains of dead as offerings. Iron objects, especially, weapons of offence are found in large numbers in the burials.

The burial types are: Cairn circle, Urn burials, Dolmens, *Topikals* and *Kodaikkals*. Numerous megalithic sites have been excavated in Tamil country. Sanur, Kunnathur, Amirthamangalam, Kodumanal, Porkalam and Mangadu are a few of them.



### Excavated Habitation Sites

Apart from the megalithic burials, many habitation sites, especially urban centres of the Early Historic period have been excavated in Tamil Nadu. These sites offer a lot of information about the Early Historic period. Vasavasamudram near the mouth of the Palar, Kanchipuram on the bank of the Palar, Arikamedu near Pondichery, Kaveripattinam near the mouth of the Kaveri, Uraiur on the bank of the Kaveri, Alagankulam near the mouth of the Vaigai and Korkai near the mouth of the Tambrabarani River are the important excavated Early Historic habitation sites in Tamil Nadu. They give valuable evidence for the Indo-Roman trade, and towns of the Sangam Age. Brick structures, pottery with Tamil Brahmi inscriptions and imported pottery from Rome (e.g. Amphora) have been found at these sites. The excavated sites are also indirectly useful in determining the chronology of the Sangam literature.

#### 10.1.4 Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions

Another category of evidence is the Tamil Brahmi inscriptions found on the rock shelters carved with stone beds for the residence of Jain monks and on pottery. They serve as corroborative evidence for dating the literature. They have been found at several sites near Madurai and Karur. The inscriptions at Pugalur near Karur give information about the genealogy of the Chera rulers.

#### 10.1.5 Coins – Indian and Roman

Coins of Early Historic period have been found at many sites in Tamil Nadu. They include coins of the Sangam Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. Besides these local coins, gold, silver and copper Roman coins have also been found in large numbers from several sites. Most of the Roman coin hoards are concentrated in the Coimbatore region. This is attributed to the important role this region had played in the Indo-Roman trade.

#### Chronology

Dating the Sangam literature has not been an easy task in the absence of specific evidence. As a result, there is no unanimous opinion among the scholars on the date of the Sangam literature. Some scholars date it between third century B.C. and fifth century A.D., while others place it between first century and fifth century A.D. Some of the criteria used for dating the Sangam literature are listed below:

- Based on the linguistic development of Tamil language used in the Sangam literature, the works are dated between second century B.C. and third century A.D.
- Tamil Brahmi inscriptions with similar individual names mentioned in the Sangam literature are dated from second century B.C. to fourth century A.D.
- Foreign accounts such as *Periplus Maraei of Erythrei* date the trading centres mentioned in the Sangam literature to the early centuries of Christian era.
- No reference to the Pallava rulers in the Sangam literature denotes a pre-Pallava chronology for the works.

Though the broad time range of the entire corpus of Sangam literature can be easily fixed, the internal chronology is a problematic. Among the Sangam works, the texts grouped under the *Pathinenmelkanakku* are considered earlier than the *Pathinenkilkanakku* texts. Within the *Pathinenmelkanakku*, *Ettutokai* with the exception of *Kalitokai* and *Paripatal* was the earliest. Some of the *arruppadai* literature is also dated to early period.

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## 10.2 REGIONS AND THEIR CULTURES (AINTINAI/FIVE FOLD LANDSCAPE)

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Here we describe the eoniches in which the early Tamil Society lived.

### 10.2.1 Tinai Concept

The ancient Tamils had divided the Tamil country into five distinct ecological zones, with each zone having its own characteristics. Each zone with its distinct characteristics is called Tinai. The concept of *tinai* can be compared to the modern ecosystem approach adopted in the study of cultures. The five *tinai* are

- 1) *Kurinci* – mountainous zone;
- 2) *Mullai* – pastoral zone;
- 3) *Marutam* – riverine zone;
- 4) *Neytal* – coastal zone; and
- 5) *Palai*- arid zone.

These zonal classifications were adopted for the composition of poems. Besides, they also more or less reflected the actual ecological systems of Tamil country. However, it should not be considered that the five fold divisions were found as distinct units in reality. They were idealised landscapes. Though such distinct units existed in some areas, quite a few regions had overlapping of various *tinai*s. *Tolkappiyam* refers to such a situation as *tinai mayakkam*.

Each zone or *tinai* includes the conduct code ascribed to love situations (*akam*) and war situations (*puram*). The *tinai*s have distinct characteristic features, namely, time, season, fauna, flora, avifauna and occupation. In the composition of poems the poets followed these conventions. While composing a poem on Marutam *tinai*, the plants, animals and the way of life seen in that zone are incorporated in the poems. While creating these conventions the poets have visualised the way of life they saw in each *tinai* and created the conventions. In actual life, the subsistence and various aspects of the life in these zones are varied depending upon the landscape patterns. The *Akam* and *puram tinai*s also reflect the predominant behavioural patterns among the people of each landscape. It can be concluded that these poems more or less reflect the ground reality, though it is quite possible that certain generalisations and exaggerations found their place.

### 10.2.2 Kurinji

The Kurinji landscape was the mountainous zone. The people who lived in this zone are called *kuravan*. Hunting and gathering was the main occupation here. Muruga was the God of Kurinji.

#### Characteristics of Kurinji Landscape

**Tinai or Landscape:** Kurinji, mountainous zone (named after a flower of the hilly region (*Phelophylum Kunthianum nees*)).

**Time:** Midnight.

**Season:** Early winter and early dew season.

**Flora:** Jackfruit and bamboo.

**Fauna:** Elephant, monkey, tiger.

**Avifauna:** Peacock, parrot.

**Settlement:** Small settlement (*cirukuti*).

**Subsistence Pattern:** Hunting of wild animals and gathering of honey and plant produce, slash-burn cultivation.

**Food/Crops:** Rice, pepper, *tinai*, tuber, honey.

**People:** People of mountains (Kuravar, Kanavar & Vetar).

**Deity:** Muruga, the God of warfare.

**Conduct Code (*Akam*):** Clandestine meeting of the hero and the heroine (*punartal*).

**Conduct Code (*Puram*):** cattle lifting (*vetci*).

### 10.2.3 Mullai

Mullai was the pastoral zone. Pastoralists lived in this region and animal husbandry was the main occupation. Vishnu was the God of this region.

#### Characteristics of Mullai Landscape

**Tinai or Landscape:** Mullai, the pastoral or forest zone (named after white jasmine flower (*Jasminum auriculatum*)).

**Time:** Evening.

**Season:** Winter and early rainy season.

**Flora:** Indian laburnum, iron wood tree.

**Fauna:** Cow, bull, sheep, goat and deer.

**Avifauna:** Sparrow and wild fowl.

**Settlement:** Pastoral villages and hamlets.

**Subsistence Pattern:** Animal husbandry and small scale cultivation.

**People:** Pastoralists, cowherds & shepherds (*Ayar* and *Itaiyar*).

**Deity:** Vishnu.

**Conduct Code (*Akam*):** patient waiting on the part of wife for the return of her husband from a journey (*iruttal*).

**Conduct Code (*Puram*):** Invasion (*Vanji*).

### 10.2.4 Marutam

Marutam was the riverine zone. Farmers lived in this zone. Indra was the God of this region.

#### Characteristics of Marutam Landscape

**Tinai or Landscape:** Marutam, riverine or agricultural zone (named after a flower of the mystle tree (*Terminalia arjuna*)).

**Time:** Last hours of night and dawn.

**Season:** All the six seasons, winter, autumn, early dew, late dew, early spring and late spring.

**Flora:** Mango trees.

**Fauna:** Buffalo, fresh water fish.

**Avifauna:** Heron.

**Settlement:** Village (*ur*).

**Subsistence Pattern:** Agriculture and allied activities.

**People:** Ploughmen, agriculturalists, villager (*Ulavar* and *Urar*).

**Deity:** Indra, God of rains.

**Conduct Code (*akam*):** Lover's quarrel due to hero's infidelity (*Utal*).

**Conduct Code (*puram*):** Besieging the enemy's fort (*Ulinai*).

### 10.2.5 Neytal

The Neytal was the coastal zone. The people who lived here were known as Paratavars. Varuana was the God of this region. Fishing and salt mining were the main occupations.

#### Characteristics of Neytal Landscape

**Tinai or Landscape:** Neytal, coastal zone (named after the flower which grows in the back waters (*Nymphaea violacea*)).

**Time:** Afternoon.

**Season:** All the six seasons.

**Flora:** *Punnai*.

**Fauna:** Crocodile, shark.

**Avifauna:** Seagull.

**Settlement:** Coastal towns (*pattinam*).

**Subsistence Pattern:** Fishing and salt collection.

**People:** Fisher folk (Valaiyar, paratavar & minavar).

**Deity:** Varuna, the God of Sea.

**Conduct Code (Akam):** Bemoaning the lover's absence (*Irnakal*).

**Conduct Code (Puram):** Battle (*tumpai*).

### 10.2.6 Palai

Palai was the dry, semi arid zone. As such there is no desert land in ancient Tamil country, the landscapes of Kurinji and Mullai, during the dry climate or in the time of rain failure, became parched and resulted in the formation of Palai land. Korravai was the goddess of this region.

#### Characteristics of Palai Landscape

**Tinai or Landscape:** Palai, arid zone (named after the flower of the desert region (*Wrightia tinctoria*)).

**Time:** Mid day.

**Season:** Late spring or summer.

**Flora:** Cactus and other thorny shrubs.

**Fauna:** Elephant, tiger, wolf.

**Avifauna:** Eagle.

**Settlement:** Small settlements on the highway.

**Subsistence Pattern:** Highway robbery, plundering and cattle lifting.

**People:** Warriors, robbers, and hunters (Maravar, Eyinar, Vetar, Kalvar).

**Deity:** Korravai, the Goddess of victory.

**Conduct Code (Akam):** Separation of lovers (*Pirital*).

**Conduct Code (Puram):** Victory (*Vakai*).

### **Akam and Puram embedded in the concept of the Regions:**

A unique feature of Sangam literature is the special place accorded to common men and women. Most of the works deal with day-to-day activities of common people, who were immortalized in these poems. The literature covers all the aspects of human life under two categories - *akam* and *puram*.

*Akam* indicates the inner life of the people, which encompasses the love feelings of men and women. *Puram*, on the other hand, deals with the outer life of the people, with the emphasis on war, victory, and human values.

There are three main components in the *akam* concept, namely, the *mutalporul*, *karuporul* and *uriporul*. The *mutalporul* or the primary element denotes space and time of action. The *karuporul* or the principal element indicates the natural elements belonging to a particular landscape (deity, food, flora, fauna and economic activities). The *uriporul* or the human elements, denotes human emotions and feelings that are appropriate to the aspects of *mudal* and *karu*. There are five corresponding *tinai*s for *akam* situations.

#### **Akam Conduct Code for the Five Tinai**

<b>Tinai</b>	<b>Code of Conduct</b>
<i>Kurinji</i>	Clandestine meeting of the hero and the heroine ( <i>punartal</i> ).
<i>Mullai</i>	Patient waiting on the part of wife for the return of her husband from a journey ( <i>iruttal</i> ).
<i>Marutam</i>	Lover's quarrel due to hero's infidelity ( <i>utal</i> ).
<i>Neytal</i>	Separation of lovers ( <i>pirital</i> ).
<i>Palai</i>	Bemoaning the lover's absence ( <i>irankal</i> ).

There are also two additional situations in *akam* poetry, namely the *Porunta tinai* or mismatched love and *kaikillai* or unrequited love.

#### **Puram Codes for the Five Tinai**

<b>Tinai</b>	<b>Code of Conduct</b>
<i>Kurinji</i>	Cattle lifting ( <i>vetci</i> )
<i>Mullai</i>	Invasion ( <i>vanji</i> )
<i>Marutam</i>	Besieging the enemy's fort ( <i>ulinai</i> )
<i>Neytal</i>	Battle ( <i>tumpai</i> )
<i>Palai</i>	Victory ( <i>vakai</i> )

The two additional *tinai*s of *puram* concept, namely, the *Kanchi* and *Padantinai* deal with human values and ethics in life.

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## **10.3 POLITY**

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The political formations of the Sangam age were in a preliminary stage. There was no major empire, but only three large kingdoms ruled by *Ventars* (crowned kings), and many chieftains (*Velirs*), who controlled small territories. The Cheras and Cholas and Pandyas were the *Muventars* or three major kings, who controlled large territories and ruled independently. The *Muventars* performed Vedic sacrifices (e.g. *Rajasuya*) to legitimise their kingship. There are references to these monarchs in the Asokan inscriptions as Chodas, Padas and Keralaputos. The Asokan inscriptions also mention

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‘Satiyaputos’ who are identified with the rulers of Tagadur region (Dharmapuri region in western Tamil Nadu). The *ventars* and the chieftains frequently fought among themselves for supremacy. While a few of chieftains were independent, others were aligned with one of the *Muventars*.

The history of Sangam Cheras is gleaned from *Patirrupattu*, a work of eight anthologies. The Pugalur Tamil Brahmi inscription of early centuries of the Christian era also refers to the genealogy of the Chera rulers. The Cheras ruled over most part of Kerala and western Tamil Nadu from Vanchi and Karur. Vanji is identified with modern Karur near Tiruchirapalli. Some scholars identify it with Kodungallore near Thrissur in Kerala. Muziris near the mouth of Periyar was the famous port of the Cheras. Senguttuvan was the prominent ruler of this dynasty and he was a contemporary of Gajabahu of Sri Lanka. Bow and arrow was the emblem of the Cheras.

The Cholas ruled over the Kaveri delta. Their capital was situated at Uraiyur. They also had another capital at Puhar (Kaveripattinam), which also acted as a port city. Karikala was the famous king of this dynasty, who is said to have destroyed all his enemies at a very young age and also credited with the building of a dam or bund across the river Kaveri. There were other rulers such as Nedunkilli. Tiger was their emblem.

The Pandyas are considered to be the earliest rulers of the Sangam Age. There are many references to Pandyas in literary sources such as the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Arthasastra* and the accounts of Megasthenes. They ruled over the southern Tamil country. According to legends, they patronised the poets of Sangam Age. Their capital was at Madurai. Korkai was their port city. Neduchelivan was the famous ruler of this dynasty, who is said to have defeated the Aryan rulers. Fish was their emblem.

There were numerous chieftains like Ori, Kari, Pari, Atiyaman, Nalliyakotan, and Ay, ruling over small areas. There were frequent battles among the chieftains to control territories and to collect booty. The collected booty was redistributed by the chief among the followers (warriors, bards and others). Some of the chieftains were powerful and received tributes from other smaller chieftains (*Purananuru* 97). The chieftains also fought with the *Ventars*, e.g. Pari of Parambu hills.

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## **10.5 CULT OF HERO WORSHIP**

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The economy of the Early Historic period was a mixed type with different modes of production prevailing in different ecozones. Hunting-gathering and slash-burn/shifting cultivation were practised in the hilly areas (Kurinci). Pastoralism was common in the Mullai areas, fishing and collection of salt were the occupations in the coastal areas, and farming was the main mode of production in the Marutam region. In the Palai region, plundering was the occupation, besides hunting. However, these should not be taken as the only mode of production of the respective region, but as the chief mode of production.

Cattle or sheep rearing was the dominant mode of resource use in most of the areas. According to the literature, it was predominant in the Mullai region. Those who engaged in cattle rearing were called *idaiyar*. Cattle were treated as wealth as indicated by the term. The frequent raids conducted by the chiefs, mainly to steal the cattle suggest the importance of cattle. Archaeological evidence shows distribution of cattle and sheep in most parts of Tamil Nadu except Kerala, where no Early Historic habitation sites have been excavated. The people from the dry agro-pastoral regions seem to have dominated the political scenario.

Cultivation contributed significantly to the production, but it was restricted to certain ecozones. It was not as popular and dominant as cattle rearing. The amount of agricultural implements reported from the megalithic burials also indicates that agriculture was not the predominant mode of production. The method and crops of cultivation differed from one zone to another. In Kurinji zone, *milagu* (pepper), *tinai* and *samai* were cultivated. In Mullai region, *cennel* (a type of red rice) was cultivated. The land was classified into *vanpulam* and *menpulam*, referring respectively to dry, rough lands and soft, wet lands. Perhaps dry cultivation was common in the *vanpulam*, while wet or rice cultivation was common in the *menpulam*. The poems suggest that the people of *menpulam*s were prosperous and those from *vanpulam*s faced drought situations frequently.

Monarchs played a significant role in promoting agriculture. King Karikala Chola is said to have destroyed forest lands and brought more lands under cultivation. For irrigation purpose, he built a dam or bund across the river Kaveri. Animals and ploughs were used in cultivation. There are also references to the use of cattle and elephant in thrashing paddy. A *Purananuru* poem mentions the practice of slash-burn cultivation by the Vedars of Kollimalai (*Puram* 231). Tank irrigation was also known.

There is evidence for land donations in the Sangam Age. The Velvikudi copper plates of sixth century A.D. mention about the restoration of earlier grant originally given by the Sangam Pandya rulers, by the by the Later Pandyas. Land donation was made to bards and warriors. According to Sangam literature, the Chera king Selvakadunkko Valiadan is said to have donated lands. The landed classes were known as *uyarntor* and landless labourers were called *illisinar*. Hunting gathering was the main occupation of the hill region. Bow and arrow were used for hunting. Plant products were also gathered for subsistence.

According to Rajan Gurukkal, kinship was the basis of contemporary relations of production for the native people. The people of the ecozones were clan based descent groups dispersed into domestic segments called *kutis*, around the clan settlement called *ur*. Each *kuti* was an independent production unit under *ur* which was controlled by headman (*kilar*). The *kilar*'s authority was based on clan-ties. He controlled the clan's resources, which was allocated to the clan members through redistribution.

Agriculture and animal husbandry were dependent upon cooperative labour of affinal or agnatic kins and thus there was no developed division of labour. The poems have references to potters performing rituals and bards carrying out certain magico-religious rites. This suggests that the division of labour had hardly evolved.

However, in the case of brahmana households the situation was different. As the brahmanas were not cultivators themselves, they had to use non-kin labour for cultivation. This gradually began to change the equations towards the end of the Early Historic period and led to the formation of land owning and cultivating classes. From Medieval period onwards, when more brahmanas migrated into Tamil country and received land donations, the older institutions disintegrated and caused the formation of a new order.

The allusions found in the Sangam poems suggest that heroism and martyrdom received tremendous respect in the early Tamil society. The heroic ideology was very popular and the heroes were worshiped by erecting memorial stones. Wars and plunder raids were justified and glorified through various means. Losing one's life in the battle, and that too with wounds on the chest was considered a great honour. On the contrary, wounds on the back were considered a sign of cowardice or disgrace. Numerous poems talk about the delight of brave mothers over the death of their sons in the battle with wounds on the chest.

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In the Early Historic period, a number of chiefs dotted the landscape and they frequently attacked each other. Plunder was one of the means adopted by the chiefs to generate resources and frequent raids were carried out for this purpose. More battles were fought for the booty rather than land, as tax from land was not a well established means of income. Cattle were the target of such raids. This was called *vetchi* in the literary convention. This is because cattle were considered wealth. It is interesting to note that the Tamil term for cattle '*Madu*' also denoted wealth. The booty recovered during the raids was redistributed among the kinsmen, warriors, bards and the chief.

Ability to organise strong warriors to conduct frequent raids and to successfully lead them were important qualities required for the chiefs. The very existence and fame of the chiefs depended on successful raids on enemies, and effective defence in case of enemy raids. The warriors were rewarded with the booty or land, if they happened to be alive. What if they lose their life? Therefore, a reward, much more attractive than a share of land and booty, was the necessity to draw and motivate the warriors. What else could be the fitting compensation than making them on par with Gods? Thus, was born the ideology of heroism and cult of hero worship.

The cult of hero worship was promoted in many ways. The bards and poets who were patronised by the kings, mainly from the booty plundered during the raids, immortalised the heroes and reinforced the cult of hero worship. The cult of hero worship encouraged mothers to motivate their children, boosting the supply of warriors. The works cited below are suggestive of the ways the society nurtured the cult of the hero worship.

“.....Her delight

When she heard that her son fell in battle

Felling an elephant,

Was greater than at his birth”

*Purananuru* 277 (A.K Ramanujan 1985:181)

“..When people said

her son had taken fright,

had turned his back on battle,

she raged and shouted

“If he really broke down in the thick of the battle, I'll slash these breasts that gave him suck”

and went there,

sword in hand

Turning over body after fallen body

she rummaged through the blood-red battle field

till she found her son,

quartered in pieces,

and she rejoiced 'more than on the day she gave him birth.

*Purananuru* 278 (A.K Ramanujan 1985:182)

“If a child of my clan should die,

if it is born dead,

a mere gob of flesh



not yet human,  
they will put it to the sword,  
to give the thing a warrior's death...."

*Purananuru* 74 (A.K Ramanujan 1985:120)

Though these poems certainly have an element of exaggeration, it is clear that heroic ideology was dominant and strong. The abundance of weapons of offence found in the contemporary Megalithic burials also corroborates the significant role of warfare and heroism in the Early Historic Tamil society.

Hero stones were manifestations of the cult of hero worship. It is one of the rewards offered for the sacrifice of warriors. Most probably the tradition of erecting hero stone evolved from the megalithic tradition that was very popular before the Early Historic period. It seems that in the Early Historic period the memorials were mainly erected for heroes, unlike the Pre-Early Historic (Megalithic) period where the burials or memorials were erected for most of the of the people.

Hero-stones form part of a matrix of what has been categorized as 'memorial' stones. Memorial stones are spread across the subcontinent from the deep south to the arid reaches of Rajasthan desert. There are sati stones and stones set up in remembrance of dead men. The latter can be subdivided into those set up to commemorate individuals who died a natural death, and those set up to honour 'heroes' who died in battle.

Normally the hero-stone has three panels. The lowest panel depicts the event in which the person has died. In case the death occurred in a battle or a skirmish, the battle is depicted on the lowest panel of the stone. Sometimes that panel is expanded or new ones added according to the scale of the event in which death occurs. The middle panel depicts the heavenly march of the dead, escorted by the *apsara*. The top most panel depicts the dead hero, worshipping a deity, which in most cases is a *sivalinga*. In this stereotype, there are variations to cater to the need of the situation. In case more than one member of a family dies, then we find two slabs joined together or the slab is vertically divided. We also come across quadrilaterally carved hero-stones, which depict three panels of identical sizes.

There are many poems in Sangam literature describing about the *Nadukals*. There are references to hero stones on the highways and hero stones being worshipped by people by decorating them with peacock feathers. Tolkappiyam discusses the rituals involved in the erection of hero stones. Sangam literature mentions that hero stones were erected for kings (Atiyaman, *Purananuru* 232). In one instance, a bard while directing another, describes the wild region with memorial stones planted on the way side.

'On many junctions there are planted stones  
inscribed with noted names of maravars  
who, finding their foes raised shouts of joy  
when they retreated, were ashamed, returned,  
considering the moment opportune,  
and yielded up their lives. These stones too speak  
with such contempt of those who flee from foes.  
thou may'st go after playing on thy yal  
observing ancient rules and singing songs  
that please hew ear in praise of Gods that live  
*in planted stones*'

*Malaipatakam*, lines 386-396 (Chelliah 1946:31)

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## 10.5 SUMMARY

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So, you saw how nature and culture intertwined to shape the early tamil society. The cult of hero worship was manifestation of the pastoral nomadic nature of the society. Study of its eco zones and the developments of the pastoral nomadic society then complement each other to give us a picture of the early tamil society.

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## 10.6 GLOSSARY

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- Hero Stones** : These are commemorative stones, which are erected, in pastoral nomadic societies to honour those who died in wars related to cattle. For the historian these are valuable sources of information about the nature of cattle raid. By plotting the location of each stone on a map the historian can also map out the routes the pastoral nomads took while roaming the countryside for pasture and water.
- Eco Zones** : By these we mean the ecological zones into which a region is divided. An ecological zone normally combines certain natural eco characteristics and is complete in itself for the purposes of giving food, water, and shelter to the flora and fauna in its habitat.

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## 10.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the nature of the sources for the early historic period for Sangam age.
- 2) Discuss in detail the concept of Tinai.
- 3) What was the importance of cattle raids in the early Tamil society?

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## UNIT 11 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE, NOTIONS OF UNTOUCHABILITY, CHANGING PATTERNS IN VARNA AND JATI

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Marriage and Family Life,  
Notions of Untouchability,  
Changing Patterns in  
Varna and Jati

### Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Inter Personal Relationships: Gender in Family Life
- 11.2 Marriage: Facets of Social Reproduction
- 11.3 Changing Social Pattern: Varna and Jati
- 11.4 Summary
- 11.5 Glossary
- 11.6 Exercises

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### 11.0 INTRODUCTION

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The earliest Vedic literature comes from a background of pastoralism giving way gradually to agricultural settlements. The social philosophy enshrined in Rig-Veda had evolved into a new entity through a sustained philosophical discourse over a couple of millennium and accumulated historic experience of the then society. The end product of the social evolution was found to be a plummet of rituals that promulgated the supremacy of 'twice-born' and protected the hierarchical social structure. This created a lot of dissent in the lower end of the social hierarchy. Buddhism and Jainism appeared in the mean time as alternatives to the hierarchical and non-egalitarian ideology and practice of Hinduism. The questions about caste and supremacy of Brahmins appear quite frequently in the Buddhist and Jain texts. This suggests that this was a major social problem and philosophical pre-occupation of the time. The early Buddhist literature suggests a more settled agrarian economy and an emerging commercial urban economy. The Mauryan period (4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) saw the development of an imperial system based on an agrarian economy. Subsequent five centuries saw a series of small kingdoms ruling in various parts of the subcontinent and at the same time a tremendous expansion in both internal and external trade. These changes brought several changes in the social and cultural spheres. In this unit we will study some of the major changes in the social sphere. We will start this discussion from the marriage, the most elementary form of social institutions. Section-I thus discusses the gender relationship in a conjugal life, which is the foundation of family. Section-II then proceeds to discuss the cultural dynamism of social reproduction. Section-III at the end then covers wider social categories such as Jati and Varna.

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### 11.1 INTER PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: GENDER IN FAMILY LIFE

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A close look at the Buddhist and Jain literature gives some glimpses of inter-personal relationships and gender relationship in conjugal life. There existed conjugal love and affection between husband and wife. Sometimes, however, the wife's devotion to her husband arises out of duty rather than love. Still, a woman is valued by her husband more than by her other relatives. In *Sigalovada Sutta*, it is said that husband should treat his wife with respect, courtesy and faithfulness. In turn, she should be hospitable and chaste, skilled and diligent at work and should safeguard the property of her

husband. In another place Buddha addressing young women about to go to their husband's house says: (1) A wife rises earlier than her husband and is the last one to retire, she willingly helps her husband, carries out his wishes and speaks with him affably. (2) She honours, reveres and respects all whom her husband reveres, such as his parents, *samanas*, and *Brahmanas*. (3) She manages the household and those who live in it. (4) She is deft and nimble in the crafts of her husband's household and she knows how to get the work done and how to do it herself. (5) She safeguards her husband's property. Only such a wife, the Buddha adds, can be born a *Deva* after death.

In another instance, Buddha advises *Sujata*, the unruly daughter in law of *Anathpindika* who comes from a rich family. He says there are seven types of wives, some approved and others not so. The first is 'the slayer' (*vadhaka*) who is pitiless, corrupt and neglect the husband at night, and passes her time with others. The second type is 'the robber' (*Chorisama*), who takes his money and longs to impoverish him. The third is 'mistress-like wife' (*ayyasama*) who is lazy, indolent, expensive to maintain, who loves gossip and talks with strident voice. She lessens her husband's zeal and industry. These three are harsh and distrustful, and live in the hell after their deaths. But, the fourth type is 'the mother-like wife' (*matusama*), who has sympathy for her husband, cares for him as she would for an only son, and safeguards her husband's property. The fifth type is 'the sister-like' (*bhaginisama*), who respects her husband as she would an elder. The sixth type is 'the companion-like' who is full of joy on seeing her husband, just as one meeting a friend after a long time. The last type is 'the slave-like wife' (*dasisama*), who does not fear to take beating from her husband and is calm, patient, and obedient. These wives are virtuous and will go to heaven after death. Interestingly, *Sujata* after listening to Buddha's deliberation chooses to be a 'slave-like wife'.

Now let us turn to the Hindu texts to see what they have to say about personal relationship between married couples. In *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, the admonition addressed to the king by the sage *Kanva*'s disciple, we have echoes of rules in *Smritis* deprecating long residence of the wife with her paternal relatives and admitting the husband's complete authority over her. *Kanva*'s own summary of the duties of a wife, addressed to *Sakuntala* on the eve of her departure for her husband's place, is based on the rules laid in earlier *Smritis* and *Kamasutra*. In the character *Dhuta*, wife of the hero in the *Mrichchakatika* we have a typical instance of the good wife described in *Smritis*. The belief in the extraordinary powers of the devoted wife (*pativrata*), which is expressed in the *Mahabharata* and other works, is reflected in a story of the *Dasa-Kumar-Charita*. The attitude of high-born ladies is illustrated in another story of the same work, where a woman, repudiated by her husband, declares it to be a living death for women of high birth to be hated by their husbands, for the husband alone is the deity of such women. Still another story shows how the qualities of economic housekeeping and absolute devotion to the husband were highly prized among wives. Following is a description of an ideal wife based on various *Smritis* and *Kamasutra*.

*Vatsyayana* draws a picture of the good wife and may be taken as to be a faithful reflection of real life. The picture exhibits those qualities of service and self-restraint as well as sound household management, which have remained the hallmark of Hindu, wives down to the present day. The wife is supposed to devote herself to her husband as though to a deity. She should personally look after the comforts of her husband. She shares her husband's fasts and vows, not brooking into refusal. She attends festivities, social gatherings, sacrifices, and religious processions, only with his permission. She engages sports approved by him. She avoids company of disreputable women, shows him no signs of displeasure, and does not loiter about at the doorstep, or in solitary places for a long time. She is not puffed up with prosperity, and she does not give charity to anyone without informing her husband. She honours her husband's

friends, as is their due, with gifts of garlands, unguents, and toilet. She serves her father-in-law and mother-in-law and abides by their commands. When in their presence, she makes no replies, speaks few but sweet words, and does not laugh aloud. She engages servants in their proper work and honours them on festive occasions. Above all, when her husband is gone abroad she lives a life of ascetic restraint: she gives up wearing all ornaments excepting the marks of her married state: she engages in religious rites and fasts: she acts as bidden by her superiors: she does not go out to visit her relations except on occasions of calamities or festivities: when she visits them, she does so only for a short while and in the company of her husband's people. When her husband returns home, she goes forth immediately to meet him in her sober dress, and then she worships the gods and makes gifts.

Apart from attending to her husband and his parents, relations, as well as his friends, the wife has complete and comprehensive charge of the household. She keeps the household absolutely clean, adorns it with festoons of flowers, and polishes the floor completely smooth. She looks after the worship of the gods at the household shrine and the offering of *bali* oblations three times a day. In the garden attached to the house she plants beds of various vegetables, herbs, plants, and trees. She keeps a store of various provisions in the house. She knows how to spin and weave, how to look after agriculture, cattle-breeding, and draught animals, how to take care of her husband's domestic pets and so forth. She frames an annual budget and makes her expenses accordingly. She keeps daily accounts and makes up the total at the end of the day. During her husband's absence she exerts herself in order that his affairs may not suffer. She increases the income and diminishes the expenditure to the best of her power. In case the woman has a co-wife she looks upon the later as a younger sister when she is older in age, and as a mother when she herself is younger.

The rule of life for the virtuous wife sketched above from the *smritis* and the *Kamasutra* appears to have been generally followed in the Gupta Age. Again, according to *Katyayana* and *Veda-Vyasa*, the wife is to be associated with the husband in the performance of his religious acts, but all acts done by her to secure her spiritual benefit without his consent are useless. On the other hand, husband must maintain his wife. Some of the texts even prescribe penance for a husband for deserting a faultless wife.

Interestingly, we mark a striking similarity in Buddhist and Hindu sources on the interpersonal relationship in a conjugal life. The woman was mostly responsible for the household management and subservient to her husband. Unlike the Vedic period, women no longer enjoy equality with their husbands. They are also marginalised in other spheres of public life. The basic framework of the social structure thus can be inferred to be patriarchal, though there are rare instances of royal women acting as sovereigns. In Orissa, several queens of *Bhaumaka* dynasty occupied the throne in the absence of male heirs. Hence, it is hard to generalise for the whole subcontinent.

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## 11.2 MARRIAGE: FACETS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

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In the Rig Vedic times, the most ancient of the Vedic traditions, the woman enjoyed an exalted position and she was on perfect equality with her husband. The wedding hymn in Rig Veda narrates the marriage of *Surya*, the Sun-maiden with *Soma*. The hymn metaphorically describes the bride and the groom, with all rituals, formulas and sayings. The marriage becomes a visible reality when the parents give the bride the farewell blessings. At least eight different forms of marriages were recognized. There was a distinct sanction for the remarriage of widow. Men of one caste married widows of another caste (*Atharvaveda* V: 17-18) and marriage of near-blood was objected for third and fourth generation. But as we move into later *Smriti* period, we

find more and more restrictions to be included and the system becomes more rigid and static.

The ascendancy of rival faiths such as Buddhism and Jainism resulted in strong brahmanical reaction. As Buddhism and Jainism looked more reformists, the Brahmanic movement of counter-reform also gained strength. This Brahmanic reaction to the reformist alternative religious philosophy was successful by integrating the foreigners who entered the Indian society from north and northwest. The orthodox brahmanical society strategically conceded to these powerful ruling classes the status of Kshatriyas. In the meanwhile, the resurgence of trade and industry especially during Gupta rule raised the standard of living of many social groups and urbanization took place in all parts of the country. More and more groups were allowed to hold better social positions in the structural matrix of Brahmanic social order. The social groups who gained new social positions now enviously guarded them by following the social customs rigidly. The rules of marriage and social interaction became more restrictive and stringent. Thus, on the whole, during this period albeit the philosophical challenge from Buddhism and Jainism, the social rules did not depart much from their earlier practice.

Like Smritis, Vatsyayana contemplates marriage as being normally arranged by the parents or other guardians of both the parties. There are only four forms of marriages recognized in this period out of original eight. The four types of marriages recognized were: *Brahma*, *Prajapataya*, *Arsha*, and *Daiva*. The parents and relatives, in usual circumstance, would search for a match. Occasionally there was a ceremony for selection of the bride. The parents or guardians of the bride usually took the advantage of occasions of festivities and social gatherings to show the bride to the groom's selection party. Thus, both bride and groom were not involved in the selection process; it is parents or elders in the family who took the decision.

However, *Vatsyayana* mentions in special circumstances, a young man can on his own win the girl of his choice by courtship or even by trickery and violence. He though discusses *Gandharva*, *Paisacha* and *Rakshasa* forms of marriage in these special circumstances, yet they are not favoured. The literature in Gupta period contain repeated references to *Gandharva* marriages between the leading characters, but, these are concerned in general with ancient kings, or heroes, or with fictitious character of princes and nobles. The popular attitude on this point is well expressed by *Kamandaki* to the love-lorn heroin of *Malatimadhava*. She says that generally father as well as destiny have authority over the disposal of maidens, the contrary examples of *Sakuntala* marrying *Dushyanta*, *Urvashi* marrying *Pururavas* and *Vasavadatta* marrying *Udayana* involve rashness and therefore do not deserve to be followed. In historical example, princess Rajyasri of Thaneswar, her father, king Prabhakaravardhan, arranged her marriage. The mother meekly acquiesced the choice with the observation that 'the father is the judge in the bestowal of the daughter'. Hence, the patriarch or elder male members of the family mostly took the decision of the marriage. The opinion of the mother in such matter played a marginal role. Any role of the bride and groom in such a context seems far-fetched.

As every social group consciously guarded their social positions, the instances of marriage between different groups reduced considerably. The *Sastras* now made rules where marriages in the same caste were preferred. *Vatsyayana* in his *Kamasutra* declares that a man uniting himself in love according to canonical rites with a virgin of the same Varna obtains the blessings of progeny, fame, and public approval. The contrary practice of making love to girls belonging to higher Varnas as well as to married women is forbidden. The intermarriages between different Varnas were hedged around with even greater restriction in the society of *Vatsyayana's* time than those contemplated by Smritis. According to Vatsyayana, not only is marriage in the *pratiloma* order absolutely forbidden, but also marriage in the *anuloma* is put on the same low level as union with harlots.

The effect of stringent marriage rules and the prescribed punishment and social ostracism was shed upon the age of the marriage. To exercise the absolute control over the marriage, the growing patriarchy in the society adopted rules that favored early marriages. To keep the purity of the social groups and thereby preserving the social status of the group, now women became the symbol of social prestige. Several texts of this period thus put forth rules to maintain the social purity by stringently regulating marriage options. Though, there was some space provided for the boy for any aberrant behaviour, the control over girls was absolute. Some texts made it compulsory to marry the girl before puberty. According to *Vishnu Purana* the age of the bridegroom should be three times that of the bride, but according to *Angiras* the difference in age should be considerably less. Hence, though there is no agreement by different authors on the age of marriage of girls, but it can safely be said that the marriageable age of the girl had considerably gone down in this period in comparison to the earlier *Smriti* period.

The ceremony of marriage was as ever. The stepping round the fire, offering of grains as sacrifice, utterance of some promises by the bride and bridegroom by way of canonical hymns were essential rites. The parents usually took various precautions for the happiness of the daughters. Before selecting a suitable bridegroom, they matched the *gana*, i.e., classes of both agree or not. All men belonged to three *ganas* viz., *deva-gana* (divine class), *nara gana* (human class) and *rakshasa gana* (demonical class). A married pair of like *ganas* has the best constancy. *Deva* and *nara ganas* make middle combinations; *deva* and *rakshasa* inferior; *nara* and *rakshasa* are opposed or inimical. A boy or girl's *gana* is determined by the *rasi* (sign of the zodiac) and *nakshatra* (constellation) under which she or he is born.

The *Smriti* law of pre-Gupta period requires the widow as a rule to live a life of strict celibacy and self-restraint, though *Brihaspati* recommends, as an alternative, that she should burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. Literary references show that the custom of sati was extolled by some authors, but strongly condemned by others in the Gupta period. But a wide spread prevalence of this practice in the Gupta Age is disproved by the complete silence of the observant Chinese travelers on this point and frequent references to widows in the *Smritis* and other literature. On the whole, we may infer, on general grounds, that widows in the Gupta Age, as in the earlier times, usually live the chaste and austere life prescribed by the *Smritis*. But the remarriage of widows, and of other women, though gradually coming into disfavor, was not absolutely forbidden.

Thus, on the whole, the social and domestic life in this period continued from the earlier period with the following restrictions:

- 1) No intermarriage, inter-dining and exogamy.
- 2) Ancient eight forms of marriage were falling into disuse. Only the first four were recommended and supported viz., *Brahma*, *Daiva*, *Arsha*, and the *Prajapatya*.
- 3) Early marriage of girls was now insisted upon.
- 4) Remarriage of widows was still in use, though regarded with disfavor since *Manu*.
- 5) Of the 12 kinds of sons, only two were recognized, viz., *aurasa* (legitimate) and *dattaka* (adopted).

Now, looking at the Buddhist sources one does not notice any remarkable difference from the Hindu sources on these matters. One finds various forms of marriages and unions mentioned in the Buddhist texts. There are ten forms of unions mentioned in one place. These are:

Early Historic Societies:  
6th Century B.C. to 4th  
Century A.D.

- 1) when woman is bought with money (dhanakkhita).
- 2) When woman stays of her own accord with a man (Chandavasini).
- 3) When a man gives her money of union (bhogavasini).
- 4) When a man gives her clothes (patavasini).
- 5) When an ablution of water is performed (odapattakani).
- 6) When she removes her head wear (obhatacambata).
- 7) When she is also a female slave (dasi nama).
- 8) When she is also a servant (kammakari).
- 9) When she is temporarily with a man (muhuttika).
- 10) When she is captured in a raid (dhajahata).

This list of unions throws adequate light on prevailing social situation within which these relationships took place. But, the most acceptable form of social union of both sexes was in the form of marriage, which is referred in many texts as *avaha-vivaha*. *Avaha* literally means the leading of the bride and *vivaha* leading her away by bridegroom's family. In this form of marriage, the families of both parties were mostly unknown to each other. The marriage was arranged through an intermediary. It is the status and position in the society of the families on both sides, which are of the importance. Presumably, the families must be equal. However, when the marriage is being arranged, the rites and practice held the bride's family to be superior. The individual opinion of the girl and the youth like the Hindu practice is absent though compatibility is suggested by imputation of identical qualities of both parties.

One also finds reference to marriage practices in non-Buddhists in Buddhist literature. *Vinaya Pitaka* mentions five types of *brahmanas* in relation to marriage. The first type of *Brahman* is *brahmana brahma-sama*, celibate like God. Second type is *brahmana devasama* and the third *brahmana mariyada*, those who follow traditions. The second and third types must marry only *brahmana* women and with a ritual in which water is poured on woman. The fourth type, those who break traditions-*brahmana sabbhinnamariyada*; and the fifth is the *brahmana* outcaste or *brahma chandala*. The fourth and fifth types of *brahmana* marry both *brahmana* and other woman. The ceremony in the last two types is through pouring of water as well as through buying and selling. All types of *brahmanas* irrespective of their behaviour are described as pure in lineage and also versed in the Vedas. It is obvious that only the first three types of *brahmanas* carry some approval. The last two are disapproved of but do not lose their caste affiliation.

A comparison of both Hindu and Buddhist practice thus suggest close resemblance. Both the societies held patriarchal attitude to arrange marriage, where the opinion of the parties to the marriage held no or marginal importance. The compatibility in Hindu system was ensured by astrological and caste background. To the contrary, however, in Buddhist practice, the economic background and status of the family ensured compatibility between husband and wife. Hence, in both the societies marriage led the foundation for a patriarchal family. The interpersonal relationships within the marital bond favoured patriarchal ideals.

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### 11.3 CHANGING SOCIAL PATTERN: VARNA AND JATI

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Our information on the *Varna* concept comes largely from the *Dharmasastras*, and description of it in those sources is not always corroborated, and occasionally even contradicted by other sources. The concept of *varna* is seen to be closely associated



with the concept of *dharma*, understood in sense of universal law. *Dharmasastras* state that the society was made up of four orders, and later a fifth order was added. The first four were the *Brahman*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra*. The fifth order was later identified with untouchables. This schema of social structure is traced from the *purushasukta*, the tenth *mandala* of Rig Veda. This tenth *mandala* is believed to be a later addition. The reference to *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra* as a social category is only found in this last *mandala* and is conspicuously absent in other parts of Rig-Veda.

In the later period, Manu provides a list of *Varnas* and occupations associated with them. Though other Hindu sources recognise a hierarchical social composition of the contemporary society, yet there is no sufficient evidence to suggest they resembled the *varna* system described by Manu. Had the *varna* system functioned as a superimposed hierarchical layer of social groups, the distinction between the four main groups and other permutation and combinations would have remained very clear and distinct. What is curious however that while the identity of the *brahmana* and the untouchable is generally clear, references to the intermediate groups often appear to be of a rather confused, if not contradictory kind. In large number of instances provided in the non-*Dharmasastra* sources one finds a contrary situation. Buddhism is viewed as a system, which was more sympathetic to oppressed groups and it provided an economic, political, and social solution to the caste oppression. In Buddhist literature no one is ever described as belonging to *brahmana varna*, *kshatriya varna*, *vaisya* or *sudra varna*. It seems to have remained a theoretical concept without any parallel in actual practice. On the other hand, the terms *jati* and *kula* appear in concrete situations quite frequently. What really seems to matter the Buddhists were the *kula* and *jati* divisions.

The *vinaya pitaka* states that there are two *jatis*: the low *jati* (*hina jati*) and the excellent *jati* (*ukkatta jati*). Buddha also accepts this bipartite division, but at several instances refuted the relation of *jati* in the matter of spiritual attainment. In doing so, Buddha though recognises the importance of *jati* and *gotra* in social interaction, but rules out their extrapolation to the spiritual field. In *purana kassapa*, a distinct Buddhist text, six social divisions are conceptualised based on occupation, trade, caste and sect affiliation. They are:

- 1) *Kanhabi jati*- Black *jatis* mostly comprising of those who follow a bloody trade, i.e., mutton butchers, pork butchers, fowlers, hunters, fishermen, robbers etc.
- 2) *Nilabhi jati*- Blue *jatis* comprising of Bhikshus.
- 3) *Lohitabhi jati*- Red *jatis* which includes Jainas.
- 4) *Halladdabhi jati*- Yellow *jati*, which includes white robed householders or gahapatis.
- 5) *Sukkabhi jati*- White *jati* comprising of *Ajivikas* and their followers.

The scheme not only provides this broad structure of the society in terms of different colour groups, it further resolute low *jati* group into a hierarchical scheme of occupational groups. This textual resolution of the low *jatis* into occupational groups starting with *pukusuka* should be taken to indicate an order of lowness. This in overall character seems as a forerunner to Manu's scheme. The Buddhists believed that good behaviour and wisdom being rewarded with rebirth in the high *kulas* of *Kshatriya* and *Brahmanas* and *Gahapatis*. The opposite characteristics on the other hand would result in rebirth in the low *kulas* of *Chandala*, *nesadas*, *vennas* and *pukkusas*.

Rhys Davids drawing conclusion from the recruitment practice and principle of Buddhism proves that the *jati* was not a determining criterion in Buddhist *Sangha*. But, in practice the egalitarian principle of Buddhism could not influence beyond life

in *Sangha*. Other section of the society and the social interaction however still followed the discriminatory practice of the caste system. Rhys Davids believed that “had Buddha’s view own the day, the evolution of social grades and distinctions would have developed differently and the caste system would never have been built up”. Oldenberg, on the other hand, has pointed out that despite the fact that Buddhist theory acknowledged the equal rights of all persons to be received into the *Sangha*, the actual composition of the *Sangha* suggests that it was by no means in the keeping with the theory of equality and that a marked leaning to aristocracy seems to have lingered in ancient Buddhism. Similarly, Fick states that the development of caste was in no way broken or even retarded by Buddhism. Charles Eliot in his book *Hinduism and Buddhism* also suggest that while Buddha attacked both the ritual and philosophy of the *brahmins*, so that after his time the sacrificial system never regained its earlier prestige, he was less effective as a social reformer. Buddhism did oppose the Brahministic ritualism, but did not preach against the caste system as whole. E. Senart in his book ‘*Caste in India*’ also writes that the conflict between the Buddhists and Brahmins was primarily a struggle for influence, and that there was nothing in the Buddhists stand which aimed at changing the entire caste system.

Some of the historical evidence in the Gupta Age points to departures from the earlier Smriti law on *varna* and *jati*. An inscription of 5<sup>th</sup> century AD refers to two *kshatriya* merchants living in a city in the upper-Ganga basin, while another inscription of the same century mentions of a body of weavers from Gujarat as having gradually adopted various other occupations in their new home in Malwa. This social dynamism is proved by a number of authentic instances of *brahmanas* and *Kshatriyas* adopting the occupations of the classes below them, and of *Vaisyas* and *Sudras* following those of the classes above them. This social dynamism needs to be understood in the economic and political dynamism of this period. The economic expansion was integrally related to the social integration process. The village economy grew from subsistence production stage to produce social surplus to support trade and commerce. The imperial polity integrated vast regions into a single political unit allowing different people, skills and resources to interact. The land grant to *kshatriyas* expanded the agricultural practice to nook and corner of the country. The spread of Brahman groups stretched brahmanical nuclei to foster systematic acculturation in such regions to the Sanskrit mould. The social groups enjoying different grades of social status were integrated into the economy and regional polity. The emergence of small kingdoms at the end of Gupta period thus created many groups to claim *Kshatriya* status. The economic opportunities lured some *brahmanas* to take up trade. New technology and craft activities provided new opportunities to *Vaisyas* and *sudras*. These opportunities of economic interaction created new rules of social regulations. As we have discussed in the earlier section, the rules of inter-marriage became more rigid. Though, some examples of intermarriages between *varnas* (both *anuloma* and *pratiloma*) can be inferred from the literary sources, yet they seem to be confined to the social and economic elites. On the whole, the hierarchical model of *varna* system could not be rigidly enforced in practice, since it would require a static society for proper functioning.

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## 11.4 SUMMARY

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In this unit, we saw the different patterns of marriages available to the society. This made the gender relations quite complex. In the section on Varna and Jati we saw the changing patterns emerging.

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## 11.5 GLOSSARY

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**Household Management** : In the ancient texts refers to the task and the art of running day to day affairs of the household according to certain canonical requirements. By the Vedic times the householder or the Grahpati was a crucial pillar of the society, so, the task of running the household were now to be congruent with his newly emerging status.

**Marriage and Family Life,  
Notions of Untouchability,  
Changing Patterns in  
Varna and Jati**

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## 11.6 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the changing nature of Marriage in the context of Varna and jati.
- 2) Explain the various forms of marriage in the specificity of Jati contexts.
- 3) Discuss the institution of Marriage as understood through various sources.

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## UNIT 12 TRANSITION TO EARLY MEDIEVAL SOCIETIES

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### Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Perspectives
- 12.2 Early Medieval Society
- 12.3 Periodisation
- 12.4 Polity and Society
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Glossary
- 12.7 Exercises

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### 12.0 INTRODUCTION

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What is early Medieval Society in India? How does one relate the problems of historiography and periodisation to the notion of early medieval society? Why should the category 'early medieval' exist, and on what grounds should it do so? These are some of the basic issues that will be dealt with in this unit. We have divided this unit into five sections to facilitate a better understanding of the concerns cited. In the first section we will look at the story of the concept of society as narrated in the Indian context so far. The various perspectives in play are discussed threadbare to understand the problem analytically. In the second section we try to understand the early medieval society in general. This is to understand the difference in terms of characterization of a period. In the third section then we try to locate the issue of periodisation in the context of the debate on early medieval society. The fourth section then focuses on one particular segment of society and polity in the context of the discussion above. Here we look at the Yadavas and the cult of Viththal as a reference point to peg our discussion. The last section then presents some learnings.

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### 12.1 PERSPECTIVES

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Let us first locate the early medieval in the context of the debate on various historiographical models. The use of the term 'early medieval' is not so recent, but the context in which it has been used, as a replacement to Mills periodisation, is fairly recent. We need to understand the traditional periodisation as well as the departures from it in order to understand the category empirically.

There is a strange convergence in so far as the AMP (Asiatic Mode of Production) and the nationalist historiographical model of Indian Society are concerned. Both advocate a strong unchanging society. The AMP however rejects the existence of various levels of polities, and argues for the absolute power of the 'Oriental Despot' lording it over the unchanging world of the unstratified village societies. The AMP is the least seminal and the most controversial concept in the Indian historiography. It has come to be regarded as the outcome of rather poor knowledge that Marx possessed about the sub-continent. The rejection of the Asiatic Mode of Production and Oriental Despotism comes from the very centre of Marxist Scholarship in India, starting with of course Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi. Recently it has surfaced again on the grounds of being a sound theory in its own right, but should be given a decent burial it deserves so far as the historiography of the sub-continent is concerned.

The nationalist historiography as is well known embraces the periodisation offered by Mill rather uncritically. We need to once again understand this periodisation and its

uncritical acceptance by the nationalist school. This is so as the same is still being taught in the schools and in the universities after 50 years of India's freedom. The second battle of Tarain thus becomes a defining moment for one period to end another glorious/dark one to begin, depending what colors you wear. Mill's periodisation divided the sub-continent's history in three phases of Hindu, the Muslim and the Modern (British) eras. The communalist overtones of such a periodisation projects two kinds of golden ages depending on whose side of the fence one chooses to be. Apart from the obvious communal overtones of such a periodisation, it was also not based on any solid frame or terms of reference, such as a social formation, or a mode of production or a *longue durée* of the Annales. The needs of 'nationalist historiography' were specific, to cater to the requirements of the National Movement. Here it seems that the ground had already been conceded by the scholarship to give grist to the two-nation theory propounded by the League and confirmed by the elections held in 1937. The basic tenets of this school advocated a strong society, highly bureaucratized, and strongly administered. Such an inference is drawn from the widely scattered epigraphic evidence in the context of 'early medieval India', and later for the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. Problems of continuous growth and the decline of early and late medieval societies are often considered as an effect of mere conquests or as a result of dynastic history. They are not seen in their structural terms.

The more recent formulations on the society formation however agree that the pre-modern society in India was highly bureaucratized. There is however a wide range of disagreement over the degree of fragmentation or segmentation on one hand and the temporally or spatially fluctuating unitary tendencies on the other hand. In this context recent debate has focused on the issue of the degree to which the pre-modern society in India was centralized, spatially and temporally. Germane to this debate are two formulations that directly impinge on the issue of spatial and temporal fragmentation. The first one is of course the model of Indian Feudalism and the second one is that of Burton Stein's Segmentary State and Society.

Daniel Thorner mourned that 'there is no single article on the place of feudalism in the historical evolution of India' (Thorner 1956:133). Ironically exactly in the same year that Thorner could not detect a single work devoted to feudalism in India, Kosambi published two articles on feudalism, and later that year the famous Introduction came out. Subsequently R.S. Sharma began to publish articles on the origin and development of feudalism in India. Later these were enlarged and supplemented by new studies and Indian Feudalism appeared in 1965 (Sharma 1965).

Feudalism as a theoretical construct remains the most controversial construct in the debate on periodisation in Indian history. This debate also directly impinges on the issues such as the nature of the society in early medieval context and the process of social formation in the early medieval India. Let us briefly understand what happens at the level of society and polity when the feudal structures emerge on the ruins of early historic phase in India. It has been argued that decentralization and hierarchy characterize the new society structure. This is suggested by the presence of a wide range of semi autonomous rulers such as the Samantas, mahasamantas, mahamandalesvara and so on. Further, the emergence of the landed intermediaries is considered the hallmark of Indian feudal social formation. This of course is linked with the disintegration and decentralization of society authority and with significant changes in the agrarian structures and relations of productions. The emergence of this landed gentry/intermediary is causally lined with what is now known as the land grant economy. All this is presupposed on the premise that the pre-feudal structure was a centralized bureaucratic imperial structure. That structure collapsed. The collapse of that structure (read the Mauryan Empire) led to the emergence of Indian Feudalism in the early medieval phase of Indian history. It is supposed that this earlier structure was characterized by highly monetized economy, long distance trade and tightly held bureaucracy where the payments were in cash and there were no intermediaries

between the king and the peasant. This pattern changed with the collapse of the Mauryan Empire. It then resulted in a system where the urban monetary economy gave way to ruralization and villages becoming 'self-sufficient'. This also ushered in an 'Urban Decay', a hallmark of the feudal process. In the peasantry this resulted in something close to serfdom, characterized by immobility, forced labour and exorbitantly high rates of revenue. Taken together, these three points enumerate the feudal model that explains the society formation as well as the nature of society in early medieval India.

The internal weakness of this model has been pointed out by many and one need not get into that debate now. The Euro centric nature of 'feudal society', the presupposition of a strong unitary imperial system before the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and a pan Indian generalization largely given on the basis of epigraphy alone (as we do not have any horizontal excavation for the historical period in India) are some of the criticisms that have been offered. Nevertheless, Indian Feudalism remains one of the most cogently worked out theoretical paradigm about society formation process in India, and hence warrants our attention.

If we leave aside the AMP and the theory of the nationalist historians, then Stein's segmentary state and society, along with 'feudalism' will have to be regarded a major conceptual contribution to the contemporary debate on early medieval state and society in India. Stein in his 'Interim Reflections' reaches for a theoretical merger between three parallel strands of segmentary state and society integrated polity and processual model of integration. Stein visualizes a meeting point for all the three as necessary step to arrive at the alternative framework to understand society formation in India. This process of integration implied a transformation of 'pre-society polities into society polities and thus the integration of local polities into structures that transcended the bounds of local politics. This integrative process was accompanied by a series of other initiatives, extension of agrarian society through peasantization of tribal groups, improvements in the trading networks, expansion of the Caste society and the emergence of spatial extensions of the ruling lineages by the processes of what Kulke calls Kshatriyaization or Rajputization. These measures affected the pre-modern society in two significant ways. The dynastic nuclear area came under bureaucratic control of the central lineage/dynasty. Secondly the politically controlled area expanded through a process of integration into its hinterland. In this the Samanta, the Rajas and the maha mandaleshvaras played a pivotal role, one that was played later on by the Yadava Bhosale's of Singhnapur of Maharashtra. This formulation of looking at the society formation in an evolutionary process is a departure from both the Feudalism model as well as that of the segmentary society.

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## 12.2 EARLY MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

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In this context, the question that really requires some reflection is: what is it that makes the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries different than say the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries. What are the underlying processes that operate in the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> centuries? How different these process were, or did the process result in a different outcome than say in the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries or in the 17<sup>th</sup> or the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. We need to look at such differences in terms of society and polity before arriving at any tentative propositions regarding early medieval phase in Indian history. We need to understand the early historical a shade more to understand the process a shade better. The early historical phase in the Indian history can be characterized as going through two dominant traits: the shift towards state formation, and thus the related development of resource mobilisation and control over the apparatus of resource mobilisation. The forms of control could be direct or indirect, through society organs or other more complex networks. We can broadly understand the early historic phase by looking at the underlying form as outlined below. This will help us understand the nature of 'early medieval' a shade better. At the level of polity the territorial kingdoms

crystallized into a state system. This system was characterized by long distance trade, urbanization and the existence of village communities. The social order of the Varna had taken roots and we already have the upper crust appropriating the surplus and the others doing the servile duties. It is against this background that we need to understand the nature of early medieval system.

The answer to this vexed issue depends on what perspective one chooses to argue from to outline the difference. B. D. Chattopadhyaya, who in recent years has worked out this problem from the perspective of integration and continuity of a process unleashed in the 'early historic era' argues that we must see this transition to medieval era in terms of the 'scale of certain fundamental movements within the regional and local levels and not in terms of a crisis of a pre-existent, pan-Indian social order'. He thus cuts the Gordian knot as it were and refrains from defining the nature of early medieval formation in terms of its economy or polity at the pan Indian level. However he identifies three elements that evolve in the process of history from the 'early historic phases'. These are, viz. The expansion of a society, the peasantization of tribes or in other words a journey from 'tribe to caste' and the cult appropriation and integration. He thus rejects the single pre determinate explanation of a cultural pattern (read feudalism) and opens other possibilities that could work at multicultural explanations at the pan Indian level. It at once recognizes the fact that in the 'early medieval contexts' regional identities were shaped more sharply and that the process of society formation was taken to its logical conclusion in different regions and at different levels.

Let us understand the broad contours of that society or rather societies that existed in various state systems in terms of differences from the early historic ones. The point of departure however does not lie in the feudalism or the segmentary society either. It lies in the way periodisation is understood and operated in Indian history.

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### 12.3 PERIODISATION

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The issue of periodisation is really simple at one level. What constitutes the 'ancient', the 'medieval' and the 'modern' in Indian History? The answers to these vexed questions have varied from the moment James Mill defined Indian History in largely communal terms. Without getting entangled in the earlier debates on the Mills periodisation, and the equally communal response by the Nationalist historians, let us understand the basic premise about periodisation. We periodise because it helps us understand the epoch, a century, an era, and a time segment better. Therefore the question really is about the categories deployed to differentiate those particular eras, centuries or epochs. Mill deployed his categories in a manner that answered to him the issues that he was trying to understand, the past in terms of its use to help the imperial Britain rule better. We need to understand it on our terms, a past in terms of its complexity to help us understand the present a shade better. Once such understanding exists then the categories of periodising Indian history or any history for that matter become that much more refined. In the context of the 'early medieval' then, what we need to really look at is the underlying form which differs from the one that existed in say 'early historic', or say in 'medieval'. It is this difference that will sharply bring out the need to periodise. If it doesn't then there is for us not logical need to periodise. So what is that underlying form that we are trying to grapple with?

It is at this point that the debate about Indian Periodisation really hots up. The underlying form has been variously defined as feudal, not feudal, semi feudal, colonial, capitalist, and so on. So the entire time segment for the pre feudal (early historic) is designed to usher in the feudal and the interim period is the preparation for that. The same goes for those who do not accept the feudal as underlying form. Here the effort is to usher in a non-feudal formation from the 'early historic'. The problem therefore really is 'early historic' from which the 'early medieval' has to be derived, in feudal



or non-feudal terms. Often the romantic reality is taken for a classical one and this simple mistake results in greater errors. For instance the nature of the society, or a society is seen as the defining category, while the process that results in such a formation is ignored. Thus we get feudalism, or an integrated polity, or a segmentary society or a patrimonial bureaucratic structure, depending on what is current in fashion. Instead we need to look at both; the process as well as the resultant outcome of that process at any given points in time to arrive at any characterization of a polity or a society.

Seen in this light, we need to understand the points of departures when the processes initiated in the 'early historic phase' started consolidating around a society and polity, many societies and polities. Underlying this consolidation were three entities, shaping up of regions, emergence of cults and its relationships with the polity and the proliferation of states, as a result of a state formation process. To what extent these were feudal in character, or consisted of free peasantry would depend on the nature of evidence from that particular region. Let us take one polity, the Yadavas of Devagiri, to understand the process.

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## 12.4 POLITY AND SOCIETY

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The Yadava kingdom is a typical example of an early medieval system in operation where the process of consolidation of polity, growth of a 'folk/tribal' cult into a fully sanskritised deity and the evolution of a society takes place simultaneously from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Let us first understand the cult and its process of transformation.

The epicenter of the cult of Viththal is located in the township of Pandharpur, at the heart of the Yadava kingdom. The city of Pandharpur is located on the right bank of river Bhima, on 17° North and 75° 23'-east longitude. The earliest reference to Pandharpur is from a Rastrakuta grant dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. The operative parts of the grant state that Pandarangapalli along with Anewari, Cala, Kandaka and Duddapalli were granted to a learned brahmana, Jayadviththa. (MAD 1929:198ff;). This grant also refers to the scribe, one Pandaradrisena, or the lord of the Pandara hill. The Rastrakuta king Amoghavarsa gives this grant in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The next reference to Pandharpur is slightly indirect, viz. in that the grant refers to a small temple a 'lahan madu' being erected by the Mahajanas, Dandanayaka and others, during the reign of Bhillama. This inscription is dated to 1189 AD. (Tulpule, 1963: 85 – 92). We will come back to this inscription in another context. The next inscription is interesting from the perspective of the evolution of the settlement. It states that Mallisetti gave at Paundarikaksetra, on the Bhimarthi a village. (IA, 1885:68-75). The palli is now being referred to as the Ksetra.

Pandharpur is first referred to as a palli in the sixth century AD. (Saletore: 773). This term denotes a small settlement. This status of the settlement remains unchanged from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD to the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. This status drastically changes in the next one hundred years, between 1189AD- to 1237 AD. The settlement is now a mahagrama. The nature of the settlement undergoes further change in the next 50-75 years. In the 'Cauryasi' grant this mahagrama has been referred to as a 'pura' (Tulpule, op. cit: 165 – 190). Finally, a 14<sup>th</sup> century grant also refers to Pandharpur as a pura, an urban centre. In this context, the evolution of the categories such as from grama to the pura needs to be understood. These are essentially two different categories denoting a difference in the nature of the settlement. Inherent in the category is the notion of 'space'. Pandharpur thus graduates from a mere palli to a grama and then to a Ksetra and finally into a pura an urban settlement, by the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Christian era.

It is important to record the epigraphic evidence about the Vitththal as a deity before we get into the interplay of traditions. This is important as the epigraphy can then suggest a temporal and spatial context within which we can then understand the play of traditions and the role of the state in this drama.

We can divide the entire epigraphic context pertaining to the cult of Vitththal into four distinct phases. In the first phase (516 AD to 1188AD) we get references to Pandharpur but we do not get any conclusive evidence regarding the existence of Vitththal as a deity at Pandharpur. There is one controversial reference to the 'Lord of the Hill', but the reference to the context eludes us. In this phase, Pandharpur is referred to as a palli, or a settlement. All that can be concluded from this oblique reference to the lord is that some kind of a worship centre might have existed on the hill at Pandarangapalli. This phase comes to an end in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, towards the very end of the reign of Bhillama V, an inscription invokes Vitththal as a deity and refers to the small temple/shrine that has been erected. This is the first concrete reference to the deity at Pandharpur. One Vitthtaldevanayaka is also referred to in the inscription, suggesting that by then name of the deity had become wide spread in the society at large.

The signs of first change in the nature of settlement occur in the next phase. The Hoysala inscription of 1237AD refers to the grant for the anga-ranga-bhoga and a grant to the Siva temple too. It also refers to the palli as a mahagrama. The change in the nature of the settlement is linked to the fortunes of the deity, which are also changing. In the last phase of its journey from the palli, the centre now refers to the Pura and the small temple undergoes a remarkable change. The grand Yadava temple sponsored by the Yadava dominated domains now stands in full glory before the world. This evolution takes place between 1273-1277AD. (PMKL, Dandekar 1993)

To sum up, in the first phase we do not find any trace of Vitththala in its deified form at Pandharpur. The construction of the temple turns out to be the most crucial event in the history of the settlement as well as the deity. Within a span of 84 years of the construction of the small temple, there ensues a virtual renovation and expansion of the same. The palli of the sixth century AD is now a pura. This growth is compressed in less than one hundred years. Intimately connected with all these developments are the Devagiri and the Hoysala Yadavas. It is clear that they find a common strand in one of the traditions at the cult centre and thus are able to extend a patronage to it. It is also interesting to note that the reference to Vitththal as a deity is only in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. (Tulpule, 1963:) The phenomenal growth of the settlement is compressed in mere one hundred years. Is it due to the extraordinary interest shown by the state in the existing traditions at the settlement? What is the significance of this process in terms of the Yadavaisation in the Deccan in the early medieval context? Here we must now turn to the deity to understand the same from another perspective, that of a state and tradition. This will enable us to understand the interplay of traditions at the cult centre that create a cult at Pandharpur by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD.

We need to understand the nature of the Yadava intervention to understand the birth and the evolution of this cult. The polity intervenes decisively at Pandharpur only in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. It has been noted earlier that the Yadava feudatories erected a small temple at Pandharpur in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. This small temple was expanded/renovated/reworked in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. This initiative came from the political structure. A call was given to mobilize resources. At the beginning, the call was not heeded to and very little resource mobilization seems to have taken place. Then the *Karnadhipa* of the Yadava kingdom made donation to the cult centre. This was followed by a spate of donations at the cult centre. Finally the Yadava King Ramcandradeva Yadava capped the donations at the temple by his own, and he himself took upon the role as the Pandhari Phad Pramukh, or the head of the congregation at Pandharpur.

In a manner, the Yadavas are responsible for the existence of the deity and the cult centre at Pandharpur. The Yadavas held sway over most of the Deccan between the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian era. (Varma, 1978, 164). According to the epigraphic records, we suggest that this extensive territory was divided by the state administration into a number of administrative units. Some of these administrative units are Seuna desa, Kuntala Desa Karhataka desa (SIER, 1940: 249) and Man desa (PMKL: No. 34: 165-190): 9,1,8). In one of the records, four more divisions are suggested besides the Amra desa. These divisions are Chahanda desa, Keja desa, Ausa and Udgir desa. (PMKL NO. 23: 122). It is interesting to note that four out of these five desa are located in the Mominabad taluka of the Bid District.

We do not find any significant number of land grants within the semi-arid zone. In fact, they appear to have come to a halt in the 8<sup>th</sup> century with the grants of Wing and Vir. Between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. we do not find a single major land grant in the semi-arid zone. There are however two minor and one major sacred complexes, at Pulunj, Velapur and Pandharpur. (PMKL.NO.50: 45, 34:166:190). Pandharpur occupies an important niche in the political and religious landscape of the semi-arid zone.

We therefore need to contextualise the semi-arid zone against the frame of reference presented above. It is clear that it was 'marginal' territory, insofar as agricultural activity is concerned. We also do not come across major land grants given by the early medieval state in this period. (Dandekar, 1991; Guha) Yet the process of assimilation was carried out through the temple networks, and it does not appear to be a 'marginal' territory any more, as the extent of the resources mobilised becomes clear. It was very much at the centre of activity. Therefore, it was important for the Yadavas to hold this territory. It could be suggested that perhaps one way of integrating the newly conquered areas was to extend patronage to local temple networks. In that sense, cults or temples had assimilative qualities in early medieval contexts. Such assimilation becomes necessary in a situation where there is a need to integrate diverse segments within a single policy.

The policy of extending patronage was a reciprocal measure by which the ruling lineages acquired legitimacy from such centres of worship. The process of integration implied a transformation of 'pre-state polities into state polities and thus the integration of local polities into structures that transcended the bounds of local polities. This integrative process was accompanied by a series of other initiatives, extension of agrarian society through peasantization of tribal groups, improvements in the trading networks, expansion of the caste society and the emergence of spatial extensions of the ruling lineages by the processes of what Kulke calls Kshatriyaization or Rajputization. These measures affected the pre-modern state in two significant ways. The dynastic nuclear area came under bureaucratic control of the central lineage/dynasty. Secondly the politically controlled area expanded through a process of integration into its hinterland. In this the Samanta, the Rajas and the maha mandaleshvaras played a pivotal role, one that was played later on by the Yadava Bhosale's of Singhapur in Maharashtra. In the earlier attempt they succeeded, but by the time of Shivaji, the cult centre was no longer powerful enough to play that kind of a role. The retreat of a material context that supported that kind of a tradition had begun in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

But the state had not totally given up its role of harnessing an existing tradition. This is clear by the later rulers who emulated the Yadavas and Shivaji. It appears that even in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., such a policy was followed by Peshwas and later on by the British. The Peshwas made liberal donations to sub regional centres of Ganapati. (Preston 1980: 118). The British too undertook to renew such grants to religious Centres. H.D. Robertson, the collector of Pune district, reported to the Deccan Commissioner that on the auspicious day of Padava he ordered the commencement of public worship on the old footing in Parbati and other pagodas dependent on the city.

“...I was desirous to make some deductions from this amount and had determined to fix the annual allowance of Rs. 20,000 but when I saw the operations of the deductions in detail I was convinced for the sake few thousand rupees, I would engender, or rather not eradicate any lurking wish for Bajirao’s re-accession to the Musnad. I therefore, ordered everything carried on as before...” (Preston, *ibid*: 119)

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## 12.5 SUMMARY

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We need to draw certain conclusions from the discussion above. As stated earlier the ‘early medieval’ remains a problematic category. It is so because the attempt largely has been to see it as a departure rather than a consolidation of a process that was initiated in the ‘early historic’. Secondly we also need to understand that the Pan Indian generalization is not desirable to characterize the nature of society and state in early medieval India. We instead should try to understand the shaping of regional identities and emergence of a cult based polity and society. We should leave the meta generalizations to another space and time. Meta generalizations are always loaded categories and hence should be applied with a lot of care.

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## 12.6 GLOSSARY

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- Long Duree** : This term was coined by the Annales school of historians. This refers to the structures of society and economy which persist over a long term as analysed by Ferdinand Braudel in his book “The Mediterranean”. Alongside this school also talks of the middle duree and the short term phenomena in social structures.
- Peasantization of Tribes** : This refers to the process by which lineage based societies make a transition to territorial societies. Concretely there is a move towards stable and settled agriculture. In the process the social group develops ties with land.

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## 12.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the different view points surrounding the debate on early medieval society.
- 2) Why should the early medieval society be seen as a distinct phase in the development of Indian history?

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## UNIT 13 THE PROBLEM OF URBAN DECLINE: AGRARIAN EXPANSION, LAND GRANTS AND GROWTH OF INTERMEDIARIES

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### Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Urban Decay
- 13.2 Indian Feudalism
- 13.3 The Feudalism Debate
- 13.4 The Alternatives
- 13.5 Summary
- 13.6 Glossary
- 13.7 Exercises

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### 13.0 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we will be discussing one of the most controversial questions in the early medieval context of Indian history, the 'Urban Decay'. The issue is controversial for several reasons. The question of 'urban decay' is directly linked with the nature of social relations in that context. The debate on 'feudalism' too revolves around the urban decay. We also need to take into account the third wave of urbanization that spread across the sub-continent.

Our objective is to understand these debates and not to arrive at any mechanistic generalizations, or to 'solve' the problem of the urban decay. We rather would try to understand the nature of the debate on the urban decay and the issue of feudalism from that standpoint. In order to have a proper discussion on the same the unit is divided into five sections. In the first section we would be discussing the context in which the debate is carried out. The subsequent sections then would look at the genesis of the debate, the question of feudalism and its links with the land grants and the question of intermediaries. In the last sections we would take up the alternative formulations on the same construct.

In the context of the post early historic period there appear to be two contrasting perspectives with regard to the period between the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Christian era. We need to take a dispassionate look at the debate on 'Urban Decay' in the early medieval context. We do also need to look at the 'Land Grant' economy and the terms of argument for it. The entire debate on the issue of both revolves around the 'Feudal Social Formation', its protagonists and antagonists. Within this debate there are other possibilities as well that we need to look at.

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### 13.1 URBAN DECAY

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The first Indian Marxist historian to have referred to the growth of feudalism in India was B.N.Datta. D.D.Kosambi subsequently developed the idea and posited two stages ('feudalism from above' and 'feudalism from below') in the evolution of feudal social formation in early medieval India. However, it was only with the detailed and richly documented theory of 'Indian Feudalism' by R.S.Sharma that the idea not only gained popularity but also attracted staunch detractors. In the process, the early medieval Indian historiography has tended to be divided among those who support this

theory and those who do not. Opposition and criticism notwithstanding, the feudal framework has come to dominate the study of almost every aspect of early medieval India.

Central to the first formulations of the transition to feudal mode of production was the decline of external trade, demonetization, and the consequent relapse to a self-sufficient economy. Critics pointed out the theoretical inadequacy of the schema that explained critical stages of change almost exclusively in terms of external factors. Following on that the model for Urban Decay as a symptom of the then existing social formation that was feudalism has been reworked considerably. Let us briefly list out the empirical details of the argument.

- 1) The new state structure post-Mauryan period, that consolidates itself around the 4<sup>th</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD is characterized by decentralization, and hierarchy, as suggested by the presence of the *samanta*, *mahasamanta* and other *rajapurusa*.
- 2) The emergence of the land grant economy and the coterminous rise of the landed intermediaries along with it is considered as the hallmark of Indian feudalism. This is directly linked to the erosion of the direct authority of the king over his subjects. This also assumes a change in the structure of the agrarian relationships. This class of landed intermediaries is assumed to be absent in the imperium of the Mauryas.
- 3) The third aspect of urban decay is supposed to get reflected in the nature of monetization. Recent evidence indicates that the actual coinage drops sharply in the post-Gupta period. This some have argued is a true indicator of decline in trade and thus a consequent decline in the urbanism as a phenomenon.

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## 13.2 INDIAN FEUDALISM

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Daniel Thorner mourned that ‘there is no single article on the place of feudalism in the historical evolution of India’ Ironically exactly in the same year that Thorner could not detect a single work devoted to feudalism in India, Kosambi published two articles on feudalism, and later that year the famous Introduction.. came out. Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi suggested a two fold feudal formation for the post early historic phase. What he described as ‘feudalism from above and feudalism from below’ has never been understood adequately. Subsequently R.S. Sharma began to publish articles on the origin and development of feudalism in India. Later these were enlarged and supplemented by new studies and Indian Feudalism appeared in the sixties.

Feudalism as a theoretical construct remains the most controversial construct in the debate on periodisation in Indian history. What is at stake in the debate around the feudal question is not so much the use of the term, ‘feudalism’ per se as the differing perceptions of the substance of political and property relations. This often leads to a lot of confusion. This debate also directly impinges on the issues such as the nature of the State in early medieval context and the process of state formation in the early medieval India. Let us briefly understand what happens at the level of society and polity when the feudal structures emerge on the ruins of Early Historic State in India. Decentralization and hierarchy characterize the new state structure. This is suggested by the presence of a wide range of semi autonomous rulers such as the Samantas, mahasamantas, mahamandalesvara and so on.

Further, the emergence of the landed intermediaries is considered the hallmark of Indian feudal social formation. This of course is linked with the disintegration and decentralization of state authority and with significant changes in the agrarian structures and relations of productions. The emergence of this landed gentry/intermediary is causally lined with what is now known as the land grant economy.

The third reflection relates to the change in the nature of economy where the urban monetary economy gives way to ruralization and villages becoming 'self-sufficient'. This also ushers in an 'Urban Decay', a marker of the feudal process. In the peasantry this results in something close to serfdom, characterized by immobility, forced labour and exorbitantly high rates of revenue. Taken together, these three points enumerate the feudal model that explains the state formation as well as the nature of state in early medieval India. Thus, the descriptions of Kali age in the epics and the Puranic literature served as the pointer of a 'deep social crisis' that gripped the Indian society in late third and early fourth centuries. The most significant element of this crisis was the phenomenon of varnasamkara, literally, an intermixture of the varnas. In a system where the vaisyas and the sudras were engaged in production and paid taxes, argues Sharma, 'varnasamkara would also imply the refusal of the peasants and traders, called vaisyas, to pay taxes and would thus put in jeopardy the very fabric of society and polity' Thus, a new mechanism of surplus extraction had to be deployed: steadily the state started assigning land revenue directly to priests, military chiefs, administrators and the others. The advent of the decadent Kali age (ascribed to the third and fourth centuries) is seen as symptomatic of fissures in the varna-based social order. The wealth-producing lower orders did not perform their assigned functions and refused to pay taxes to the rulers. Consequently, the rulers granted land for services on a large scale. This indeed was also the time when strong coercive measures are suggested, turning the king and his officers into oppressors. A significant suggestion has been made that the vaishya dynasty of the Guptas possibly emerged in the early fourth century as a reaction against oppressive rulers. Eventually, however, the Guptas were validated and legitimized by Brahmins who saw them as the protectors of the varna order prescribed in the Dharmasastras. The Kali Age is the period when the pace of transition from the classical varna model to the modified one of feudal type was accelerated, insofar as the rajashanas undermined peasant control over land and transformed the peasant into a tenant of the landlord. Not just that, large landed estates, which rested on the exploitation of the peasants, were fortified by the property laws of early medieval time.

The level of monetization has been an important link in the chain of arguments about the emergence of the feudal order in early medieval India. Beginning with the thrust on "paucity" of metal money and its links with the relative decline in trade and urbanization between circa A.D. 600 and 1200, the construct of Indian Feudalism has negotiated some alternative paradigms that have questioned the aforesaid early formulations. John S. Deyell sought to demolish the paradigm of Indian Feudalism by quantifying coin data to debunk the notion of "paucity". Andre Wink, on the other hand, is convinced about the relative absence of an indigenous coinage tradition. But he locates the pivot and driving force of early medieval economy and trade in the "world embracing exchange circuit with a unified monetary constituent," for which no empirical evidence was adduced.

Grossly unequal rights in the matter of distribution of land and agricultural produce marked the early medieval socio-economic formation. Embedded in this exploitative system were the seeds of popular protests. Several instances of violent conflicts between landlords, who were Brahmins, and the peasants in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu between the 11th and the 13th centuries are on record. There are a few instances of tribal peasants rising in revolt against the landed powers. In Bengal, the protracted revolt of the Kaivartas, who were absorbed into brahmanical society as a low mixed caste, was in some measure a spontaneous expression against the oppression of the Palas and their landed beneficiaries, leading to the supplanting of Pala rule for a brief period.

That the feudal ethos marked by inequality and hierarchy conditioned the contemporary Indian mind is reflected in the domains of culture and divinities as well. Tantras, along with the contemporary and perhaps equally pervasive current of Bhakti, provided means to uplift the lower orders by allowing them to worship the various deities, for

which Vedic forms of initiation or mantras were found to be inadequate and irrelevant. Are the proponents of the Vedic culture as the 'Hindu' culture listening?

Both Tantrism and Bhakti, however, became ideological constructs to consolidate the feudal space. The orientation towards servility, hierarchy, destiny and favour seeking seems to be so strong that the egalitarian ethos associated with peasants and the tribal people do not make their presence really felt. The existing social formation was fed on and nurtured by the dominant ideas of the feudal ruling class. The feudal ideologues also used language to promote social distancing. They worked out different modes of addressing superior lords.

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### 13.3 THE FEUDALISM DEBATE

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The first major offensive against the feudal paradigm was undertaken in 1979 when Harbans Mukhia sought to establish that a "free peasantry" existed in the relevant period. Harbans Mukhia argued that the European notions of feudalism heavily influenced the model established by votaries of 'Indian Feudalism'. Reconsidering class in the pre-capitalist context, Sharma focused on the unequal distribution of surplus. Coming down heavily on Mukhia, he says: "To attribute such structural phenomena as the absence of serfdom or the longevity of peasant autonomy to the carrying capacity of the soil is to ignore the potentialities of social dynamics."

As one critic pointed out, this framework assigned the state 'the role of a prime mover in the entire gamut of socio-political change, including even the curious decision to preside over its own demise, by unleashing the processes of political fragmentation and parcellization of sovereignty'. It is possible to argue that the prime mover is not state in this scheme of analysis but the said social unrest and the consequent politico-fiscal crisis to which the state responded. A greater problem, however, is to decide on a uniform chronology for the alleged transition to feudalism.

In the context of the above it would be important for us to understand the nature of the state formation in the early historic period. The entire model of 'Indian Feudalism' pre-supposes a certain structure of the early historic state and its linkages with the emergence of feudalism. Indian Feudalism was a distinct phase in the post early historic phase of Indian history is not a foregone conclusion. Let us understand the context of the debate before we move on to the issue of urban decay and its linkages with this debate.

While the earlier interpretation of Asoka and his social policy remains largely the same, the understanding of the nature of the Mauryan State has changed considerably. The model of a highly centralized empire with complete control over uniform structure in a vast territory gives way to systems of uneven development, coordinated by the centre aimed at the control of the resources at the different parts, of course of varied nature. This is an extremely important revision, not only for the understanding of Mauryan India but also in explaining what came later. For instance, one does not have to look for similarities among the Sungas, the Sakas, the Satavahanas and the Kalingas, whom an earlier historiography had taken as so many "successors" of the Mauryas. The relatively uncomplicated picture of Mauryan India in an earlier fashion of historical writing, with only one shade on the map, gives way to a complex situation with a metropolis, core areas and peripheries. When the core areas graduate, the metropolis loses its relevance. That explains the diffuse nature of the politics in the post-Mauryan period as something more than a relapse into anarchy and darkness. This politics is explained within the context of the extensive trade that India had with the western and eastern worlds. The political processes in the Northwest, the Gangetic heartland, Western Deccan, the Mahanadi valley and the Deep South are taken up for a meaningful treatment within this framework. The new insights regarding megaliths and the Roman trade are just two cases in point.



The Asiatic Mode of Production and the jingoistic theory of the nationalist historians form the other two streams regarding the nature of social formation. At this point we only need to consider another formulae, that of Stein's Segmentary State, which along with 'Feudalism' will have to be regarded a major conceptual contribution to the contemporary debate on the nature of social formation in India in the early medieval context. Stein in his 'Interim Reflections' reaches for a theoretical merger between three parallel strands of Segmentary State, Integrated Polity and Processual model of Integration. Stein visualizes a meeting point for all the three as necessary step to arrive at the alternative framework to understand state formation in India.

Stein formally introduced his concept of 'The Segmentary State in South Indian History' in the late seventies. Stein's own terms clarify his own position. "In a segmentary state sovereignty is dual. It consists of actual political sovereignty or control, and what Southhall terms "ritual hegemony" or ritual sovereignty". These correspond in the Indian usage to Ksatra and rajadharma respectively. In the segmentary state there may be numerous centres of which one has primacy as a source of ritual sovereignty, but all exercise actual political control over a part or segment of the political system encompassed by the state. The specialized administrative staff what in some unitary states would be called the bureaucracy is not an exclusive feature of the primary centre, but is found operating at and within the segments of which the state consists. Subordinate levels or zones of the segmentary state may be distinguished and the organization of these is pyramidal. That is the relationship between the centre and the peripheral units of any single segment is the same –in reduced form–as the relationship between the prime centre and all peripheral focuses of power... In the Indian context this principle is expressed in the terms little kingdoms and little kings to describe a local ruler whose kingly authority is that of any great king but more limited in scope."

Stein had applied his segmentary state concept to the Chola State by the eighties he had applied to the Vijaynagar too. Stein's segmentary state as a model is considered as an 'immensely powerful deconstructive tool' against the conventional theories. It is the most important contribution to the South Indian historiography since K.A.N. Sastri's work on the Cholas. Yet it is conceded that the segmentary state cannot explain certain aspects of state formation in South India.

Criticisms of this model come from within the anthropological use of the term and its adoption by Stein to its outright rejection by both the Feudalism school and the votaries of integrated polity. Integrated polity looks at the issue of state formation as a process to be understood and explained rather than theorized. We need to understand the issue of integrated polity as well before we move on to the urban decay and urbanization issue. This is important as the nature of social formulation plays a major role in the process of 'urban decay'. A feudal social formation may not result in urbanization but would surely be an indicative of an urban decay. It is therefore important to internalize the context of the social formation in the early medieval India.

Let us now round this off with a look at the other side of the hill as it were. So far the state formation has been considered from the perspective of fragmentation and segmentation of political authority (i.e Feudalism and Segmentary State) we can also look at the same process as an integrative, processual and centralization process.

The process of integration implied a transformation of 'pre-state polities into state polities and thus the integration of local polities into structures that transcended the bounds of local politics. This integrative process was accompanied by a series of other initiatives, extension of agrarian society through peasantization of tribal groups, improvements in the trading networks, expansion of the caste society and the emergence of spatial extensions of the ruling lineages by the processes of what Kulke calls Kshatriyaization or Rajputization. These measures affected the pre-modern state in two significant ways. The dynastic nuclear area came under bureaucratic control

of the central lineage/dynasty. Secondly the politically controlled area expanded through a process of integration into its hinterland. In this the Samanta, the Rajas and the maha mandaleshvaras played a pivotal role, one that was played later on by the Yadava Bhosale's of Singhnapur of Maharashtra.

The religious institutions played a major role in this process of state formation. Of course the influence of religion on the polity was well known to the earlier generations of historians, but it was only after the feudalism and segmentary state system model that this was properly internalised by the historians. Segmentary state in fact argues for localized segmentary structure of the state and its ritual sovereignty. In the second millennium AD there is a clear shift of the royal patronage form 'rural brahmana villages to the urban temple complexes and temple cities. This was to derive among other things a greater legitimacy for the rule and to exercise the ritual sovereignty.

This formulation is a departure from both the Feudalism model as well as that of the segmentary state. The point of departure however does not lie in the feudalism or the segmentary state either. It lies in the way periodisation is understood and operated in Indian history.

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### 13.4 THE ALTERNATIVES

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Instead of contextualising the land grant economy and the issue of urbanization in the context of just decay, it might be useful to analyze them as a process that had its antecedents in the transformation of the polity. What then are these processes and can we very specifically arrive at any pan Indian generalization in the context of urban decay is the real issue.

It had been once argued that the breakdown of the once centralized, bureaucratic and wedded in singular polity that was the Mauryan imperial system resulted in the fragmentation of the polity and ushered in the feudal social formation. In this formation the class of intermediaries emerged that stood between the supreme political authority and the peasant. The monarchy as it were presided over its own demise.

It is now being realized that the Mauryan imperial system was not a unitary centralized administrative structure. The imperial system of the Mauryan encompassed many a political formations within its holds, the tribal chiefdoms the local chiefs, the regional rulers and even in some cases larger kingdoms. The Mauryan system was an amalgamation of all and not a merger of the same. The decline of the Mauryan dynasty in fact unleashed these forces that were already growing up in the vast territories which formed the imperial systems of the Mauryas. Thus the Satavahanas emerge in the Deccan and the Kalinga assert themselves. Thus there seems to be little possibility of an arrested growth.

Let us consider another important aspect of the issue in the context of the nature of the social formation. It is now being established that the early medieval period is marked by what is characterized as the third wave of urbanization in the sub-continent. The evidence for this is largely epigraphical and literary, nevertheless is convincing. The third phase of urbanization does not point towards an 'urban decay'. It actually points towards maturing of systems and forces that were unleashed after the imperial system of Mauryas transformed into regional and local polities. This phase is more prominent in the peninsular India. This raises yet another issue. On the basis of the availability of evidence that is largely from Indo-gangetic basin, it may not be prudent to arrive at pan Indian formulations, especially with regard to the social formation.

We also need to consider the issue of pastoralism and what would that entail in the context of feudalism and the land grant economy. If we consider the Deccan as a case in point, then in the large areas of the Deccan, we do not come across any major land grants being given over a period of time. We do however come across grants to the temples, as well as references and evidences that point to a largely a pastoralist dominated economy. A case of the Yadavas in the Deccan would be a

good illustrative example. Thus the revenue divisions of the area were also unsettled till the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. What kind of a land grant economy would exist in a pastoral dominated area? Would the generalization of a feudal social formation remain valid. In one interesting argument a large number of sites in the Deccan have been explored, and excavated belonging to western Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Marathawada. Mate, in an incisive study demonstrates a very strange feature as resulting from the archaeological perspective. “All the sites that have been explored and excavated reveal a significant gap in occupation. “Many of the sites go back to the chalcolithic phase assigned to the 15<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and have debris coming down to the 18<sup>th</sup> century AD – but with a wide gap of seven to eight centuries between the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD”. It is in this period that the famous dynasties of the Deccan have flourished the Calukyas, the Rastrakuta and the Yadavas of Devagiri. What has the absence of the archaeological record meant in terms of the existence of pastoralism and its impact on the nature of the social formation in the Deccan?

Thus the question of the urban decay in the context of the early medieval India cannot be answered in a simplistic formulation.

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### 13.5 SUMMARY

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In this unit we familiarised you with various arguments on urban decay. Historians have been arguing from the point of view of feudalism, integrated polity and the segmentary state on this matter. Their debate brings out the complexity and nuance of this phenomenon in our period.

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### 13.6 GLOSSARY

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**Demonetization** : This refers to the phenomenon in which a process of moving away from an economy characterised by an exchange with money. This has been positive as one of the major evidences urban decline and decay in our period.

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### 13.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the pros and cons of the existence of Feudalism in Indian society.
- 2) What is the relationship between the concept of feudalism and urban decay.

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## UNIT 14 PROLIFERATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF CASTES AND JATIS

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### Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 The Context
- 14.2 Framework for Consolidation
- 14.3 The Issue of Proliferation
- 14.4 Summary
- 14.5 Glossary
- 14.6 Exercises

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### 14.0 INTRODUCTION

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The term “Caste” comes from the Portuguese *casta*, which takes no account of *varna* but does encode ranks among status groups. We cannot advance one single acceptable definition for explaining the caste system. Caste can be viewed as a multifaceted status hierarchy composed of all members of society, with each individual ranked within the broad, fourfold class (*varna*, or color) divisions, or within the fifth class of untouchables—outcastes and the socially polluted. The fourfold caste divisions are Brahman (priests and scholars), Kshatriya or Chhetri (rulers and warriors), Vaisya (or Vaisaya, merchants and traders), and Sudra (farmers, artisans, and laborers). In each system, each caste (*jati*) is ideally an endogamous group in which membership is both hereditary and permanent. The only way to change caste status is to undergo Sanskritization. Sanskritization can be achieved by migrating to a new area and by changing one’s caste status and/or marrying across the caste line, which can lead to the upgrading or downgrading of caste, depending on the spouse’s caste. The term “caste” came to mean an ethnic group with a ranked position in social relations.

At the core of the caste structure is a rank order of values bound up in concepts of ritual status, purity, and pollution. Furthermore, caste determines an individual’s behavior, obligations, and expectations. All the social, economic, religious, legal, and political activities of a caste society are prescribed by sanctions that determine and limit access to land, position of political power, and command of human labor. Within such a constrictive system, wealth, political power, high rank, and privilege converge; hereditary occupational specialization is a common feature. Nevertheless, caste is functionally significant only when viewed in a regional or local context and at a particular time. The assumed correlation between the caste hierarchy and the socioeconomic class hierarchy does not always hold.

The term *jati* came to connote a specifically South Asian style of multi-cultural ethnic identity. The term could denote virtually any type, category, or group of people with similar characteristics, who tended to inter-marry, live together, engage in similar customs, worship alike, dress alike, eat similar food, speak alike, and be represented by group leaders. With this clarity about terms let now move across the landscape to sketch the context of territoriality of the early medieval in which the expansion and consolidation of the jatis took place.

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### 14.1 THE CONTEXT

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Early medieval social environments evolved over the centuries in the context of two long-term economic trends: sedentary farmers increased the productivity of land with

specialized labour and technology, and mobile groups extended transportation and communication by land and sea from South Asia to Central Asia, China, and the Mediterranean. Already by the seventh century, we can see that long arteries of human mobility across Eurasia were connected to regional veins in South Asia and to local capillaries running through expanding areas of agricultural production. Most new dynasties that sprang up in the first millennium developed in places where long trade routes crossed fertile valleys and deltas. For instance in Kashmir they surrounded Srinagar; and in Nepal, the Kathmandu Valley. In Punjab, they dotted the foothills. They multiplied along the rivers Ganga, Narmada, Tapti, Sabarmati, Mahanadi, Krishna, Godavari, Pennar, Kaveri, Vaigai, and Tambraparni. In the peninsula, they thrived most of all where rivers met the sea. In the flatlands of northern Sri Lanka, they expanded around irrigation reservoirs that received water running down from mountains in the centre of the island. In this vast area as the agrarian society spread along the river basin the uplands were still dominated by the pastoralists, and others.

New kinds of society came into being as medieval agrarian domains clashed with landscapes inhabited by nomads, hunters, and forest dwellers. Kings, Brahmans, and local landed elites led the drive to extend and protect the moral authority of *dharma*. For kings, peace and prosperity in their domains were definite signs of righteousness, as in Rama's kingdom in the *Ramayana*. Protecting *dharma* enabled royal families and local elites to form ranks of honour and spiritual merit that also disciplined the labour force, coordinated economic activities, and secured rights over landed property. Medieval texts on *dharma* do not insist that a king be a Kshatriya, and in much of the subcontinent, medieval caste (*jati*) ranks developed without the presence of all four *varnas*. Medieval texts, *sastras*, rather prescribe that the king's sacred duty — *rajadharma* — is to protect of local custom. Kings need to give grants of farmland to temples and Brahmans to express dynastic support for *dharma*, but they also had to protect local rights to land. Kings, Brahmans, and local landed elites had to work together to realize *dharma*. The spread of *jati* ranking as a feature of social life seems to have been propelled by ritual alliances among upwardly mobile groups. New dynastic realms were places where the building of ranking systems made good sense. Dynastic lineage leaders and Brahmans were critical actors in creating these systems of social difference, status, rank, and power. New societies came to include new social groups and institutions formed around models of behaviour, identity, aesthetics, and patronage codified in Sanskrit texts as Brahmans who sanctified social rank interpreted these locally. Rising families hired Brahman genealogists and court poets, patronised Brahman and temples, endowed feeding places for mendicants and pilgrimages, staged festivals, fed saints, and variously joined in activities that brought gods, priests, kings, and farmers into communion. People moved up in society by supporting and emulating Brahmans.

All this occurred as farmers expanded their control over land and labour and as populations of peasants, nomads, pastoralists, hunters, and forest tribes were slowly finding new social identities. Over many generations, people became high caste landowners, kings, protectors of *dharma*, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Superior Sudras, Inferior Sudras, untouchables, and aliens beyond the pale. Dominant agrarian castes came into being in different regions: Jats, Rajputs, Kunbis, Vellalas, Velamas, Reddys, Kapus, Nayars, and many, others. In this long process, ancient identities were lost. In ancient times, the Hoysala kings' ancestors were Melapas, hill chiefs in the Soseyur forests. Udaiyar and Yadava dynasties descended from herders. Tevar kings descended from Marava and Kallar hunters. Gurjaras and Rajputs had once been pastoral nomads. Places, too, acquired new identities, as they became known by the names of dynasties and of the local groups in control. Land became ethnically marked by traditions of group control. Dominant castes identified with dynastic territories that became their homelands. The only people who could be equally "at home" in all the lands of *dharma* were Brahmans

A small but significant set of inscriptions records opposition to Brahman settlements, to their collection of taxes, and to their claims on local resources like pastures. The authority of Hindu kingship spread slowly — often violently — into the vast spaces that lay outside its reach in early medieval centuries. In many instances, land grants appear to mark frontiers of royal power, and here resistance might be expected. Even where local society did accept the ritual and social status of Brahmans, fierce competitive struggles might flare up over land grants. In the ninth century, local conflicts of this kind accompanied new Brahman settlements on the Tamil coast. In the Rashtrakuta realm, inscriptions warn that violence and curses will be heaped upon opponents of Brahman land grants, and texts proclaim that people who murder Brahmans will be punished harshly, which implies that such murders did occur. Farming communities expanded agriculture in medieval domains by pushing pastoral nomads and forest cultivators away; but at the same time, herders, hunters, nomads, and other peoples also entered expanding agrarian societies, becoming labourers, farm-ers, craft producers, animal breeders and keepers, trans-porters, dairy producers, soldiers, traders, warriors, sorcerers, and kings. Agricultural territories included more diverse populations, not only different kinds of farmers — including peasants, landlords, and landless worker — but also non-farming groups who were essential for farming: artisans, cattle herders, hunters, transporters, traders, collectors of forest produce, well-diggers, priests, engineers, architects, healers, astrologers, and warriors. Without them, economies could not expand; their incorporation was an important social project.

In this context, warriors expanded their influence. Various factors promoted the rise of warrior power and one was certainly the increasing number of people with specialized military skills living in agrarian societies. Warriors with nomadic roots often became military specialists, most prominently, in Rajasthan and surrounding regions, where warrior dynasties emerged from the Gurjara Pratihara clans that conquered most of the Ganga basin after the eighth century.

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## 14.2 THE FRAMEWORK FOR CONSOLIDATION

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We thus find an entire range of political and social relationships being forged across the subcontinent in the early medieval state. Here in then lies the problem. We need to locate the proliferation of jatis either within the context of a ‘feudalism’ debate, which would then rule out the third urbanisation, or we need to perceive the early medievalism as a logical evolution of the processes that were unleashed in the early historical phase. Feudalism as a theoretical construct remains the most controversial construct in the debate on periodisation in Indian history. Decentralization and hierarchy characterize the new state structure. This is suggested by the presence of a wide range of semi autonomous rulers such as the Samantas, mahasamantas, mahamandalesvara and so on.

Further, the emergence of the landed intermediaries is considered the hallmark of Indian feudal social formation. This of course is linked with the disintegration and decentralization of state authority and with significant changes in the agrarian structures and relations of productions. The emergence of this landed gentry/intermediary is causally lined with what is now known as the land grant economy. The third reflection relates to the change in the nature of economy where the urban monetary economy gives way to ruralization and villages becoming self-sufficient. This also ushers in an ‘Urban Decay’, a hallmark of the feudal process. In the peasantry this results in something close to serfdom, characterized by immobility, forced labour and exorbitantly high rates of revenue. Taken together, these three points enumerate the feudal model that explains the state formation as well as the nature of state in early medieval India.

Another framework that has been suggested regarding the consolidation pertains to the so-called segementary state system advocated by Stein. Stein formally introduced his concept of ‘The Segementary State in South Indian History’ in the late seventies.

Stein's own terms clarify his own position. "In a segeimentary state sovereignty is dual. It consists of actual political sovereignty or control, and what Southhall terms "ritual hegemony" or ritual sovereignty". These correspond in the Indian usage to Ksatra and rajadharmā respectively. In the segeimentary state there may be numerous centres of which one has primacy as a source of ritual sovereignty, but all exercise actual political control over a part or segment of the political system encompassed by the state. The specialized administrative staff what in some unitary states would be called the bureaucracy is not an exclusive feature of the primary centre, but is found operating at and within the segments of which the state consists. Subordinate levels or zones of the segeimentary state may be distinguished and the organization of these is pyramidal. That is the relationship between the centre and the peripheral units of any single segment is the same –in reduced form–as the relationship between the prime centre and all peripheral focuses of power... In the Indian context this principle is expressed in the terms little kingdoms and little kings to describe a local ruler whose kingly authority is that of any great king but more limited in scope."

Stein had applied his segeimentary state concept to the Chola State by the eighties he had applied to the Vijaynagar too. Stein's segeimentary state as a model is considered as an 'immensely powerful deconstructive tool' against the conventional theories. It is the most important contribution to the South Indian historiography since K.A.N. Sastri's work on the Cholas. Yet it is conceded that the segeimentary state cannot explain certain aspects of state formation in South India.

Criticisms of this model come from within the anthropological use of the term and its adoption by Stein to its outright rejection by both the Feudalism school and the votaries of integrated polity. Integrated polity looks at the issue of state formation as a process to be understood and explained rather than theorized. We can also look at the same process as an integrative, Processual and centralization process. This could be the third alternative framework to locate the issue of consolidation of jatis within the larger polity.

The process of integration implied a transformation of 'pre-state polities into state polities and thus the integration of local polities into structures that transcended the bounds of local politics. This integrative process was accompanied by a series of other initiatives, extension of agrarian society through peasantization of tribal groups, improvements in the trading networks, expansion of the Caste society and the emergence of spatial extensions of the ruling lineages by the processes of what Kulke calls Kshatriyaization or Rajputization. These measures affected the pre-modern state in two significant ways. The dynastic nuclear area came under bureaucratic control of the central lineage/dynasty. Secondly the politically controlled area expanded through a process of integration into its hinterland. In this the Samanta, the Rajas and the maha mandaleshvaras played a pivotal role, one that was played later on by the Yadava Bhosale's of Singhnapur of Maharashtra.

The religious institutions played a major role in this process of state formation. Of course the influence of religion on the polity was well known to the earlier generations of historians, but it was only after the feudalism and segeimentary state system model that this was properly internalised by the historians. Segeimentary state in fact argues for localized segeimentary structure of the state and its ritual sovereignty. In the second millennium AD there is a clear shift of the royal patronage from 'rural brahmana villages to the urban temple complexes and temple cities. This was to derive among other things a greater legitimacy for the rule and to exercise the ritual sovereignty.

This formulation of looking at the state formation in an evolutionary process is a departure from both the Feudalism model as well as that of the segeimentary state. The point of departure however does not lie in the feudalism or the segeimentary state either. It lies in the way periodisation is understood and operated in Indian history.

Strange though it may seem, these are not so contradictory positions as they may seem. The evolution of the processes unleashed could have taken a feudal form and content and it is also possible that they could have gone the other way. We do not have to subscribe to the view that there was a pan Indian mode of production across the sub-continent in the early medieval stage of sub-continent's past. What might have existed would be a mesh of relationships at varying states of being. Most medieval dynasties combined elements of imperialism, regionalism, and localism. Many expanded like empires. All formed regions of competition and overlapping sovereignty. Early dynasties thrived on local support from core constituencies. The organization of political systems differed among regions and changed over time, but documents indicate general patterns. Most records depict transactions among people with titles in dynastic ranks and indicate that sovereignty emerged from these transactions rather than being dictated by legal or constitutional rules. Sovereignty consisted of honour and deference expressed in public interactions by people whose activity inscriptions record. Inscriptional transactions were mostly gifts, contracts, and commitments that individuals engaged to express respect and support for people they recognized publicly thereby as being superiors or subordinates. This complex economic web of relationships was understood in the form of what is now known as the 'land grant economy'. We need to locate the issue of the consolidation of the jatis in this land grant economy, constricting if the feudalism argument is the analytical tool or expanding if we go by the theory of third urbanisation.

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### 14.3 THE ISSUE OF PROLIFERATION

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Caste — jati — defined units and idioms of family alliance and ranking within varna ideologies, but patriarchy also transcended caste and escaped the rule of dharma. Warrior kings connected disparate, distant territories to one another, and the rule of dharma could organise only parts of these expansive territories. In the sixth century, groups outside the ranks of caste society comprised the bulk of the population and though dharma did subsequently expand its reach by various means, people outside caste society — whether beneath the lowest of the low or outside the pale altogether — remained numerous. Though excluded from temples and other rituals in respectable gentry communities, low castes and non-castes lived in agricultural territory. Because the power of caste society expanded downward from the top ranks and outward from centres of ritual and conquest, groups at the lowest ranks and on the margins of dominant caste control comprised a moving borderland between caste society and its surroundings. Outsiders in and around localities of high caste control were critically important for the vitality of every agrarian locality, and many did enter into the rituals of dharma in various ways, but many also remained outsiders. Such people continued to arrive in every agrarian territory with new waves of migration and conquest colonisation throughout the first and second millennium. Idioms and practices of patriarchal alliance allowed for the loose inclusion of countless within transactional territories formed by systems of market exchange and political ranking. Lineage and clan leaders among tribal groups, merchant patriarchs from distant places, travelling artisan headmen, nomadic chiefs, and military commanders from virtually any background could form alliances with locally dominant caste patriarchs based not on their caste ritual rank but rather on the mutual recognition of their respective patriarchal powers. Heads of households and heads of state could negotiate as patriarchs because they could rely on one another to command the labour and allegiance, assets and loyalty, of their kinfolk.

In the early medieval we come across a phenomenon where the existing caste groups/varnas do get broken down into numerous castes and jatis. In the brahmana this process is manifest where many a brahmana castes were named after the type of ritual they performed. Here the growth of the land grant economy paved way for a larger fragmentation of the caste. In the land charters the brahmana are identified



by their gotras, male ancestors name, by the branch of learning and finally by the original home. If we look at the Maithili brahmana then their original homes or sub caste groups shot up to 1000. We can locate similar examples of other brahmana sub caste groups in the same vein.

The emergence of the Rajput identity gives us some idea of the new form the issue of proliferation took. The local communities/tribes such as the Bhils, Candelas and Palas and others gained the respectable Kshatriya lineage by the brahmana genealogists. This also paved way for the Bactrian Greeks, Sakas and the Parthians to be absorbed in this process of proliferation. This was an open ended process as we do find later the Hunas and the Gurjaras joining the ranks along with Caulukyias, Parmaras, Cahamanas and Tomaras.

This process of proliferation was not limited to the upper castes alone. We do find a major proliferation occurring in the other caste groups. A fifth century work mentions more than hundred caste groups. Works in the eighth century state that thousands of mixed caste came into existence due to a variety of reasons. The reasons could be conquest, spread of trade, expansion of agriculture and related activity etc. We do get references to the amalgamation of Sabaras, Bhillas and Pulinda in the medieval inscriptions of central India. This amalgamation was not always peaceful. There are references to violent conflicts occurring between the Abhiras and the others throughout the Deccan from the ninth to the thirteenth century. These conflicts were as much for political power as for a higher status in the new set up. Thus all the Abhira groups did not get absorbed in the high caste groups. Within the Abhiras too there were the lower sub caste groups and middle caste groups. Thus the situation of conflict was as much within as outside the caste groupings. In fact we do come across a phenomenon where the local tribal groups negotiated their status to gain space in the larger fold. This process of negotiation was sometimes violent and at other times through trade and exchange networks. Even in the process of amalgamation the *jatidharma* was left untouched and was strictly respected.

We also find another significant process that further advanced the process of proliferation of jatis. This was the process where the crafts were transformed into caste groups. The guilds and the trader groups, the *srenis* themselves acquired caste status and became closed groups. The head of a guild is often referred to as the *jetthaka* or *pamukkha* in early Buddhist literature. Often he is referred to after the occupation followed by the guild of which he was the head, e.g., 'head of garland makers' (*malakara jetthaka*), 'head of carpenters' guild' (*vaddhaki jetthaka*), etc. Apparently the Guild Head exercised considerable power over the members of his Guild. *Setthis* were merchant-cum-bankers and often headed merchant guilds. The guild head could punish a guilty member even to the extent of excommunication. It appears that normally headship of a guild went to the eldest son. Succession is mentioned only after the death of the head and not in his lifetime, which would suggest that the head remained in office life-long. The evidence of two Damodarpur Copper-plate inscriptions of the 5th century AD shows that one Bhupala held the office of *nagarasreshthi* for well nigh half a century, supports this.

We can also locate the emergence of local crafts into castes groups as mixed castes such as the *napita*, *tambulika*, *citrakara*, *svarnakara*, *malakara*, *modaka*, and many others. These obviously were various crafts where the people involved in those crafts emerged as new jatis in the mixed caste group. We do get references to crafts villages such as the *Kumbharapadraka* that belonged to the potters.

Along with the crafts the religious affiliation too played a role in the proliferation of jatis. The emergence of various sects had close affinity with the jatis they emerged from and the gods they worshipped. This process was linked to the state formation as well.

Each brahmanical sect was linked as it were to a head who demanded allegiance to him. The Lingayats and the Virashaivas are an extremely good example of this phenomenon. It is indeed ironical that those who sought to remove the caste system themselves were absorbed in the same.

Thus the caste groups consolidated, either in a feudal mode or in an integrated emerging polity across the length and breadth of the sub-continent. This consolidation was not limited to the higher caste groups alone but as a phenomenon was experienced across the entire social spectrum. Let us now look at the major learnings that we can derive from this process.

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## 14.4 SUMMARY

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The process of consolidation and proliferation of the caste and jati was initiated in the early historical phase as the urbanisation spread in the sub-continent under the Mauryan imperium. This process was consolidated in the early medieval context. It engulfed the agrarian as well as the non-agrarian groups such as the pastoralists, the gatherers hunters and the forest dwellers.

The process was not limited to the higher caste groups alone as has been observed above, but was certainly geared to gain a high caste status in order that wealth and power could be obtained and legitimised. The high ranking in the caste group went with resultant wealth and power. The process was certainly hierarchical in nature and sought to legitimise the power and the wealth of the high caste groups. Thus these social changes can be understood against the framework of feudalism or integrated polity, where for both it was essentially the growth of the local, and the regional.

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## 14.5 GLOSSARY

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**Hierarchy of Caste** : By hierarchy of caste it is meant here in the sense of what Louis Dumont called the hierarchy of purity and pollution which the caste system consists of. In this sense castes are ordered according to the perception of purity or pollution they are ascribed with.

**Sanskritisation** : This term was coined by the eminent sociologist M. N. Srinivas. This term meant that castes of lower order and ranking aspired to a higher ranking and often moved up within the caste hierarchy.

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## 14.6 EXERCISES

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- 1) Analyse the context in which we can debate the issue of consolidation of the jatis and castes.
- 2) Was the proliferation of castes and jatis limited to the upper castes alone?
- 3) Was this proliferation wide spread or limited to one particular region of the sub-continent?

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## UNIT 15 RELIGION IN SOCIETY

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### Structure

- 15.0 Introduction
- 15.1 Geographies of Religion
- 15.2 Integration as a Process
- 15.3 Temple and its Role
- 15.4 Summary
- 15.5 Glossary
- 15.6 Exercises

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### 15.0 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we would be looking at the over all perspective on the religion in the context of early medieval society. In the first part of the unit we will be discussing religious geography of the landscape. Subsequently the issue of the emergence and the integration with the political milieu will be taken up. We will also discuss the role of the temple and later will draw some conclusions based on the discussions.

The medieval cultural milieu included divinity and humanity; drew no sharp line between them; and contained various kinds of beings that moved back and forth between them and lived ambiguously at their conjuncture. Royal genealogies typically had celestial ancestries including the sun and moon. The spirit world was everywhere in everyday life. Celestial beings brought victory in war and commanded human fates. Spirits of nature caused disease, drought, flood, and fertility for animals, crops, and humans. Visible and invisible powers mingled capriciously. Priests, rulers, mystics, and saints evoked divinity and gods lived in society. Medieval domains were institutional environments for organizing, deploying, and controlling powers that circulated among people and gods.

A diverse Hindu cultural complex spread across medieval domains, endowing many local traditions with common features but also being defined distinctly in each place as local people continued to embrace local traditions. Learned Brahmins received gifts of support from rulers and local elites to organize temples and to conduct ceremonies that incorporated local deities, sentiments, and practices. At the same time, Brahmins rationalized and ritualised the local status hierarchy; they defined local identities in the ritual vocabulary of *varna* and *jati*. Brahmins used high-culture elements from ancient Sanskrit texts to compose locally grounded Hindu ritual domains that multiplied disparately in bits and pieces, in a motley pattern of *ad hoc* adjustments.

Brahmanical cultural forms spread in much the same way — and at the same time — as others were spreading Jainism, Buddhist, Islam, and Christianity. Competing royal patrons backed competing religious specialists, often at the same time. In this lively world of cultural politics, Brahmins defined Hindu orthodoxy in local terms. Their success depended on innovative adaptations to evolving social environments. They were active in two distinct arenas: one was inside the state itself; the other, outside the state, in local society, particularly in rural society. Brahman rituals and Sanskrit texts became widely influential in medieval dynasties. The prominence of Sanskrit prose, Puranic deities, and divine genealogy in the inscriptions' *prasastis* indicates a sweeping royal agreement across South Asia (and in parts of Southeast Asia) that Brahmins brought to medieval governance a powerful symbolic technology. Most inscriptions are bi-lingual documents that symbolize the two-tier cultural space in which medieval dynasties worked. Brahman Sanskrit cosmopolitanism met vernacular languages in the inscriptions. Many early medieval Sanskrit *prasastis* report the royal

conduct of Vedic rituals, while vernacular texts in many inscriptions record a rulers' financial support for Agrahara settlements, temple building, and temple rituals. There were many ways to sponsor brahmanical influence and they all centred on temple precincts where most inscriptions appear and most identities were initially formed. The spiritual powers of Brahmans mingled with those of the gods that became central figures in medieval life.

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## 15.1 GEOGRAPHIES OF RELIGION

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Buddhism and Islam became most prominent along routes of trade and migration that ran from one end of Asia to the other. In the sixth century, Buddhists received most of the patronage available in Afghanistan, the upper Indus basin, and Himalayan regions from Kashmir to Nepal. They then moved eastward across Central Asia and established themselves firmly in Tibet, China, and Japan. After the eighth century, the eastward and southern migrations by Arabs and Turks from West and Central Asia forced a shift in the pattern of religious patronage towards Islam. Nevertheless Buddhist monks had a permanent base in Sri Lanka, and from the eighth century onward, they receive state patronage in Burma. This pattern changed as the Islam advanced through trade and the earlier religious patronage now shifted in favour of Islam as Buddhism receded in background. In fact this kind of a scenario can be visualised else where as well. For instance in Bengal in the east Vijayasena (1095-1158) defeated the Palas, pushed Sena armies west across Bengal and northern Bihar, patronized Vishnu worship, and paved way for a patronage of Vaishnavism in the Sena domains. The last Sena raja, Laksmanasena, patronized the most famous Bengali Vaishnava poet, Jayadeva, who wrote the widely influential devotional poem, *Gitagovinda*. The Sena ruler's patronage to vaishnavism came to an end in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as the political patronage shifted again. This shift was towards Islam in the eastern regions of Bengal, where the Senas had earlier uprooted Buddhists; while Vaishnavism received support from merchants, landowners, and local rulers in the western regions.

Like multiple sovereignties in medieval domains, multi-religious cultures developed where patronage sustained diverse religious institutions. Popular rituals and local sentiments often merged and overlapped, crossing the lines of religious tradition, particularly in the spiritual domain of devotional cults that revolved around charismatic individuals.

The Kathmandu Valley was a Buddhist stronghold ruled by Hindu kings. Powerful medieval kings in Tibet accessed the Himalayan passes to the north as major arteries of culture, commerce, and politics reached China. This brought more and more Buddhists and their patrons in the valley. Kingdoms around Kathmandu became a melting pot for Hindus from the south and Buddhists from the north, and like dynasties in Bengal, they made multi-cultural patronage a long-standing religious tradition.

In the western plains — in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Malwa, and Bundelkhand — medieval dynasties of Kalacuris, Caulukyias, Paramaras, and Candelas also patronized Jains, who were prominent among merchants. One Caulukyias king is said to have become Jain. Local and Jain cultural features blended into one another. Jain temple worship and Hindu-Jain marriage became common.

In the peninsula, medieval worshippers of Shiva and Vishnu displaced Buddhism and Jainism from the cultural prominence they enjoyed in early medieval times, especially in Madurai and Kanchipuram. Pockets of Jainism remained, however, and all along the peninsular coast, most prominently in Kerala, kings patronized diverse merchant communities that were essential features of life along the Indian Ocean coast, including Jains, Zoroastrians, Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Arab Muslim settlements received patronage from non-Muslim rulers all along the peninsular coast, as they did across the Palk Straights in Sri Lanka.

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## 15.2 INTEGRATION AS A PROCESS

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Inside medieval cultural environments, trends in popular religion indicate the increasing influence of religious feelings of a distinctly non-Brahman kind that first achieved prominence in temple worship farthest from the original home of classical Brahman orthodoxy. In the far south, from the eighth century onward, Shiva and Vishnu worship in old *Dakshinapatha* spread as a reaction to the orthodox brahmanical religion. This was manifested in the new tradition of devotional (*bhakti*) worship that valued emotion above knowledge, discipline, and ritual; by composing vernacular verse in Tamil, not Sanskrit; by promoting women saints and mass participation in deity worship; by giving devotees a direct relation to god independent of Brahmanical mediation; by making low caste status respectable in the eyes of god; and by creating pilgrimage places rooted in local traditions. *Bhakti* poets produced a new style of emotive, popular cultural politics. Devotionalism made divine frenzy and passion for god a high virtue, and by the tenth century, these energies had been turned against religious competitors. Several texts indicate massacres of Buddhists and Jains. Under Chola kings, worshippers of Siva (Shaivites) prospered at the expense of Vishnu worshippers (Vaishnava), triggering conflicts among sectarian forces.

*Bhakti* devotionalism and sectarian competition challenged the brahmanical elite proponents of traditional orthodox religion as it attracted more patronage from ruling dynasties. To cultivate a popular following, many rulers in the south supported Vaishnava (Alvar) and Saivites (Nayanar) *bhakti* poets. The most celebrated Hindu intellectual of the early medieval age, Shankaracharya (788-820), made his name during his short life by developing a Sanskrit high-culture rendition of Tamil devotional poetry, by reconciling Saivism and Vaishnavism through a non-dualist *advaita* philosophy that drew on the Upanishads and incorporated elements from Buddhism, and by travelling from Kerala to Kashmir and back again to establish monastic centres. Shankara helped to absorb and normalize popular devotionalism in elite Brahman high culture. A powerful regional sect of Virashaivism attracted royal patronage and many adherents from merchant communities and became regionally dominant in northern Karnataka, where Lingayats remain predominant today. Similarly in the Deccan the worship of Vitthala at Pandharpur can be ascribed to a rise of a new polity and its support to a new cult that later legitimised the rule of the new elite.

A case study of the process unfolding at the cult centre at Pandharpur in the early medieval times will illustrate this point better. The epicenter of the cult of Vitthala is located in the township of Pandharpur, in the heart of the Yadava kingdom. The city of Pandharpur is located on the right bank of river Bhima, on 17° North and 75° 23'-east longitude.

The earliest reference to Pandharpur is from a Rastrakuta grant dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. The operative part of the grant states that the Pandarangapalli along with Anewari, Cala, Kandaka and Duddapalli were granted to a learned brahmana, Jayadviththa. This grant also refers to the scribe, one Pandaradrisena, the lord of the hill Pandara. This grant is ratified by a confirmatory grant by Rastrakuta king Amoghavarsa in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. The next reference to Pandharpur is slightly indirect, viz. in that the grant refers to a small temple 'Lahan madu' being erected by the Mahajanas, Dandanayaka and others, during the reign of Bhillama this inscription is dated to 1189 AD. We will come back to this inscription in another context. In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Hoysala king made some donations to the Lord Vitthala at Pandharpur. The next inscription is interesting from the perspective of the evolution of the settlement that had remained a Palli. It states that Mallisetti gave at Paundarikaksetra, on the Bhimarthi a village. The palli is now being referred to as the Ksetra. In the later half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century some inscriptions refer to the palli as pura. The following can be culled out from the evidence cited above.

Pandharpur is first referred to as a palli in the sixth century AD. This term denotes a small settlement. This status of the settlement remains unchanged from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD to the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. This status drastically changes in the next one hundred years, between 1189AD- to 1237. The settlement now is a mahagrama. The nature of the settlement undergoes further change in the next 50-75 years. In the 'Cauryasi' grant this mahagrama has been referred to as a 'pura'. Finally, a 14<sup>th</sup> century grant also refers to Pandharpur as a pura, an urban centre. It is also interesting to note that the reference to Vitththal as a deity is only in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. The phenomenal growth of the settlement is compressed in mere one hundred years. This is due to the extraordinary interest shown by the state in the existing traditions at the settlement. Here we must now turn to the deity to understand the interplay of traditions on the deity there that creates a cult at Pandharpur by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD.

It is important to record the epigraphic evidence about the Vitththal as a deity before we get into the interplay of tradition. This is important as the epigraphy can then suggest a temporal and spatial context within which we can then understand the play of traditions and the role of the state in this drama. We can divide the entire epigraphic context pertaining to the cult of Vitththal into four distinct phases. In the first phase (516 AD to 1188AD) we get references to Pandharpur but we do not get any conclusive evidence regarding the existence of Vitththal as a deity at Pandharpur. There is one controversial reference to the 'Lord of the Hill', but the reference to the context eludes us. In this phase, Pandharpur is referred to as a palli, or a settlement. All that can be concluded from this oblique reference to the lord is that some kind of a worship centre might have existed on the hill at Pandarangapalli. This phase comes to an end in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, towards the very end of the reign of Bhillama V, an inscription invokes Vitththal as a deity and refers to the small temple/shrine that has been erected. This is the first concrete reference to the deity at Pandharpur. One Vitthaldevanayaka is also referred to in the inscription, suggesting that by then name of the deity had become wide spread in the society at large.

In the next phase the signs of first change in the nature of settlement occur. The Hoysala inscription of 1237AD refers to the grant for the anga-ranga-bhoga and a grant to the Siva temple too. It also refers to the palli as a mahagrama. The change in the nature of the settlement is linked to the fortunes of the deity, which are also changing. In the last phase of its journey from the palli, the centre now refers to the Pura and the small temple undergoes a remarkable change. The grand Yadava temple sponsored by the Yadava dominated domains now stands in full glory before the world. This evolution takes place between 1273-1277AD.

To sum up, in the first phase we do not find any trace of Vitththala in its deified form at Pandharpur. The construction of the temple turns out to be the most crucial event in the history of the settlement as well as the deity. Within a span of 84 years of the construction of the small temple, there ensues a virtual renovation and expansion of the same. The palli of the sixth century is now a pura. This growth is compressed in less than one hundred years. Intimately connected with all these development are the Yadavas, the Devagiri and the Hoysalas. It is clear that they find a common strand in one of the traditions at the cult centre and thus are able to extend a patronage to it. In a manner, the Yadavas are responsible for the existence of the deity and the cult centre at Pandharpur.

Popular devotionalism attracted thousands of passionate believers to temples and pilgrimage sites. This made public patronage increasingly complex and fraught, because sects could provide decisive military and financial support for dynastic contenders. Multiple and layered sovereignties continued among the gods, nonetheless, in the established medieval manner. Thus the rise of the sects and the consolidation of the

new polities went hand in hand. The Jagannath cult at Puri is an illustrative example of this phenomenon and this was repeated elsewhere as polities emerged integrating the local traditions and ascending to the regional levels.

Popular movements made such support contentious. Rulers had to balance support for their core religious constituency with support for others, which brought condemnation from allies. Devotees of Vishnu and Siva could be equally unforgiving.

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### 15.3 TEMPLE AND ITS ROLE

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Activity that dramatized emerging social identities appear in temple inscriptions. Rituals performed by Brahmans using Sanskrit liturgies brought cosmic spiritual powers down to earth to sanctify a caste social order. Temples were sites for enacting social rank among worshippers who protected *dharma* and financed rituals; and the rituals brought a variety of local, regional, and imperial gods together. Medieval societies witnessed many kinds of rituals, by all kinds of spiritualists and officiates, from all kinds of social backgrounds, in all manner of locations, which brought rain, secured crops, drove away disease and delivered healthy babies and bolstered dynasties. Temples to these great sovereign gods rose on the land as towering sacred landmarks and monuments to political power.

The temple as a ritual and architectural complex emerged in its glory in the later Gupta period. Its elaboration and spread from the sixth to the fourteenth century provide a legacy for us to study from Mahaballipuram to Khajuraho. The absorption of local deities, rituals, symbols, and spiritualism into Puranic literature and related myth, folklore, and artistic representation constituted the dominant worship by enhancing the cultural potency of local deities, their devotees, and their patrons. Local cults were woven into Puranic traditions and temple rituals as local communities came under royal authority. The greatness of the gods enhanced the glamour of royal patrons. We do come across a number of inscriptions referring to temples and the grants given there along with the rituals performed. In many a cases we find the local deity be accorded a higher status in the religious pantheon and the advent of Bhakti paved a different type of integration that was more open.

Social identities emerged around temples as people and gods lived together. Gifts by kings, landed elites, merchants and others to Brahmans and temples increased the spiritual stature of the donor. Inscriptions are contracts and advertisements. The more popular a temple became — the more praised in song and more attractive for pilgrims — the greater became the value of its patronage and the number of people whose identity attached to it. Rising *bhakti* devotionism enhanced the virtue, volume, and commercial value of pilgrimage, as it increased temple donations and investments. Donations became increasingly popular as a means and marker of social mobility as temples became commercial centres, landowners, employers, and manufacturing centres. Increasing participation in temple rituals made them more effective sites for social ranking, as temple honours were distributed according to rank and all worshippers were positioned in ranked proximity to the deity. Rulers came first. Rich donors came in the order of the value of their temple endowments. Popular *bhakti* movements made sovereign gods ever more central in everyday social life, even for the poorest people who did all the hardest manual labour who were prohibited from ever setting foot in the temple, whose exclusion marked them as the people of the lowest social rank. Some powerful *bhakti* saints came from the lowest of the low, whose devotion was so strong that gods came out of temples to return their love.

People who joined temple society gave gifts to gods and Brahmans that increased the status of donors, executors of the grant, and by extension, and all their kin. Over time, kinship circles formed around lineages and clans that fed gods and Brahmans, and

these kin groups formed high-status, non-Brahman elite *jatis*, elevated above others in ritual and society. Brahmans reaped major benefits. In some instances, thousands of Brahmans were granted rights to hitherto uncultivated land. In the open spaces of Rashtrakuta power, one inscription records a gift of 8,000 measures of land to 1,000 Brahmans, and 4,000 measures to a single Brahman. In each specific context, an inscription of this kind appears to mark an effort by a non-Brahman power block to enhance its status and that of its local allies.

In other cases, Brahmans were appointed as the local representatives of the state authorities in what are described as *agrahara* villages where Brahmans presided over small peasants, who in Bihar were mostly landless sharecroppers or bonded labourers. These *agrahara* villages were typically small villages and satellites of bigger villages that included members of several castes and bigger land-holders. In Bihar, such *agrahara* villages proliferated and it is quite likely that in such *agrahara* oppressive social relations and some of the most egregious patterns of caste-centered discrimination and exploitation may have developed.

But these developments took time to spread elsewhere in India, first spreading to Bengal and eastern UP, and very gradually elsewhere in India. However, this pattern was not necessarily replicated in identical form throughout India and some parts of India virtually escaped this trend. In *agrahara* villages in other parts of India, Brahmans did take on the role of local administrators and tax collectors, but the status of the small peasantry was not always as miserable as in Bihar. The degree of exploitation and oppression appears to be related to the extent of alienation from land-ownership.

In religions that paid tremendous stress on “revealed truth” (such as Christianity or Islam) there have always been strong tendencies towards dogmatic rigidity. But even at the peak of their influence, India’s Brahmans were never quite able to impose any comparable sort of rigid uniformity in the practice of Hinduism on a national (let alone, international) scale. In some localities, the lower castes did without the Brahmans entirely while elsewhere, especially in the South, or in Central India and Orissa - Brahmans often felt obliged to give due deference to dissenting and heterodox cults, and incorporated their belief systems into mainstream Hinduism.

The existence of these numerous cults was partly an expression of the struggle for social equality and freedom from exploitation, but for some, it was also a means for accessing greater social privileges. The Brahmans of Tamil Nadu (along with the rulers) attempted to manage these social tensions through co-option, philosophical accommodation and synthesis.

In Andhra, folk religions played a powerful role in mediating Brahmanical influences, and a vibrant example of the deep penetration of folk influences in popular religion is to be seen in the sculpted array of folkloric panels in the temple of Srisailam (sponsored by the Vijayanagar rulers in the 14th-15th C.). In neighbouring Karnataka, the Bhakti ideal and Jain influences put their stamp on prevailing religious practices.

Religion in India thus developed in a much more organic fashion than is commonly realized, and it was never completely divorced from popular inputs. Both male and female deities drew followers, and while goddesses were sometimes displayed in demonic warrior roles, gods were sometimes displayed with feminine qualities. In the Yogini temples, all the deities were women and although today, there are only a handful of surviving Yogini temples, (mostly in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh) it is not unlikely that many more may have been in existence.

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## 15.4 SUMMARY

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In this unit we told you the story of how religion developed in the early medieval society. The role of popular cults was highlighted to show how the inputs from



popular religious beliefs and practises was shaping the mainstream religious social developments. The link between cults and the rise of states was also highlighted.

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## 15.5 GLOSSARY

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**Popular Devotionalism :** Here we mean the faith and love of ordinary people towards god which developed as forms of Bhakti cults in various parts of the country.

**Celestial Ancestries :** This is the practice of tracing geneologies of kings and queens to mythical forms of planets, sun and the moon.

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## 15.6 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the salient features of religion in early medieval society.
- 2) Did polity play any role in shaping of religion in early medieval India?
- 3) How was the cult of Viththala was patronized by the Yadavas?

Earlier you read about the emergence of Pandharpur as a religious centre. In this appendix we give you an insight into the evolution of the Vitthal tradition. This will help you to grasp the religious process at a local level.

### **Vitthal and Traditions**

It is important to record the epigraphic evidence about the Vitthal as a deity before we get into the interplay of tradition. This is important as the epigraphy can then suggest a temporal and spatial context within which we can then understand the play of traditions and the role of the state in this drama.

We can divide the entire epigraphic context pertaining to the cult of Vitthal into four distinct phases. In the first phase (516 AD to 1188AD) we get references to Pandharpur but we do not get any conclusive evidence regarding the existence of Vitthal as a deity at Pandharpur. There is one controversial reference to the 'Lord of the Hill', but the reference to the context eludes us. In this phase, Pandharpur is referred to as a palli, or a settlement. All that can be concluded from this oblique reference to the lord is that some kind of a worship centre might have existed on the hill at Pandarangapalli. This phase comes to an end in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD, towards the very end of the reign of Bhillama V, an inscription invokes Vitthal as a deity and refers to the small temple/shrine that has been erected. This is the first concrete reference to the deity at Pandharpur. One Vitthaldevanayaka is also referred to in the inscription, suggesting that by then name of the deity had become wide spread in the society at large.

In the next phase the signs of first change in the nature of settlement occur. The Hoysala inscription of 1237AD refers to the grant for the anga-ranga-bhoga and a grant to the Siva temple too. It also refers to the palli as a mahagrama. The change in the nature of the settlement is linked to the fortunes of the deity, which are also changing.

In the last phase of its journey from the palli, the centre now refers to the Pura and the small temple undergoes a remarkable change. A full-fledged Yadava temple sponsored by the Yadava chiefs now stands in full glory before the world. This change occurs between 1273-1277AD. To sum up, in the first phase we do not find any trace of Vitthala in its deified form at Pandharpur. The construction of the temple turns out to be the most crucial event in the history of the settlement as well as the deity. Within a span of 84 years of the construction of the temple, there ensues a virtual renovation and expansion of the same. The palli of yesteryears is now a pura. This growth is compressed in less than one hundred years. Intimately connected with all these developments are the Yadavas, the Devagiri and the Hoysalas. It is clear that they find a common strand in one of the traditions at the cult centre and thus are able to extend a patronage to it. In some sense the Yadavas are responsible for the existence of the deity and the cult centre at Pandharpur.

Against this background now let us analyse the interplay of traditions at Pandharpur. We can identify three primary traditions but not necessarily in the chronological order of succession at the centre. Of the three the saivite tradition can only be glimpsed through and is not easily discernable. It leaves its traces at the cult centre at various places. We can trace the saivite tradition through the imprints in the epigraphic, sanskritic and the oral sources.

The vaisnavite tradition is more pronounced at Pandharpur. In the Vaisnavite tradition, the deity appears as the 24<sup>th</sup> avatar of Visnu. The deity is also closely linked to the Vaisnavite pantheon. This becomes clear from the various titles used for the deity in the inscriptions by the Yadava kings.

The third tradition, the pastoral tradition, is most interesting and least pronounced at the cult centre. This is so because the pastoral tradition is not so easily visible outside the

frame of reference of pastoralism. In the pastoral tradition, the lord Vitthala appears as the younger brother of Biroba/Birappa/Virabhadra. There are innumerable stories regarding the two brothers, narratives of their journeys and the processes of their settling down. We will refer to one illustrative story of this tradition before we move on to the underlying feature of this tradition and its importance to the state.

‘Once upon a time Vitthala and Bramal (Biroba) felt that they required a new place to stay. They started looking for a new place and came down to Pattankodoli. Here they saw a huge empty space and decided to settle down there.

In the meanwhile, Kallya learned that these Dhangar gods have come to the settlement. He immediately summoned Lingusha Patil, Dattoba Kulkarni and Japtap. They were informed about this arrival. He also complained that now that they have come they will surely kill a goat and the blood will flow past my door! The leaders of the village decided that they would not allow them (the gods) to stay in the village. The next day Vitthala and Bramal send out Soma Pradhan to find out whether anyone was willing to give them shelter. As no one was willing to and that they were not quite welcome in the village was conveyed to Soma. He came back and reported this to the gods. The gods then become angry. Bhandara was sprinkled over the village. The entire population of the village sans the brothers went blind. The leaders then rushed to the gods. The gods agreed to restore the sight of the people in lieu of space for them. Thus an agreement was reached and they stayed in the village.

The Dhangar oral tradition is replete with such stories. All these stories bring out a basic conflict between the pastoralists and the others. We need to locate this conflict in the history of the semi arid belt and the response of the polity to this conflict.

Vitthala is not always a younger brother of the god of the sheep keepers. At times, it is suggested in some versions of the oral tradition of the pastoralists that Vitthala is their son in law, and Padubai/Rahi/ Rukmini is their daughter. Yet, the son in law maintains an identity and his temple is different than that of his wife.

These oral traditions that connect the deity to the strong pastoral context are also supported by two different sets of evidences, the hero-stones and a 13<sup>th</sup> century contemporary story from a different sect that suggests a strong link between the hero stones and the origin of the cult at Pandharpur. Hero-stones form part of a matrix of what has been categorized as ‘memorial’ stones. Memorial stones are spread across the sub-continent from the deep south to the arid reaches of Rajasthan desert. Here we will confine ourselves to those in Maharashtra. These date to about the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. There are sati stones and stones set up in remembrance of dead men. The latter can be subdivided into those set up to commemorate individuals who died a natural death, and those set up to honour ‘heroes’ who died in battle.

Normally the hero-stone (locally known as *viragala*) has three panels. The lowest panel depicts the event in which the person has died. In case the death occurred in a battle or a skirmish, the battle is depicted on the lowest panel of the stone. Sometimes that panel is expanded or new ones added according to the scale of the event in which death occurs. The middle panel depicts the heavenly march of the dead, escorted by the *apsara*. The top most panel depicts the dead hero, worshipping a deity, which in most cases is a *sivalinga*. In this stereotype, there are variations to cater to the need of the situation. In case more than one member of a family dies, then we find two slabs joined together or the slab is vertically divided. We also come across quadrilaterally carved hero-stones, which depict three panels of identical sizes. The hero-stones of Maharashtra carry no inscriptions. In Pandharpur two cattle raid depicting herostones have been discovered recently. There is also a story in a contemporary text about the origin of the deity. This story suggests that Vitthala died while defending cattle and a Bhadkhamba was erected to commemorate the memory of the dead hero. Later the Bhadkhamba started giving boons to the

worshippers and the cult was born. In some sense, then the origin of the cult lies in the tradition of the dead, of the heroes and the practice of erecting the herostones. These two sets of evidences make a strong case for pastoral tradition to be the primary tradition and the later varkari tradition is post Yadava intervention. The reasons for the Yadava intervention in this cult centre are now clear. We need to understand the nature of the Yadava intervention to understand the birth and the evolution of this cult.

The state intervenes decisively at Pandharpur only in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. It has been noted earlier that a small temple was erected at Pandharpur by the Yadava feudatories in the 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. This small temple was expanded/renovated/reworked in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. This initiative came from the political structure. A call was given to mobilize resources. At the beginning, the call was not given its due attention and very little resource mobilization took place. Then the Karnadhipa of the Yadava kingdom, made donation to the cult centre. This was followed by a spate of donations at the cult centre. Finally the Yadava King Ramcandradeva Yadava capped the donations arrived at the temple by his own, and he himself took upon the role as the Pandhari Phad Pramukh, or the head of the congregation at Pandharpur. Here the cult is successfully created by the state.

#### **A Parallel Process: Issue of Legitimacy**

A similar pattern occurs at Velapur, although on a smaller, more localised scale. Velapur is located twenty miles to the northwest of Pandharpur. It has a large Hemadpanti temple of Haraharesvara Mahadeva. The temple has three inscriptions of four to seven lines each, two dated to A.D. 1300 and the third dated to A.D. 1301, all in the reign of the Devagiri Yadava king Ramachandra (1271-1310). As Tulpule (1963: 103) has documented, Velapur has four inscriptions in all. These are dated A.D. 1206 (two records), A.D. 1300 and A.D. 1305. Out of these four inscriptions, we are concerned here only with the last three. The first one is a memorial stone. It records the death of one Mali Setthi, whose admirers put up the Stone.

The inscriptions of A.D. 1300 and A.D. 1305 form a group. The first inscription in this group states that in the reign of Sri Ramachandra Yadava, Joideva was in charge of Mandesa, and the officers Baideva and Brahmadevrana were under Joideva in Mandesa. Baideva erected a temple of Vatesvara and gave some concessions.

The second inscription from Velapur, also related to this temple of Vatesvara, states that when Jaideva was Sarvadhikari of Mandesa and when his representative, Brahmadev Rana's brother Baidevarana, was an officer of Mandesa he erected a maker (temple/Yajna gruha) for the temple.

The third inscription relating to Velapur is also related to the temple of Vatesvara at the same place. This inscription states that, under the reign of Ramacandra Yadava, the Sarvadhikari of Mandesa, Brahmadevarana erected and considerably enlarged the temple of Vatesvara. He also brought order to the various temples of Velapur. A considerable restructuring seems to have been carried out at Velapur. These three inscriptions have to be taken together. A brief history of the growth of this temple can be recreated when these inscriptions are analysed.

In A.D. 1300, Brahmadeva Rana erected a temple for Vatesvara. His brother Baideva Rana erected another structure near the temple in the same year. In the year A.D. 1305, after a gap of five years, Brahmadeva Rana constructed a palace and other structures. A general renovation of other temples seems to have been carried out at Velapur. The gap of five years can be explained terms of Brahmadeva Rana's own advance in the Yadava administration, where he rose to become the administrative head of Mandesa. Thus, he is heralded as the Sarvadhikari of Mandesa by the year A.D. 1305.

We suggest that the thrust of the polity followed by the Yadavas becomes clearer from this example. The parallel example of the evolution of the Vatesvara temple at Velapur and the general practice of making donations is suggestive of a deliberate polity. The list that gives the names of deities is from the Dharwad and Vijapur areas. These areas were brought under Yadava influence when the Hoysala kingdom suffered a set back at the hands of the Yadava.

We therefore need to contextualise the semi-arid zone against the frame of reference presented above. It is clear that it was 'marginal' territory, insofar as agricultural activity is concerned. We also do not come across major land grants given by the early medieval state in this period. Yet the process of assimilation was carried out through the temple networks, and it does not appear to be a 'marginal' territory any more, as the extent of the resources mobilised becomes clear. It was very much at the centre of activity. Therefore, it was important for the Yadava State to hold this territory. It could be suggested that perhaps one way of integrating the newly conquered areas was to extend patronage to local temple networks. In that sense, cults or temples had assimilative qualities in early medieval contexts. Such assimilation becomes necessary in a situation where there is a need to integrate diverse segments within a single polity.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The existence of these numerous cults was partly an expression of the struggle for social equality and freedom from exploitation, but for some, it was also a means for accessing greater social privileges. The Brahmins of Tamil Nadu (along with the rulers) attempted to manage these social tensions through co-option, philosophical accommodation and synthesis. In Andhra, folk religions played a powerful role in mediating Brahmanical influences, and a vibrant example of the deep penetration of folk influences in popular religion is to be seen in the sculpted array of folkloric panels in the temple of Srisailem (sponsored by the Vijayanagar rulers in the 14th-15th C.). In neighbouring Karnataka, the Bhakti ideal and Jain influences put their stamp on prevailing religious practices.

Religion in India thus developed in a much more complex fashion than is commonly realized, and it was never completely divorced from popular inputs. Both male and female deities drew followers, and while goddesses were sometimes displayed in demonic warrior roles, gods were sometimes displayed with feminine qualities. In the Yogini temples, all the deities were women and although today, there are only a handful of surviving Yogini temples, (mostly in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh) it is not unlikely that many more may have been in existence.

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## UNIT 16 VILLAGE COMMUNITY

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### Structure

- 16.0 Introduction
- 16.1 What is a Village Community?
- 16.2 *Panch or Panch-Muqaddam*
- 16.3 Functions and Powers
- 16.4 Summary
- 16.5 Exercises

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### 16.0 INTRODUCTION

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Harold H. Mann insists that the heart of India is in its villages, and argues that “If we want to understand the history of the country we must seek far more in the obscure unprinted records of village vicissitudes than in the more showy array of documents concerning conquests and governments, princes and their retainers or palaces and their inhabitants”.

To understand the village community in a subtler manner, it is essential to know: *What is a village?*

The reference of existence of village is found in sources of pre-colonial India. The words *deh* (Persian word for village) and *gaon* or *ganve* are frequently used in the literary sources and the folk traditions. Mughal Empire’s territorial divisions are well known to us. These divisions were perceived on the basis of rivers, mountains, deserts and languages. *Ain-i Akbari* also reflects how the Mughal empire was divided into *subas/sarkars/parganas*. The *parganas* had a varying number of villages. These numbers are known from the Amber- Jaipur documents, particularly from the *Arsattas*, apart from other sources. Also seventeenth century documents from Rajasthan and Haryana show the small number of cultivators in the villages which reflect the small size of villages in pre-colonial India. Documents from Deccan, South India etc. also reflect the varying sizes of the villages from tiny hamlets to populous settlements. Territorial identity has also been deciphered in the sources like *Marwar-re pargana-re vigat*. These sources also identify the social identities of the inhabitants and the village officials.

In *Markandeya Purana*, the village is defined as a “place surrounded by cultivable lands and where inhabited a number of people available to support the able cultivators in raising crops in those lands”.

Monier Williams argues that “it is a division of territory with careful distribution of fixed occupations for the common good, with its inter-dependence of individual family and communal interests, with its perfect provision for political independence and autonomy”.

Irfan Habib writes that, “the village itself can be defined as a settlement essentially of peasants who gather to live together for better security and for the convenience of exchanging essential goods and services among themselves. Village should be seen as a community, a network of caste divisions and customary service or barter relationships. Caste was the source of the “unalterable division of labour”.

For some, like A.R. Kulkarni, village is a cluster of houses and a close-knit unit.

B.D. Chattopadhyaya has defined the village by saying that “a typical village settlement is known to have been composed of three components: a) the *Vastu* (residential land), b) the *kshetra* (cultivable land) and c) *gochara* (pasture land).”

*Taqsim* (summary accounts of the revenue of the *pargana*) documents, preserved in the State Archives of Rajasthan, Bikaner, state that villages of Eastern Rajasthan comprised of: i) the *basti* (area under habitation), ii) *raha* (tracts/ strips), iii) *magro* (rocky land), iv) *pahar* (hills if any), v) *nullah/nadi/tala'* (stream, river, pond), vi) *sir* (land under special revenue arrangements). vii) *jungle* (forests), and viii) cultivable land.

From the above described perceptions of scholars it is clear that village has been defined in different ways, but concisely, it has three components: i) varying size of territory, ii) inhabitants, and iii) agriculture as the main occupation.

The most important component, i.e. inhabitants, was bound together by the village community.

The present Unit deals mainly with the power and functions of the village community during the medieval period. The relations of the village oligarchs with peasants, artisans and labourers are discussed in the next two Units of the present Block on Rural Society.

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## 16.1 WHAT IS A VILLAGE COMMUNITY?

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Question arises what a village community denotes and how did it function? The issue came to the fore as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century in the British circles. The Committee of the House of Commons on East India Affairs discussed the issue as early as 1810. British Indian administrators Charles Metcalfe, James Mill, Elphinstone and Sir Henry Maine deliberated upon the concept of the village community.

Charles Metcalfe called them 'little republics', 'almost independent of any foreign relations', 'unchangeable'; while James Mill designated them as 'corporations'; Elphinstone argued that during the medieval period it 'acted as deterrent against the imposition of the Mahometan law upon the Indian life'. Sir Henry Maine described it as 'an organised self-acting group of families exercising a common proprietorship over a definite tract of land'. He argued that in India in the villages where a particular clan dominated then rule of the head of the clan (village headman) prevailed; while, where the village consisted of heterogeneous population (of different caste and creed) then instead of the dominance of 'one' the village *panchayat* acted as dominant body. Thus he looked at the phenomenon of the presence of the village community not 'universal' but depending on the nature of the constitution of a particular village.

Arthur Phillips (*Land Tenures of Lower Bengal*, Calcutta, 1876) argued that the village community was present in ancient India; it declined under the centralised administrative system of the Muslim rule. The growth of the *zamindari* system also contributed to its decline during the medieval period. Though the official machinery of the village headmen, *patwaris*, *chaudhuris* continued, they enjoyed their position at state's pleasure only and the state preserved the right to remove them. B.R. Grover (2005) argues that rather 'the type of village communities based on land tenures found in the nineteenth century was more traceable in the regions which had remained in complete suppression as a part of the Sultanate or Mughal rule than in such regions where the Sultanate or Mughal patterns of regular agrarian administration did not penetrate...In fact, the concept of village communities was governed by regional and tribal practices undergoing changes from time to time rather than by 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' patterns of government.' However, there appears to be no uniform pattern of the presence of village community. It varied in form and substance from region to region; even the pattern of the presence of different classes and functionaries varied from region to region. (for details see Block 4, Unit 17 of our Course MHI-05) Grover argues that 'the concept of village community depended upon the nature of prevalent land tenure and the relationship between the agricultural



and non-agricultural population residing in a village...(it) must be studied in relation to the regional tribal and clannish settlements as well as the *zamindari* rights and jurisdictions of the dominant clans’.

Regional sources throw ample light on the working of the village communities. Sources like *Arhsattas* (revenue records pertaining to state income and expenditure), *jamabandi* (revenue assessment records), *jama kharcha* (income and expenditure), *chitthis* (letters written/issued by and to various revenue officials and the state), *sanads* (issued by the *diwan*, the department kept miscellaneous information pertaining to emoluments, privileges, etc.), *dastur al amal* (schedule of revenue rates) preserved at the State Archives of Rajasthan, Bikaner in Rajasthani/Persian throw ample light on the nature of village community during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. For Punjab, we have *khalsa darbar* records (largely contains revenue records of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s reign from 1811-1849) and *patwari* records (village accounts maintained by the village *patwari* (village accountant), Marathi records preserved in Pune Archives like *thalzada* (a record of land rights/ land holdings maintained by the village accountant) and *Talebani* (actual receipts and expenditures of the village revenue) also throw much light on the socio-economic life of rural Maharashtra during the medieval period. Village system of Goa can also be studied with the help of voluminous Marathi records pertaining to village communities, preserved in the Archives of Goa. Similarly State Archives of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu also contain valuable records regarding village communities.

The village community was a strong pillar of the rural society. Wherever institutional or social system in a village was involving the village population in some form of cooperation or dependence, village community did exist. It dealt with the problems like law and order, revenue payments and related matters of the villages.

As early as first or second century A.D. the Buddhist text *Milindpanho* clearly speaks of what constituted the village community and obviously women, slave girls/ slave men, hired labour, servants, ordinary villagers, sick people etc. did not count in the list. It thus clearly states how the village community largely constituted the upper strata of the village society. The above reference makes it clear that the villages were socially stratified, and the matters of the village were decided only by the *upper strata* who alongwith the village headman were entitled to levy forced labour.

During the medieval period largely peasants, village servants and labourers did form part of the village community. However, it appears that *paikasht* (outside cultivators) *muzarian* (tenants; occupancy cultivators) hardly ‘played any role in the management of the affairs of the village community’, as rightly pointed out by Grover. However, Grover argues that there appears to have occurred some shift in their position, as the *muzarian* appears to have enjoyed ‘transferable rights of mortgage and sale of their holdings’.

S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar has given a vivid description of village assemblies of South India. R.C. Majumdar, Burton Stein, Nobura Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu have discussed in great details the working of the Brahmanical assemblies of the *Brahmadeya* (revenue free grants given to the Brahmans) villages. In these villages Brahmans formed a communal self-governing body called *sabha*. These villages were mostly established during the Pallava and Chola times. The non-*Brahmadeya* villages appear to be of earlier period and numerically their strength was much more than the *Brahmadeya* villages. *Ur* was the assembly in non-*Brahmadeya* villages. The autonomous bodies like *sabha*, *ur*, and *nattar* declined and later disappeared in the Vijaynagar period giving way to *nayaks* or independent chieftains.

If we see the working of Brahman village assemblies of the Chola period, we get to know about the system of election and representation of individual families, their

qualification for membership and the existence of various committees performing distinct functions (for the working of the village community in Deccan and South India see Unit 18 of the present Block).

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## 16.2 PANCH OR PANCH-MUQADDAM

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The Vrindavan documents beginning from 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards throw a great deal of light on the nature of functioning of the village community during the medieval period. The documents are bilingual, i.e. Persian and Braj languages. They mainly deal with the sale of village lands. In its Persian version village oligarchs (*panch*) are referred to as *muqaddam* while in the Braj version they are addressed as *panch* and they claim to act in concert (*sab panchan milikare*). This suggests that the *panch* and *muqaddam* were used as synonym. *Panch* formed a collective body, known as *panchayat*. Their traditional number appears to be *five* (Hindi *paanch*) but the number could be less and at times more. In Vrindaban documents their number varied from *four* to as many as *thirteen*.

Baden Powell states that the Indian village community was an extension of the joint family. But Irfan Habib argues that no two *panch* appear to be descendents of the same father or grand father, which is very close to the Chola regulations of Brahman villages that no single family should be over-represented in the *sabha*. He rather emphasises that 'hereditary succession had much to do with one's obtaining the status of *panch*'. Even conversion, it seems, did not deter right of a person to hold the position of a *panch*. Bari Khan is mentioned in the Aritha documents (modern Radhakund, a village near Mathura-Vrindavan) of 1640-42 as *panch* suggests that he continued to be a *panch* even after converting to Islam. Irfan Habib's study on Vrindavan documents confirms that 'at any one time only one member of the family acted as *panch* representative'. Vrindavan document of 1594 clearly mentions that out of thirteen *panch* three were Muslims. However, it appears that rights to perquisites (*biswa muqaddami*) was shared equally among all heirs and not enjoyed *solely* by the eldest member as *panch*.

Apart from hereditary succession, other factors like-caste, community, money, influence etc. also played their role in the selection of the *panch*.

Writing in 1966, Grover rejects the presence of 'village community' during the Mughal period. He argues that, 'It is difficult to trace the concept of the '*Panchayat*' system or a 'Council of the Village Elders' forming an integral part of the village community during the Mughal age'...The *zamindari* and the *muqaddami* families as well as other *riaya* would often meet in the village *chaupal* and discuss matters relating to the interests of the agricultural community. The *chaupal* would as well serve as the venue for the caste groups for discussion and enforcement of the caste regulations. It is in this sense that the village community may be said to have existed during the Mughal age'. Thus for Grover 'caste' was the chief binding factor and for him the working of the village communities was more in the sense of caste *Panchayat*. He clearly denies that it had any role in 'matters relating to agricultural life, revenue administration and social behaviour'.

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## 16.3 FUNCTIONS AND POWERS

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Grover argues that there was no 'communal land' or the 'common financial pool' belonging to the village community during the medieval period. He suggests that 'the village waste lands, the pasture lands and the adjoining jungles... (were) all owned by the state', though 'village had a right to the usage of pasture land, wood from the jungle and piscary from ponds' in lieu of 'nominal cesses (*abwab*) to the *zamindari* and *muqaddami* families'. According to him *malba* (common village fund for meeting

out official's exactions from the village) always remained an illegal cess during the Mughal period; while *kharch-i deh* (incidental expenditure of the village) 'never implied a common pool of the village *riaya* in a village community'. Citing the *farman* of Bahadur Shah I (1710) he argues that it clearly 'declares the charges on the grass and fodder from the pasture lands and jungles as illegal and forbids the *muqaddams* from further collection. Even in the 'nineteenth century, in major portions of North India, the waste and the jungle lands were mostly at the disposal of the *zamindar* and the rights of user enjoyed by village community were extremely limited'.

However, Irfan Habib on the basis of the analysis of Vrindavan documents argues that village community definitely enjoyed rights over wastelands and there was presence of common financial pool. Vrindavan documents reflect the nature and extent of authority which *panch* or *panchayat* used to exercise over the common village lands. He argues that *Panchayat* possessed control over village land (*zamin-i mauza*). It could be pond, wasteland or cultivated/cultivable land. Aritha documents confirm that they could sell or lease out the village wasteland or else could grant permission to cultivate it. One of the deed of the Vrindavan documents shows that the *panch* in 1594 had given 4 *biswas* of wasteland of the village near Vrindavan to a *bairagi* (recluse) to construct some structure. Here one has to bear in mind that the village community did not enjoy rights to sell land cultivated by individual peasants. But in case some outsider (*pai kasht*) wanted to cultivate the land in a certain village then the permission of the village community appeared to be mandatory. *Thalzada* records from Maharashtra also show that a dancer, Shyama Naikin, received a grant of 60 *bighas* of land for her services to the Sidheshwar temple of Indapur and the *dargah* of Pirchad Khan.

The important question is how the money received out of the sale proceeds of the village land used to be distributed? Mughal records did speak about it to a certain extent. It appears that the *Panch* involved in the sale of the wastelands of the village did receive their 'share', but large sum out of the proceeds used to go to 'common financial pool' of the village. Aurangzeb's *farman* to Rasikdas clearly mentions *bachh* (rate paid by the *bhaiyachara* community) villages into the common pool and *behri mal* (revenue paid by the community towards the common pool). S.P. Gupta mentions one such instance when even the *panchayati* land was taxed. He argues that it indicates the presence of 'some sort of communal ownership of land in the village'.

It is interesting to see the expenditure pattern of this 'common financial pool'. The largest amount thus received was spent to pay off the revenue demand to the state. Remuneration and perquisites of various officials were also paid out of this fund. Expenses of the village (*kharch-i deh*) were also met out of this fund. These expenditures were in the form of paying allowances and fees to the *patwari*, *qanungo*, and *chaudhury*. Even the common village loans were paid out of this fund. *Panch* could also lend money out of the common village pool in the case of the availability of surplus. In production enterprises like procuring seeds, digging up channels, etc. money was also spent by the village community out of the common village pool. All these transactions were conducted through village community (*panchayat/panch*). Common villagers had no control over these activities. The village oligarchs (designated *kalantaran*, *mutaghalliban*, *muqaddams*) were never held by the Mughal officials in high esteem. Akbar's (1556-1605) *diwan* Todar Mal calls them, 'bastards and headstrong' who 'do not pay their own share (of the revenue demand of the village) transferring it to the *reza-riaya*' (ordinary peasants). (Habib, 1999)

B.L. Bhadani's (1999) study on western Rajasthan also suggests the presence of some sort of common pool. From village Sewadi, *pargana* Jalor records we get references of 'work for the village', 'remuneration in wheat (to be given) to the

village servants', 'according to number of persons'. The remuneration paid to the village community for onward payment to the village servants suggests presence of common village fund. It also speaks of collection of dues from the peasants for the same.

In the medieval Deccan also village headmen or village assembly possessed the right to dispose off or were privileged to take possession over the wastelands (*gatkul jamin* – land of extinct families) or *pad jamin* (land left waste on account of non-cultivation for a long period). The Marathi records mention possession of such lands by the village headmen as *miras* lands; while it also speaks of disposal of wastelands by them as *miras* as well as *inam*. Thus in medieval Deccan village headmen possessed the right to 'appropriate' wastelands, but in such case he had to pay heavy land-tax on it as per *miras*-rates. On account of this, comments Fukuzawa (1991), 'the headmen of many villages would desist from taking over wastelands which would then remain unappropriated'.

In the Deccan generally disposal of wastelands appears to have been done by the village assembly (*majalsi samakul pandhar*). The sale of wastelands as *miras* lands did not necessarily involve 'payment' of the 'money' to the village assembly. Out of the three documents analysed by Fukuzawa (1991) only in one case grantee paid Rs. 100 to the village assembly. In such case the grantee happened to be an outsider. This suggests that in case of the transfer/sale of lands as *miras* lands within the village the person did not need to indulge in any cash transactions to the village assembly. But in case of outside cultivator he had to pay a 'price for the land'. This appears in contrast to the contemporary north India where a share out of the sale proceeds used to go to the village headmen and rest used to go to the 'common financial pool'. Similarly, there appears to be a contrast in the involvement of people in the two regions. In north India, in the sales of the village lands village *panch/muqaddams* were involved, while Marathi documents pertaining to medieval Deccan reveal that during the sale of village wasteland altogether 34 persons were present. Here, apart from the village assembly (*majalis samakul pandhar*) others present were – an agent (*kamavisdar*), *inamdhar* (held *inam* lands in the village), three headmen (*patils*), seven peasants, one carpenter (*sutar*), one gardener (*mali*), one blacksmith (*lohar*), one guest-bard (*bhat-mehaman*), two astrologer-accountant (*joshi-kulkarni*), one assistant headman (*chaugula*), one barber (*nhavi*), one untouchable (*mahar*), one keeper of the temple (*gurav*), as well as the *deshpande* (accountant) of the region, and thirteen other persons from the neighbouring villages and hamlets. (Fukuzawa, 1991) Village assembly, to meet out the common expences of the village (paying land-tax, etc.), could sell off land as *inam* land over which the grantee did not need to pay any tax, instead the taxes due on that land were to be shared by the village as a whole. Fukuzawa concludes that if the lands were 'disposed of as *miras* lands, it was the grantee (new *mirasdar*) who had to bear a heavy land-tax, whereas if disposed of as *inam* lands, the villagers as a group were obliged to pay the land-tax on behalf of the grantee (new *inamdhar*), if the *inam* was of a fairly large scale. In view of this situation, wastelands of many villages appear to have been left 'waste' without being disposed of.'

We do get references of sale of village lands in South India as well by the *maha-sabhyar* (members of the *maha-sabha*). Noboru Karashima (1992) refers to sale of number of such deeds. One of the inscriptions from Rajaraja Chola III, dated 1241 AD where members of *maha-sabha* of Ukkal 'sold eastern hamlet (*pidagai*)... by means of a village sale (*ur-vilai-piramanam*) for 180 *madais*'. It included wet land, garden, residential area, house, trees, well, water, irrigation, road, passage, tank, bund, etc. The assembly granted 'right of sale, mortgage, resale, inheritance and donation of this village (hamlet)'. This confirms the presence of right to sell off village land by the village community in South India. Though it appears that it did not necessarily include wastelands only.

Village servants and artisans formed an important component of the village community. As mentioned earlier a detailed analysis on the issue will be provided in Units 17 and 18. Here we will furnish only a brief account of their presence. Vrindavan documents also refer to land transfers. But how the village artisans and servants were maintained is not mentioned in these documents. Though we do get references to leather workers holding particular plots, terms and conditions of their holdings are not known.

A 1776 report from Baroch (Gujarat) throws significant light on the issue of maintenance of the artisans, “a certain portion of land of each village (according to the custom) should be tax free for the maintenance of those artisans and labourers whose services were absolutely necessary for the village”. Regarding the *Jajmani* system, R.S. Sharma argues that during the period of second urban decay (7-9<sup>th</sup> centuries), the jobless artisans of the urban areas migrated to rural areas to seek their livelihood and from this, in the course of time, emerged the *jajmani* system.

Thomas’ *Memoirs* on Sind also reveal similar information for 1847 Sind, where one gets to know the carpenter receiving his fee for the annual repair of the Persian wheels, and the potter for the supply of the earthen vessels. James Mill, Hegel, Karl Marx and Baden-Powell have described the attachment of the village servants and artisans to the village community. But W.H. Wisner concludes that the customary attachments tied the village servants and artisans not to the whole village but to groups of client families, their *jajmans*, within it. Louis Dumont feels that this is an extension of the relationship between the priest and his clients.

H. Fukazawa on the basis of 18<sup>th</sup> century Maharashtra documents writes that the servants and artisans were claiming their hereditary land allotment (*watan/miras*) from the village as a whole. These servants were called *balutedars* and were getting their share of agricultural produce known as *baluta*. Wilson’s *Glossary* discusses this system at length.

Village artisans and servants in Deccan and Gujarat and elsewhere too, whose services, like removal of litter, washerman, barber, carpenter, blacksmith and so on, were essential for the functioning of the village as an economic and social unit. They were getting tax free lands for their maintenance. On special occasions, the families of village servants received small allowances in cash and kind from the village community.

All types of artisans and servants were having their importance. A leather worker/tanner was as important and necessary as a priest in the village. Midwife services, which were provided by the low caste women, were essential for every family—low and high. Barber, similarly was necessary not only for cutting hair but also for conducting socio-religious ceremonies. This phenomenon was general throughout India even in the nineteenth century, and Baden Powell finds it in all kinds of villages. The socio-economic ties of village artisans with the *zamindars* and the cultivating community continued from generation to generation.

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## 16.4 SUMMARY

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Karl Marx infers that idyllic village communities were responsible for the stagnation of the Indian economy. But nationalist historians feel that India gradually became economically backward only during the colonial period because of British land tax and other related economic policies.

The debate about the role and rise/downfall of the village communities under the British rule may continue but the village community certainly played a significant role in every sphere of life of the villages/villagers. Thus, one can conclude that the

Indian village community was very much a living institution during the medieval period.

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## **16.5 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Define village community. Examine the roles and functions of the village community during the medieval period.
- 2) What is a village? Discuss the importance of the village community as a corporate body during the medieval period.

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## **UNIT 17 RURAL SOCIETY: NORTH INDIA**

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### **Structure**

- 17.0 Introduction
- 17.1 Social Formation in the Plains
  - 17.1.1 Rural Elites
  - 17.1.2 Peasants and Agricultural Labourers
  - 17.1.3 Stratification in the Rural Society
- 17.2 Social Formation in the Tribal Regions
  - 17.2.1 Peasantisation of the Tribal Society
  - 17.2.2 Exchange
- 17.3 Caste in the Rural Society
- 17.4 Social Mobility
- 17.5 Rural Artisans and the Village Servants
- 17.6 Trading Groups
- 17.7 Summary
- 17.8 Exercises

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### **17.0 INTRODUCTION**

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Any discourse on society encompasses all acts of its populace. Its coverage is large. Al-Beruni (11th century) has depicted Indian society as highly ‘conservative’ and ‘rigid’. Karl Marx has perceived medieval Indian village society as homogeneous, non-stratified, unchanging and stagnant. However, the historical evidences hardly support these assumptions. Contrary to Karl Marx, Fernand Braudel finds the ‘presence of self-sufficient’ village in India an ‘exception’. As a rule, the village community was open to the outside world, subject to the markets. Karl Marx’s argument is convincingly questioned by historians like Irfan Habib. He argues that the medieval rural society was highly stratified and segmented on the basis of economic status and caste groupings. Superior castes and rich often enjoyed special status in the hierarchy and were assessed at concessional rates. There existed vibrant trading interactions between the village and the towns. As a result there occurred significant changes in the pattern and structure of the village society. The overall centralizing tendencies of the Turkish and the Mughal rulers brought significant changes in the existing social structure. These tendencies may be enumerated thus : extraction of greater surplus from the villages to the urban elites; recruitment of large scale standing army and introduction of new technologies (Persian-wheel, canals, spinning-wheel).

With ecological diversities and on account of the presence of different methods of production uniform social structural forms was not possible in the medieval age. There were regional and local variations along with cultural diversities. Hilly and forest societies, which were difficult to access, possessed atypical social set-up as compared to the plains; each influencing one another to the minimal; nonetheless interaction did exist and mobility was present.

In the present Unit we will highlight some of the specific features of the rural society. For details on the nature and pattern of agrarian structure during the medieval period see Unit 17, Block 4, of our course MHI-05.

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### **17.1 SOCIAL FORMATION IN THE PLAINS**

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Northern plains with high degree of soil fertility and alluvial deposits were known for high productivity, intensive cultivation and highly commercialized agriculture. Thus

northern plains represented comparatively 'developed' social formations. State control was also possibly greater in the plains than the hills and the forests. The region was largely governed by uniform regulations during the medieval period.

Let us explore the prominent social groups at rural level. The creamy layer consisted of the *zamindars* (*bhomia* in Rajasthan), petty government officials (*muqaddam* and *chaudhuri*), rich peasants, local merchants, and moneylenders. The village also contained sizable population of the ordinary peasants, independent artisans and the village menials (labourers).

### 17.1.1 Rural Elites

By thirteenth century the *rais*, *rana*, and *rauts* of the pre-Sultanate aristocracy appear to represent 'bigger' chiefs in the rural hierarchy. By late thirteenth century we also hear the presence of the *chaudhuris* (headman of 100 villages), *khots*, and *muqaddams* (village headmen). Barani (c. 1358) comments that they were all Hindus and 'ride good horses, wear fine clothes, shoot arrows from Persian bows, fight with each other and go out for hunt, and in a good measure, chew betel leaves'. Mid-fourteenth century also saw the emergence of the *zamindar* class which for almost six hundred years occupied the centre stage in rural aristocracy. The rural elite other than their caste/clan base maintained a strong military force, including the *garhis* (fortresses). The recognition of their power can well be judged the way they were referred to in the Rajasthani documents as *riyayatis* and assessed at concessional rates in spite of state's unwillingness. We get frequent references in the Mughal *farmans* for not converting the *raiayat kashta* (peasant holdings) into the *khwad kashta* (self-cultivated) holdings. They enjoyed superior rights in comparison to common peasants. They were organised mainly on the basis of caste and clan ties. Their territories were often contiguous to the territories of other clan members. Since the *zamindari* rights became salable in the Mughal period, it led to the caste/clan monopoly becoming vulnerable.

At this point it will be interesting to trace the process of assimilation of the pre-Sultanate aristocracy and the growth and emergence of the *zamindar* class in the rural society. Irfan Habib finds the origin and growth of this class of the *zamindars* in the emergence of the Rajputs as caste/class, a phenomenon just preceding the beginning of the medieval period. The Rajputs generally trace their origin from the *rajputras* (Prakrit *raut*; before sixteenth century we do not find the usage of the word Rajput in Persian texts; *raut* was in common usage in the Persian texts). Irfan Habib (2005) argues that the *rajaputras* are mentioned in the Bakhshali manuscript (circa 200-500 AD; a mathematical work written on birch bark; so called because it was found in the summer of 1881 near the village Bakhshali (or Bakhshalai) of the Yusufzai subdivision of the Peshawar district (now in Pakistan) as 'men who receive daily pay from the king'. There is also a reference in *Chachnama* (9<sup>th</sup> century) of 'a cavalry of five thousand 'sons of kings' (*ibna-al muluk*). Irfan Habib comments that, 'In all likelihood the *rajaputras* (the *ibna-al muluk*), being horsemen of status, rode saddled horses'. He analyses that, 'one can conjecture that a number of the class of elite cavalry troopers began to coalesce into a larger caste...' *Lekhapaddhati* (a collection of documents from Gujarat, 9-13 c.) mentions that 'a *rajputra* could apply to a *ranaka*' and it illustrates them acquiring key positions in the power structure. Jaunpur inscription of 1217 associate them with land. According to Irfan Habib the next stage in the development begins with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. *Ranas* and *rautas* are mentioned in Minhaj-us Siraj's account of 1259. Barani (c. 1358) also refers to them as 'chiefs (*ranas*) and military captains (*rautas*) in the context of the period prior to Alauddin Khalji's reign (1296-1316). However, from Alauddin Khalji's period onwards the words in common usage were *chaudhuris*, *khots* and *muqaddams*. 'The *ranaka* and *rauts* when subjugated remained fairly autonomous, being obliged mainly to pay tribute...Such a situation changed when the



sultan's (Alauddin's) administration began to aim at a larger tax collection, and the tributary chiefs came to be pressed into the position of intermediaries, responsible for tax collection. The rural magnate, who replaces *ranaka* or *rana*...is then the *chaudhury*...As for the *raut* we find him replaced by the *khot*...' (Habib, 2005) The 1353 proclamation of Firuz has combined *muqaddams* (largely Hindus), *mafrozis* (state appointees to control land), and *maliks* (revenue free grantees) (largely Muslims), under one single title *zamindars*. Irfan Habib argues that, 'One may think of *mafrozis* as the state's nominees in place of *ranas* or *chaudhuri* and of *maliks* as those who, holding tax-free lands (like the *khots*), could join the ranks of the local dominant elements'. Thus, since then, *the zamindars tended to form a comprehensive category embracing all kinds of superior right holders*.

In the Mughal period *zamindars* often belonged to dominant castes. The nature and pattern of their rights and perquisites varied as per the rights of a particular clan/ caste. Mughal *zamindars* possessed forts and maintained armed retainers. Abul Fazl records that the total strength of the *zamindars*' retainers was 384,558 cavalry and 427,057 infantry and 1863 elephants, 4260 canon pieces and 4500 boats. Similarly, *bhomias* in Rajasthan maintained *garhis* (forts). We do get number of *chitthis* in Rajasthan that are full of complaints against the oppression and terror of the *bhomias*. They even did not spare the local traders and frequently looted and harassed them. At times it was difficult for the state to collect revenue from such turbulent *zamindars* (thus called *zortalab*) and *bhomias*. Many a time *raiyat* also supported the *zamindars* on account of the caste/clan ties. They were able to enlist the support of peasants at time of crisis/conflict against the state or *jagirdar/mansabdar*. Irfan Habib comments that 'Aurangzeb's official historians employ the word *zamindarana* in the sense of disloyal or treacherous conduct. The attitude reflects the suspicions of the Mughal ruling class towards chiefs and lesser *zamindars* who, because of their armed power, always posed a challenge to it. There was also here, possibly, a cultural divide as well: a contempt of the urban-based elite for the rural magnates'. Irfan Habib contends that, 'In such accession to *zamindari* status there usually followed a process of 'Rajputization' ...Had, perhaps, modern conditions not intervened, a number of Jat *zamindaris* would have entered the Rajput caste'.

The spread of *ijara* (revenue farming) system in Rajasthan during the late seventeenth century led to the rise of a new class of territorial magnates – the *thikanadars*.

### 17.1.2 Peasants and Agricultural Labourers

Peasants were not a homogeneous group. The rich peasants often formed part of the rural elite. They were commonly termed as *khwud kashta*, *kalantaran*, or *paltis* (resident cultivators, in Maharashtra they were known as *thani*; while in eastern Rajasthan they were called *gharuhala* and in western Rajasthan the privileged class of *muqati* and *prasati* formed this category) and *halmir* in Persian documents. They possessed their own granary, well, house, and ploughs. They used to get their land cultivated with the help of hired labour in addition to their family labour.

Next to the elite were the ordinary peasants (*raiyat*, *reza riaya*, *karsas*) in the rural hierarchy. They formed majority in the village. The *pai/pahi kasht* (in western Rajasthan they were known as *osari*, *bahrla gaon ka*; outside cultivators), and the *muzarian* (share croppers) were next in the hierarchy. There appears to have existed considerable economic differentiation. This economic differentiation, according to Irfan Habib, got 'reinforced and consolidated by the caste system'.

*Pahis* (their counterpart in the Deccan was *upari*) were not the resident cultivator but they were peasants cultivating the lands in villages other than their own. Usually they were the migrants from the neighbouring villages/*parganas* to the villages either deserted or where cultivable land was available. They were generally assessed at concessional rates (1/3 of the produce). The village *patel* (village headmen) normally

played an important role in bringing these new *asamis* (*pahis*). State encouraged the *pahis* to settle in new villages. In such cases ploughs, oxen, manure and money were provided by the state. There appears to be a tendency on the part of higher castes to opt for *pahi* (outside cultivators) cultivation and get the assessment done at concessional rates. There is also some evidence to suggest that there was a tendency on their part to convert the *pahi* land into *khwud kashta* holdings. However, they did not possess the right to sell their holdings or assign them on *ijara* (revenue farming).

The differential rate of revenue was assessed on the basis of caste. *Raiyat/karsas* were assessed at the highest rate. Thus the burden of taxation was probably highest upon the peasants in medieval period. A late seventeenth century *dastur-ul amal* of *pargana* Jhak in eastern Rajasthan clearly illustrates that the *raiya*t had to pay at the rate of 50 per cent of the produce, while *patels*, *patwaris*, *mahajans*, and *pahis* paid 40 per cent; the Rajputs were to pay 25-33 per cent; while the *chaudhuris* and *qanungoes* were charged even less (25 per cent). *Khwud kashta* peasants were also exempted from paying their cesses like house and marriage taxes. However, they were not exempted from paying *gaon kharch* (*malba*; village expenses). These small peasants were constantly under debt for meeting the expenses for purchasing seed, plough, oxen, etc. Mughal state acknowledged (Aurangzeb in one of his *farman*) that the peasants lived in debt for subsistence.

The *pahis* had the permission to build their own establishments (*chhaparbandi*) and they possessed their own ploughs. These *pahis* were instrumental in the growth and expansion of cultivation. Since the land was available in abundance these *pahis* could assume the proprietorship (*malik*). Thus the *khwud kasht* (self cultivated) and *pahi kasht* were infact not mutually exclusive categories, instead the division between the two was not very rigid. However, during the nineteenth century as a result of introduction of proprietorship laws the position of the *pahis* got reduced to tenants-at-will.

The *muzarian* were the tenants who used to cultivate the land of superior castes/landholders. They also served as state sponsored tenants. In that case they were asked to cultivate surplus lands or abandoned lands. In the village there were also share-croppers. They were referred to in Rajasthani documents as *sanjhedars*. Rajasthani documents show that these share-croppers were assessed at differential rates. One who belonged to superior castes was normally assessed at concessional rates; while the peasants had to pay the land tax at normal rates.

In western Rajasthan we come across another category of peasants called *basi*. Colonel James Tod mentions that they were neither *gola* (slave) nor free. Bhadani (1999) on the basis of *Jalor Vigat* identifies these *basi* peasants as those peasants who 'would move wholesale with their master to new settlements'. They were not necessarily cultivating the land of the village where they would reside instead they could cultivate more than one village's land. While there was presence of exclusive *basi* villages, there were certain villages, which were both *basi* and *raiya*t. The caste composition of the *basi* and *raiya*t villages shows that no *basi* or *raiya*t cultivator belonged to the menial caste. Gujars were entered as *basi* but not as *raiya*t in western Rajasthan. Rajputs formed the highest group among the *basi* cultivators. This shows that probably all major agricultural castes were part of *basi* cultivating castes while menial castes remained outside the fold.

Generally speaking peasants were hard pressed. Even though they were proprietors, their position was almost like semi-serfs for they were not allowed to abandon the land. In case of their flight officials were asked to bring them back by the use of force. Peasants often took money from moneylenders to pay land revenue, and for seeds, oxen, etc. as well as for maintaining their life. On account of high interest

rates these loans amounted to as high as five times the principal amount in some cases.

The cultivation of superior landholders largely depended upon agricultural labourers (*majurs, halis*). These landless labourers/‘menial castes’ formed about one sixth to one fifth of the village population. The ‘menial castes’ were prohibited to take on agriculture thus provided a vast battery of ‘reserve’ labour force. Tanners, scavengers, dhanuks, etc., when not pursuing their professions, worked as agricultural labourers. They were compelled to perform *begar* (forced labour) by the superior castes. The agricultural labourers/menials were so crucial in the rural society, comments Irfan Habib, that they formed ‘pillar of Indian peasant agriculture’. He also suggests the presence of ‘pauperised peasants often turned into wage-labourers’. But such peasant labourers were limited.

Another important aspect of medieval rural society was complete absence of agricultural slaves, though the slavery was rampant in the urban areas.

### 17.1.3 Stratification in the Rural Society

The above description clearly points out that the medieval rural society was highly stratified. This stratification was the result of many factors a) Resource base – availability of seeds, oxen, agricultural implements, Persian wheel, wells for irrigation, etc.; and b) Caste also intensified the stratification – the higher castes were assessed at lower rates and lower castes had to pay revenue at much higher rate; c) nature and pattern of crops produced further intensified the gulf – those who could produce cash crops would be better placed than those cultivating food crops. The differentiation further deepens on the basis of those who reaped one crop a year and those growing more than 4-5 crops. Referring to the  *khasra-jamabandi* documents (AD 1776) of *pargana* Chatsu (eastern Rajasthan) S.P. Gupta highlights that out of the 36 cultivators 16 cultivated one crop only, the next 11 cultivated 2-4 crops; while 9 cultivated more than 5 crops. Out of these nine cultivators two were *patels* (village headmen). The  *khasra* documents (AD 1791) of *qasba* Soabdaspur, *pargana* Sawai Jaipur also show the same trend where 6-9 crops were produced by 6 *patels*. Irfan Habib argues that the peasants cultivating more crops ‘usually cultivated larger areas of land’.

Irfan Habib states that the claims on individual property ‘gave rise to condition of social hierarchy’ in the medieval period. He adds that, ‘the retrogressive nature of the land tax was also likely to assist the process of differentiation...’ While commercialization on the one hand resulted in intensification of social stratification, on the other hand it led to increase in cash flow and thus added prosperity. According to Satish Chandra monetisation, cash nexus and natural calamities ‘accentuated the process of social segmentation’. But Chetan Singh thinks that it definitely benefited the prosperity of the ‘small peasants’ in the Punjab region. For him ‘social stratification was greater in the more developed region... Such change was more noticeable at the level of intermediary *zamindars*’. As a result of commercialisation of agriculture at Bayana, chief centre of indigo production, many rich merchants involved themselves in its production thus turned into farmers.

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## 17.2 SOCIAL FORMATION IN THE TRIBAL REGIONS

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The tribes were largely semi-nomadic in nature and of pastoral variety. During our period the nomadic character of the tribes was limited. Munhta Nainsi in his *Marwar-ra-pargana-ri-Vigat* mentions the Mina tribal of western Rajasthan as cultivators, while Mers were entered as revenue payers and agriculturists. In the Punjab region tribes like the Bhattis and the Jats were more or less settled in a particular region.

Pastoral/tribal societies largely recognized the 'collective' claim over land and its use. Therefore they were comparatively more egalitarian. But as they adopted settled agriculture hierarchy crept in. Yusufzai clan of the Afghans in Swat valley became land owning peasants but their counterpart Faqirs, who were shepherds and labourers, were to stay outside the tribe and were not allowed to be part of the tribal assembly (*jirga*). Other clan members were not to be taxed but Faqirs were to pay taxes. But such stratification was otherwise not evident among other Afghan tribes. (Habib, 2005)

### 17.2.1 Peasantisation of the Tribal Society

The dominant form of sustenance among the tribal communities was pastoralism. Nonetheless tribes' response to situations was different as per their ecological surrounding and situations. There was subtle movement of the tribals towards sedentarisation. This process of sedentarisation of the pastoralists continued unabated throughout the medieval period. Chetan Singh believes that the commercialization of agriculture and the increase in the extent of cultivation were the two crucial factors behind this transformation. The assimilation of tribes into rural social categories could be discerned by different terminology used for them by modern historians and contemporary chroniclers. They called them *zamindars*, peasants, chiefs, etc.

In the case of Jat tribe this process is clearly evident. As they moved northwards they abandoned pastoralism and opted sedentary agriculture. Yuan Chwang (AD 647) mentions them as cattle herders. Similarly, in the *Chachnama* (Arabic 9th century; and Persian translation c. 1216 AD) they were referred to as pastoralists, soldiers and the boatmen. Alberuni (c. 1030 AD) records them as 'cattle-owners and low Sudra people'. Irfan Habib (1976) argues that their northward migration in southern Punjab from Sindh towards Multan occurred sometime around 11th century. Babur mentions Jats and Gujars residing in the hills of Nil-Ab and Bhera. By sixteenth century they emerged as settled agriculturalists and prominent *zamindars* in the region. By sixteenth century they became widespread in the Punjab region. There occurred a great transformation of the Jats from pastoralists to 'vigorous peasants' during the four centuries following eleventh century. In the seventeenth century *Dabistan-i Mazahib* records them as 'lowest caste of the Vaishyas'. Irfan Habib observes that the Jat migration is accompanied by sudden appearance of Persian wheel in the region of Lahore, Dipalpur and Sirhind. Thus he suggests that 'the Persian wheel lay behind at least part of the Jatt's conversion to agriculture and their expanding settlements'. Chetan Singh (1985) argues that Persian wheel was not 'fundamental necessity to the extension of cultivation' and 'Persian wheel was not entirely co-extensive with the area which had a predominantly Jatt peasantry'. Chetan Singh (1991) further argues that the Jats' transformation into sedentarisation was influenced by 'the areas in which they resided or chose to migrate'; climate and 'topography facilitated even encouraged such a process of sedentarisation'. Chetan Singh underlines the fact that the same tribe existing in two distinct areas not necessarily reflecting the same 'socio-economic similarity'. However, even once they sedentarised their preference to keep animal husbandry continued to remain an important socio-economic feature of their social system. During Humayun's period in *pargana* Patti Haibatpur Afghans were recorded as *zamindars* later in Akbar's period they got replaced by the Jat *zamindars*. Jats thus moved up in the existing social hierarchy. Chetan (1991) accepts that this change was prompted more as a result of the 'socio-economic developments' rather than political interference'. However, we do get instances of creation of *zamindaris* as a result of state action. While sedentarisation of one section of the Jats took place quite early; another section living in inhospitable terrain continued with pastoralism. The process of the transition of the Jats from pastoral to settled agriculturalists was by no means complete in the seventeenth century.

The tribes like Ghakkars and Khokkars experienced the same process of assimilation in Punjab. This encroachment often met with resistance. By 19<sup>th</sup> century the Khokkars' presence among Jats and Rajputs points to their assimilation. Babur mentions Jat villages with Ghakkar chiefs. Ghakkar chiefs were incorporated into the mainstram by the Mughals who granted them *mansabs*. Gujjars were also assimilated by the same process. Akbar established a separate town Gujarat for them. Similar was the case of the Bhattis bordering Rajasthan. They continued as pastoralists even in the nineteenth century. While they were mentioned as rebels of Lakhi Jangal by Jahangir they were the noted *zamindars* in the Bet Jalandhar Doab and Bari Doab regions of the Punjab.

The tribal societies that got assimilated into agricultural society appear to have subsumed their tribal identity with some sort of 'caste' in the existing rural caste based multi-layered hierarchical society. The social position of these tribals so assimilated into the rural society was often fragile. Though in certain cases, like Ghakkars in the north-west, who dominated over the sedentary agriculturists, in general there appears to be subordination of the tribals to the settled agriculturists, particularly as seasonal labourers or else employed as soldiers. Niccolao Manucci (1656-1712) refers to employment of Bhattis of Lakhi Jangal in the military service of the *faujdar*. With increasing commercialization there was more demand for labour force. This requirement was fulfilled to a certain extent, at least in the peripheral areas surrounded by hills and mountains, by the tribal population.

D.D. Kosambi in his *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* argues that tribal 'elements being fused into a general society' once tribes got assimilated into the broader social structure. Their status in the hierarchical *varna* categories largely depended on the profession they pursued. Agricultural communities, gereally speaking, joined the peasant caste of that region. However, the hunting-gathering tribal groups generally formed the lowest ranks, outside the four fold *varnas*. Irfan Habib believes that the tribals formed a substantial part of rural 'menial proletariat'.

### 17.2.2 Exchange

Tribals were generally represented as notorious highway robbers involved in loot and plunder by the contemporary historians. Bhattis were particularly mentioned by the contemporary historian Bal Krishan Brahman (early years of Aurangzeb's reign) and traveller Niccolao Manucci (1656-1712) as plunderers and raiders in the region of Lakhi Jungle. Around Attock region Khattars were involved in robbery and sedition. Plunder was their means of livelihood. The difficult terrain provided them easy route to escape. According to Chetan Singh (1991) the chief reason behind these constant raids and plunder were their 'non-pastoral requirements' (foodgrains, cloth, etc.).

The process of assimilation, to a certain extent, depends upon the pace of the economic growth. The greater the economic growth faster would be the assimilation. During the medieval period, since state's interest was in expanding cultivation to maximise the revenue returns, it often resulted in clashes between the two. The state often tried to expand at the cost of the forest/tribal regions. Likewise, the tribals/pastoralists were in constant requirement for agricultural and craft products, particularly cloth. Thus there had to be a constant link between the pastoralists and the sedentary agriculturists. This reliance and exchange between the two continued unbroken.

In certain strategically located areas this interaction resulted in the involvement of the tribals in trade and they functioned as crucial link in the trading network. Lohani Afghans were the known tribal traders in the Ghazni (Ghazna) region. Their migration to India was a result of their movement in the territory to procure goods from India for trade. They served as the mediators and crucial links in the overseas trade. Alexander Burnes argues that their seasonal migration suggests links 'either coincidentally or intentionally' with the trading communities. Some smaller tribal groups

must be operating in this trading network, though at comparatively modest level, what B. R. Grover refers to in case of Gujjars of Punjab, who used to exchange merchandise in small quantity during their seasonal movements.

The Juns and Khattias of Punjab were the suppliers of butter to the towns. Supply of refined butter from *sarkar* Hissar Firuza to the imperial kitchen must have been supplied by the pastoral communities of the region. Bhadani (1999) has calculated the total amount of *ghi* extracted in the form of tax amounted to 21775 *sers* in *pargana* Phalodi in western Rajasthan for the year 1667-68. He mentions that a *Qanungo Bahi* records that total amount of *ghi* transported for sale in 1662 amounted to approximately 650 maunds from *khalisa* villages (villages whose revenues were reserved for imperial treasury). *Majith* or *madder* was brought for sale in the market was actually procured from the Abor and Miri tribals of Assam. Gumlac was also obtained from hills of Assam and Himachal. Honey and wax were also largely the forest produce. Timber was the regular item of supply via riverine route from the hills. Lahore boat-building industry survived on timber obtained from the mountain regions of Punjab. Muhammad Kazim (1668) mentions that the fine aloe-wood was obtained in huge quantity from the mountains of Assam from the Nang (Naga) tribe inhabiting the mountains. Similarly, musk that was largely produced in Kashmir and Assam, Tavernier (1640-67) reports that he bought musk worth 26000 rupees at Patna. This suggests hectic exchange of forest/hill produce during the medieval period. Mirza Haider Doughlat (1546) in his *Tarikh-i Rashidi* informs us about the involvement of Tibetan nomads in trade with India. They used to carry sheep loads at times as much as 10000 and used to return back with rice, clothes, sweets, grains, etc. Interestingly, these transactions used to take place in the hills itself.

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### 17.3 CASTE IN THE RURAL SOCIETY

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‘Caste’ was at the ‘core’ of the rural social structure. No aspect of rural society could well be explained without understanding caste equations. Irfan Habib comments that ‘the caste system remained an important pillar of the system of class exploitation in medieval India’. Babur found it somewhat astonishing that, ‘In our countries the people who are nomads of the steppes are distinguished by names of different tribes; but here (in Hindustan) people settled in the country and villages are distinguished by names of tribes’. Generally speaking, Indian villages consisted of one caste only. Though, instances of presence of more than one caste in a single village are not absent at the same time. Munhta Nainsi also refers *basi* (settlers) peasants brought from outside by the local potentates. These settlers were from various caste groups.

Caste was the major component in establishing hierarchy in the rural society, particularly in the multi-caste villages. Athat Ali proposes that in the medieval period, ‘The caste defined who could be a peasant; it created hereditary menial labourers to sustain peasant agriculture; and it provided for the village artisans and servants to serve the material and social needs of the peasant’. In the rural set up superior castes enjoyed the privileged position. Higher castes peasants, on the basis of superiority of their castes, were assessed at concessional rates as compared to the *raiyyat* (ordinary peasants). The  *khasra* papers (AD 1808) of  *mauza* Piplod,  *pargana* Jaipur clearly point out that the superior castes were assessed at much concessional rates. While an ordinary cultivator was taxed at Rs. 2 per  *bigha*,  *mahajans* and Brahman and new  *asami* paid at the rate of Rs. 1.50 per  *bigha*; while  *chaudhuris* and Rajputs were charged only Rs. 1.25 per  *bigha*. (S.P. Gupta) Even the resource base of the superior castes was distinctly larger than the  *raiyyats* and the menial castes. The documents from eastern Rajasthan clearly suggest that the land holdings held by the superior castes were much larger than the  *raiyyats*. The superior castes were even able to produce cash crops in large amount as compared to  *raiyyat* and menial castes. If we analyse caste-wise distribution pattern of Persian wheel owned by individual peasants in  *pargana* Jalor in western Rajasthan, it confirms that large amount of

resource base was concentrated in the hands of the superior castes during the medieval period. The table given below clearly points out that the rural resources (Persian wheels) were almost wholly monopolised by the superior castes (Rajputs, Brahmans, Patels).

**Caste-wise Break-up of Persian-wheels in Jalor (Western Rajasthan)**

Caste of Owners	Number of Persian-wheels	% of the Total
Rajputs	232	46.96
Brahmans	138	26.32
Sutra (carpenter)	37	7.49
Ghanchi	18	3.64
Kunbhar	14	2.83
Raibari	10	2.02
Mali	10	2.02
Duhar	7	1.42
Patiyar	5	1.07
Mina	4	0.80
Muhta	3	0.61
Dhedh	3	0.61
Jogi	2	0.40
Sirvi	2	0.40
Jagarwal	2	0.40
Nirwan	2	0.40
Bhat	1	0.20
Bhanbhi	1	0.20

**Source:** B.L. Bhadani (1993), 'Some Aspects of Village Society in Marwar during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century', *Rajasthan History Congress*, Jodhpur Session; See also Bhadani (1999), p. 122.

**Caste-wise Break-up of Cattle in Pargana Mauzabad (Eastern Rajasthan)**

Caste	Mauza Jhak		Mauza Pachal	
	Number of Asamis	Cattle	Number of Asamis	Cattle
Patel	6	28	2	12
Patwari	1	9		
Jat	7	16	12	30
Ahir	14	38		
Nai	3	5		
Gujar	4	8		
Brahman	6	12	5	15
Kumbhar	2	4		
Teli	2	2		
Chipro	2	10		
Kharwal	5	12		
Khati			1	2
Miscellaneous	62	185	10	35

**Source:** Gupta, S.P., 'Agrarian Stratification of Peasants and Superior Right Holders in Eastern Rajasthan'.

*Ain* (c.1595) records the *zamindars* by castes. Since these *zamindars* maintained fortresses and armed retainers, Irfan Habib comments that there appears 'undoubted connection between caste and power'. Munhta Nainsi in his 17<sup>th</sup> century compilation on Rajasthan, *Marwar-ra-pargana-ri-vigat* has also recorded the inhabitants of each village by their peasant castes. But we do find other villages in the same *parganas*, i.e. Merta, where both Jats and Rajputs were living side by side.

Higher castes, such as Brahmans, Rajputs, Banias, Charans, etc., generally did not work in the fields. They used to get their lands cultivated by wage labourers or through the system of *begar* by the menial caste labour. Denzil Ibbetson while writing about the Rajput peasants of Haryana comments that, "He cultivates badly, for his women are more or less strictly secluded and never work in the fields, while he considers it degrading to actually follow the plough, and will always employ hired ploughmen if he can possibly afford it". Thus caste was one of the main factors of rural differentiation.

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## 17.4 SOCIAL MOBILITY

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Sociologists and historians debate over the mobility aspect of caste. Max Weber is highly critical of the caste being the main hindrance in the mobility of professions in India. However, high degree of commercialization in the rural areas appears to be one of the major factor instrumental in social mobility and change. Referring to the Punjab region Chetan Singh (1991) argues that 'the encroachment of the market created possibilities of greater social mobility in a rural community where custom permitted only a marginal change in the social status.'

Irfan Habib mentions a *zamindari* sale in *pargana* Sandila in which a non-Muslim carpenter sold his *milkiyat* of a village to two non-Muslims of Kalawar (distiller) caste. Mulla Daud (1379) refers to one Brahman leading a *tanda* (caravan of bullocks) from Puri in Orissa to Govar in eastern U.P. (Satish Chandra, 2005)

The professional class of *mahajans* was not necessarily the 'preserve' of the Banias. Dilbagh Singh's study on eastern Rajasthan suggests the presence of Brahman moneylenders who not only used to lend money but also provided surety (*malzamini*). A Brahman family of Merta who held *sasna* (revenue free grants) as *katha* narrators to the village temple they engaged in all sorts of moneylending. They charged from the peasants for lending money for sowing purposes an interest as high as 36 per cent. Nainsi records Bhojags, who were a priestly class, as *mahajans*. (Bhadani, 1999) Similarly, S.P. Gupta mentions that in eastern Rajasthan some wage labourers (*majurs*), when they obtained bullocks of their own, got the allotment of land in their favour as peasants.

Transformation of tribals from nomads and pastoralists into sedentary agriculturists and their interaction with settled societies led to cultural transformation of these tribes. In this regard mobility of the Jats is worth mentioning. The Jats, a pastoral tribe of 8<sup>th</sup> century Sind assumed the status of peasants/*zamindars* by sixteenth century. In spite of initial resistance, the tribals were brought into the fold of traditional Hindu social structure. The tribals of Jharkhand/Chhotanagpur and also the Mongoloid Tharus got subsumed into the kshatriya fold and called themselves as Raj Gonds, Raj Bhars, Chyavanavasi Cheros (claimed descent from *rishi* Chyavana), etc. Cheros started worshipping Hindu and Buddhist images along with the worship of their traditional deity. Buchanan mentions them eating and mixing freely with the Rajputs and wearing sacred thread. In Ranchi and Chhotanagpur region presence of huge network of temples also suggests the same process of assimilation of the Bhumij and other tribals into the Hindu social structure. The construction of fabricated genealogies to assume kshatriya status clearly points out the upward movement of the tribals in the region. Popularisation of legends emphasising the association of 'Hindu' gods like Shiva and Parvati; and Pandavas and Hanuman helped greatly in the acculturation of tribals.



Irfan Habib remarks that this process of mobility in the caste based society was often accompanied by a process of 'sanskritisation'. However, where 'sanskritisation' failed, argues Habib, 'monotheistic movements condemned the ideology of the caste system'. Almost all great *bhakti* saints hailed from lower castes. (for details see Bolck 6, Unit 22 of the present Course)

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## 17.5 RURAL ARTISANS AND THE VILLAGE SERVANTS

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The relationship of the artisans and the village menials/servants (*kamins*; Ziauddin Barani has used the term *balahar* for them) vis-à-vis other members of the village community forms part of one of the most interestingly argued debates among the historians, anthropologists, and sociologists. Karl Marx calls it the existence of 'an unalterable division of labour' wherein the rural artisans and menials served the village as a whole in lieu of customary payments in kind or in the form of land assignments. Max Weber terms this caste-based labour as *demiurgic* labour. But W.H. Wiser in his *The Hindu Jajmani System* argues that in the *jajmani* ties services were provided by the village servants to individual families. Louis Dumont, on the basis of this, concluded that there existed 'ritualistic relationship between the upper caste families (the Brahmans – the pure) and the menials (artisans and labourers – barber, etc. – the impure). But such relationship only existed in case of family priests. (for details see Unit 18 of the present Block). In contrast, it appears that the services rendered by the village artisans were provided for the entire village and not to individual families. Documents from western Rajasthan even show that the services of priests to temples and that of *charan* were also for the entire village and not for individual families. Hira, a *charan* of village Kaleti, *pargana* Jalor surrendered his share once he decided not to render service to the village. We hear as early as 1000 AD (from the *Lekhapaddhati* documents of Gujarat), about the presence of *panch karuka* viz. carpenters, ironsmiths, potters, barbers and washermen who received grains from the peasants in lieu of their services. This hereditary basis of village servants was mainly instrumental in creating the 'self-sufficient' villages. It also hampered the 'mobility' aspect of the artisan classes to a 'certain' extent.

There appears hardly any change in the social status of the menial castes. Their subjugation by the superior caste peasants continued unabated. Irfan Habib argues that 'the basic line of division...between peasants and the landless...was set socially by the caste system which by compulsion prevented the 'menial' castes from tilling the soil on their own'. They served as 'reserve workforce'. The *jajmani* ties were the most crucial aspect of village artisans' relationship with other members of the village community. The village artisans were of two types, independent and the ones tied with the entire village community. The latter rendered compulsory customary service in lieu of which they received customary share from the agricultural produce. Rural artisans under '*jajmani*' ties were paid from the common village fund for rendering service to the entire village.

The loose category of village artisans referred to in the medieval texts were potter (*kumhar*), leather worker (*bhanbhi*, *dejar*), barber (*nai*), ironsmith (*lohar*), carpenter (*sulhar*), washerman (*dhobi*), rope maker (*sargara*), tailor (*darzi*), sweeper, goldsmith (*sonar*), sharpener (*siqligar*), cobbler (*mochi*), leather worker (*dhedh*), bearer of burden (*mawal*), cotton carder (*pinjara*). Tailor (*darzi*), sharpener (*siqligar*), and cotton carder (*pinjara*) are not found in the list of *balutedar* in the Deccan. In western Rajasthan we come across terms like *khut*, *mahtar* (counterpart of *vadilpana* in the Deccan) indicating the head/chief of a particular profession/artisan class. We also get references of *pawan jat* or *pauni jat* (professional castes) carrying the suffix/prefix of *thirty six* indicating the traditional number of artisans like the twelve (*bara*) *balutas* of Maharashtra. The prefix *pawan* (*pawana*) is interesting. It means payment-receiving castes. Nainsi elaborates that *pauni* were service class who rendered service to various sections of the rural society. The Brahman priests, *charan*

(bard), *qazi* (Muslim jurist), *bangiya* (*muezzin*, prayer caller), Joshi (astrologer), and *bhat* (genealogist) possessed claim over peasants' produce but did not form part of *pauni jat*. Presence of *khut* and *mahtar* also emphasises the presence of hierarchy within the same group of rural servants. It is also significant that state used to charge (probably one time) a fixed amount from artisans for establishing themselves in a particular village. Probably it was extracted by the state for granting permission/privilege to monopolise a particular service by a particular family in the concerned village. Once these rural servants abandon the village, on their re-entry they had to pay once again to the state re-entry fee. Interestingly, the *khut* and *mahtar* were assessed at much lower rate than other peasant castes. In fact, in general, as compared to other peasant castes rural servants (*sonar*, *darzi*, *lohar*) were assessed at concessional rates.

Brahmans and *charans* served village as a whole and they were also employed by individual families. However, Bhadani (1999) argues that in western Rajasthan the term *jajman* was used with reference to *charan* and Brahmans in the sphere of individual/specific ruling families and refers to patron-client relations.

These village servants could be paid either in cash (called *surkhi* in western Rajasthan; *khalek* in Shekhawati region; *hakpalla* in Amber; and *agwar* in Benaras region) or in kind (could be in the form of plough or Persian wheel) or in the form of land (called *pasaita* in western Rajasthan; given at concessional rates or its revenue free assignment). In addition they also received miscellaneous supplementary collections. B.L. Bhadani (1999) has calculated the remuneration to the village servants in western Rajasthan in *pargana* Jalor ranging from 0.12 to 2.00 per cent. In Jodhpur *pargana* the practice of granting land to village servants was prevalent in almost every village.

***Sukhri and Rekh, Jalor (1663)***

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	
<b>Name of the Village</b>	<b><i>Rekh</i> (in rupees)</b>	<b><i>Sukhri</i> (in rupees)</b>	<b>C as % of B</b>
Syana	4000	7.50	0.19
Godhan	2000	4.00	0.20
Samujo	2000	8.00	0.40
Thanwlo	3000	3.50	0.12
Un	1500	3.00	0.20
Harji	500	10.00	2.00
Alasano	500	8.00	1.60
Mithri	500	2.00	0.40
Thobau	250	2.00	0.80
Akeli	3000	21.00	0.70
Chiparwara	1600	16.50	1.03
Niblano	700	7.50	1.07
Dhanani	500	4.50	0.90
Bhagal	700	8.00	1.14
Dechhu	1200	11.00	0.92
Ahore	1000	3.00	0.30
Pado	500	1.75	0.35
Chainpura	1500	2.50	0.16
Vaghora	500	7.00	1.40
Sirno	1250	7.25	0.58

Source: B.L. Bhadani (1999), p. 142.

*Pasaita* Ploughs, Jodhpur (c.1660)

Rural Society:  
North India

A	B	C
Name of the Village	Total Number of Ploughs	<i>Pasaita</i> Ploughs
Jhalamand	29	3
Unchahero	14	1/2
Kudi	22	6
Dighari	6 1/2	2
Tanawado Khurd	32	7
Tanawado bado	20	4
Pesawas	11	2
Moklawas	8	5
Noghdo Khurd	5	1
Godhawariyo	7	1
Dhingano	16	0

Source: B.L. Bhadani (1999), p. 143.

*Pasaita* lands were granted both by the state and the *pattayats* (*pattas* were revenue assignments and its holders were known as *pattayats*). Rural servants enjoyed *pasaita* as well as received remuneration in cash and kind. It appears that rural servants' position was hereditary and permanent. In *pargana* Jalor a village footman (*payak*) named Pura received back his rights on his return. During the intervening period customary remunerations were enjoyed by another person for rendering services. This presents contrast with Deccan situations. In the Deccan in case of abandonment one had to lose the customary right. Similarly, it was considered an offense in case someone abandoned the service right. In *pargana* Jalor Hiro, a cotton carder, was fined Rs. 41 (a substantial sum) by the state on his return for abandoning the service right. (Bhadani, 1999)

Largely the pattern in the north and the Deccan was quite similar as for the nature and pattern of rural servants' rights and perquisites are concerned. The lower castes worked as agricultural labourers without controlling land. *Jalor Vigat* refers to Nais as forced labourers of the Rathors in Jalor. Similarly, Dhedhs were asked to weed out grass from the fields of the *bhumias*. (Bhadani, 1999) But artisans like Mali, Mina, Raibari, Kharol, Ghanchi/Teli (oil-presser), Sulhan (carpenter), and Kumhar (potter) were engaged in cultivation.

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## 17.6 TRADING GROUPS

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Pedlars and merchants were a common feature of the rural society. Merchants were an important link in the disposal of agricultural produce for revenue payment. They were also important for certain other processes of revenue collection like cartage, sale of grain, etc. Since the state preferred to collect the revenue in cash peasant were eager to sell off the grains immediately after the harvest to make revenue payment. Even when the revenue was collected in kind the state was in hurry to dispose off grains. The need to sell agricultural products at the earliest made the role of rural merchants very significant in the whole operation. During our period we hear for the first time the presence of specialised grain merchants (*karwanis*, *banjaras*). *Multani* merchants (Hindu merchants) also emerged prominent during this period. There appears to be hierarchy among the grain dealers. *Sahs* were usually purchaser of 'revenue grain' and they appear to have operated within the locality and were generally not involved in cross-*pargana* trading. They also acted as moneylenders. Barani mentions that they became enormously rich by advancing loans to the Turkish nobles. *Banjaras* were itinerant merchant class; but anyone involved in transporting grain and other goods in bulk was called a *banjara*.

*Mahajans* (grain dealers and moneylenders) and *bohras* (moneylenders) also occupied an important position in the rural society. Tavernier (1640-1667) comments that, 'In India a village must be very small indeed if it has not a money changer, called a shroff'. *Mahajan* generally hailed from the caste of Banias. But the word implies anyone involved in moneylending and trade. They provided the crucial link with the larger commercial world. They also acted as broker between the state and the peasant. The peasants largely depended upon this class to meet their financial requirements for agricultural as well as non-agricultural purposes (particularly in times of natural calamity), at times even the *jagirdars* and *zamindars* had to depend on them for their monetary needs. In eastern Rajasthan they were legally entitled for *biyaj-ghiwai* (interest) and it was binding on the *bohras* to advance agricultural loans. These *bohras* used to lend money to the state and the state in turn used to advance loans to the peasants. The *bohras* preferred this mode for it provided better security to their money.

These loans were not necessarily in cash, it could be in the form of bullocks, seed, plough, manure, etc. These loans were often detrimental and resulted in loss of peasant land to *mahajans*. Dilbagh Singh provides an instance of how in 1763 in *qasba* Chatsu out of 350 *ryot* (peasants) lands 175 were either purchased or bought by the *mahajans* of the village at the time of scarcity. At times these *mahajans* themselves got involved in agricultural operations through hired labour.

The rate of interest charged by the *mahajan* was very high (10-25 per cent in eastern Rajasthan and upto 36 per cent in western Rajasthan). Often it resulted either in the form of the flight of the peasantry or else in the sale of land. Dilbagh Singh reports one such case of Khiwa Jat of village Choru, *pargana* Fagi in eastern Rajasthan who was unable to pay the loan of the *mahajan* and committed suicide. The land was finally sold to recover the loan after his death. Peasants' inability to pay interest along with principal often led to the loss of land holdings. The moneylenders often appropriated superior rights in land through this method. Rural elites, *zamindars*, were often under debt of the *mahajans*. In times of scarcity or famine they even advanced loans to the state. *Mahajans* appeared to be very powerful and influential in the rural society on account of their loan giving capacity. In one of the instance in eastern Rajasthan village community gave him precedence over the *patel* (the village headman). State also provided protection to this class. Jaswant Singh (d. 1678) once ordered his officials to ensure speedy recovery of *mahajans'* loans from the peasants.

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## 17.7 SUMMARY

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Medieval society was generally perceived as 'homogeneous, non-stratified and unchanging'. However, recent researches have shown that the medieval society was highly stratified. Though 'caste' played an important role in determining social relations, social mobility was very much present. Since the land to man ratio was favourable, state's interest was to keep the peasant tied to the land. This period was also marked by large scale peasantisation of the tribals.

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## 17.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) Critically analyse the pattern of rural stratification in the medieval north India.
- 2) Examine the process of peasantisation of the tribal society in the medieval period.
- 3) What role did the 'caste' play in rural society during the medieval period?
- 4) Analyse briefly the position of rural artisans and village servants in the medieval period.

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## UNIT 18 RURAL SOCIETY: PENINSULAR INDIA

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### Structure

- 18.0 Introduction
- 18.1 Structure of the Rural Society
- 18.2 The Rural Society and the Larger World
- 18.3 Rural Society: Deccan
  - 18.3.1 Composition of the Rural Society
  - 18.3.2 Land and Social Hierarchy in the Rural Society
  - 18.3.3 The Village Council
- 18.4 The Village Servants: Deccan
  - 18.4.1 Composition
  - 18.4.2 Services and Remuneration of the *Balutedars*
  - 18.4.3 Status of the *Balutedars*
  - 18.4.4 Other Village Servants
  - 18.4.5 Rural Servants: Debates
- 18.5 Rural Society: South India
  - 18.5.1 Rural Society and Institutions: Seventh to the Twelfth Century AD
  - 18.5.2 Rural Society: Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Century
- 18.6 Summary
- 18.7 Exercises

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### 18.0 INTRODUCTION

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The rural society was not uniform in nature. It differed from region to region in the specific structure of caste, organization of work and distribution of land. There were different types of habitations and settlements that influenced the nature of the rural society. There were peasant villages and non-peasant villages (brahman dominated village). There was single caste and multi-caste villages. In the Tamil region, *brahmadeyas* were Brahman dominated villages and *vellan-vagai urar* or agrarian settlements were predominantly non-brahmanical villages. Both influenced the respective characters of the rural society. (Kesavan Veluthat, 1993.). Villages were also bi-lingual or trilingual. For instance, Dewara in the tribal district of Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh has Marathi and Telugu speaking Hindus and Muslims and three separate tribal groups.

In medieval period, new villages were constantly formed. People were migrating from one place to another. Forest lands were constantly cleared and brought under cultivation and new groups were made to settle down and tribes were transformed into settled peasant groups. All these changes influenced the structure of the rural society. Even the boundaries of the villages differed ranging from natural boundaries like rivers, fields and mountains to artificial or imagined ones, based on caste or community privileges. Several villages with growing population and economic prosperity developed into towns and urban centres. For instance, in the Tamil region several temple towns like Chidambaram and Kanchipuram were originally large agrarian settlements.

All the factors, viz., social organization, size, population and occupation contributed towards the multiple natures of the rural societies. However, despite differences in the rural societies of each village, a common pattern emerges, where the rural elites were mostly priests and landed classes. Social privileges varied according to the social rank and this was related to the rights and control over land.

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## 18.1 STRUCTURE OF THE RURAL SOCIETY

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The rural society had a stratified and complex structure. The social relations based on caste comprised of relations between brahmanas, non-brahmanas and other menial castes. Generally the landed classes belonged to the upper castes. However, there were several landed classes (like Kunbis) who did not have a high caste status but were powerful in the village. The peasants belonged to the lower castes and the rural labourers, who were landless, belonged to the menial castes. Such castes are called 'dominant castes', a concept evolved by the famous anthropologist, M.N. Srinivas. According to him, "A caste is dominant when it is numerically the strongest in the village or local area, and economically and politically exercises a preponderant influence. It need not be the highest caste in terms of traditional and conventional ranking...thus any caste can be dominant, one does not see this in case of untouchables." Though this study is based on contemporary anthropological field analysis of the Okkaligas, a 'dominant peasant caste' in Rampura village of Karnataka, it has relevance for the medieval period too. Caste groups like Reddis, Kammas were not ritually high caste, but wielded power on the basis of superior land rights and the authority to collect taxes on behalf of the state. Hence, in this manner, they were the dominant castes.

Caste relations stratified the rural society on ritual basis. Even within the peasants, there were numerous castes and sub-castes. High peasant castes like the Velalas and Thakurs rarely tilled the land themselves and hired wage labourers and sharecroppers. Within the same peasant caste also there was differentiation. One of the most significant ways in which caste influenced the rural society was evident in the settlement patterns. There were separate settlements of brahmanas, non-brahmanas and menial castes. In South India, such segregated settlements can be seen till day. Although these relations were governed by norms and values of the rural society, the state also played a significant role in shaping these relations. For instance, in the relation between the landholders and the tenant, the state evolved a complex revenue extracting mechanism that altered and influenced the agrarian relations.

Other important rural classes who were poor artisans, service castes and other occupational groups largely designated as *bara-balutas* in the Deccan and *ayas* in South India. They belonged to the lower end of the rural hierarchy.

Despite kinship relations within the caste that contributed to caste solidarities, one should not assume that castes were self-sufficient units. They were economically or otherwise also interdependent. It was not always that the traditional structure of caste had stranglehold over the rural society. The economic relations often freed itself from the caste system. The *jajmani* system, also known as *balutedari* in Maharashtra and *ayas* in Karnataka involved a network of economic relationship and reciprocity between various castes in a hierarchical manner, between the landlords and occupational specialists breaking the myth of caste as self-sufficient unit within the village. Political and economic changes further influenced the caste equations within the rural society, when one group replaced another as the powerful landed elites. For instance, in a village called Ukkal situated in the lower Kaveri valley of the Tamil region, the brahmanas were prosperous landholders controlling the agricultural production till twelfth century. However, by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they were selling their lands. The immediate cause was the heavy taxation imposed by the Vijayanagar rulers. But the decline of this prosperous *brahmadeya* 'should be viewed in the context of agrarian change, particularly differentiation in agrarian society during this period.' The non-brahmanas bought the land in Ukkal, thereby emerging as new local magnates of the village towards the end of Chola rule. (Noboru Karashima, 1992, p.121). Socio-religious movements with their respective ideologies based primarily on *bhakti* undermined the caste status and threw open various avenues for social mobility within the rural society and influenced the changes within the caste structure.

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## 18.2 THE RURAL SOCIETY AND THE LARGER WORLD

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The rural society had always been a part of the wider economy. Many landlords lived outside the village. The *moqasadors* and *jagirdars* had administrative functions within the village, but lived in cities and towns. Since revenue was usually collected in cash, the agricultural surplus was sold outside the village in the markets. In fact, markets provided a space for not only economic, but social interactions between various individuals of different villages. Occupational castes within the villages provided service to the village, but other occupational castes came from outside on occasions like fairs, festivals, marriages and temple worship and rendered services.

While kinship ties strengthened the caste groups within the village, they also cut across the village boundaries fostering social relations between villagers, linking members of every caste to people in other villages. In north India, marriages took place outside the village. This is called exogamy, through which 'extensive' ties were created. But in south India, marriages took place within the same village or nearby villages, with certain near relatives, like cross cousins (father's sister's daughter or son) and cross niece (sister's daughter). This is called endogamy and the ties were 'intensive', operating within a limited social space.

Since the state considered village as a revenue unit and assigned administrative duties primarily, of collecting taxes to various officers and village elites, hence a political network was constantly evolving linking the individual members of the rural society to people occupying various administrative positions within and outside the village. The role of the village community was also seen to be important in this respect.

A village at times had a ritual space like a temple or a Sufi shrine that not only attracted people of that village but also attracted devotees from other villages too. In such a common religious arena, the caste distinctions of the rural society were often blurred.

Thus the rural society of a village was not isolated and self-sufficient. The outside world of cities and politics influenced the rural life in many ways. In fact, it is difficult to separate the internal activities of the village from the external. The rural society becomes the context for meeting and interaction between various larger political, economic and social forces.

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## 18.3 RURAL SOCIETY: DECCAN

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The term used for village in medieval Deccan was *ganva*, *mauje* or *deh*. A bigger village that included a market place was called *kasbe*. The cultivable area comprising of black soil was known as *kali*. *Kali* was divided into blocks called *thal* (derived from Sanskrit word, *sthal*) or land and each *thal* was named after its original proprietor. *Thal* consisted of fields called *shet* or *set* (Sanskrit is *kshetra*) or *zamin*. The inhabited area called *pandhari* comprised of white soil that was unfit for cultivation. The *pandhari* was divided into house-sites, *gharthana* or *gharthikana*, each of which was owned by the *patil* (village headman) and his family, other village officers, peasants and village servants and artisans. When a family left the village and migrated, its land was called *gatkul* (*gat* means gone and *kul* means a lineage or a family) and the house site and the house left behind was called *gatkul gharthana* and *gatkulvada* respectively. Around the cultivable area were the meadows (*kuran*). It was meant for common village use and was called people's meadow (*lokacha kuran*).

### 18.3.1 Composition of the Rural Society

The rural society of Deccan consisted of primarily five groups:

- 1) The large landholders who held administrative positions in the village. They were primarily the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes*.
- 2) Village officers such as the headman or *patil* and *muqaddam*, accountant or *kulkarni* and so on.
- 3) Proprietary peasants called *mirasdars* or *thalkari* or *thalvaik*.
- 4) Temporary peasants called *uparis*.
- 5) Village servants and artisans collectively called *balutedars*.

The *patil* usually belonged to the peasant caste of Kunbis that later came to be assimilated into the Maratha caste. The accountant was generally a *brahmana* and the *balutedars* were usually menials or untouchables. The upper strata of the rural society thus comprised of the *deshmukhs*, *deshpandes*, *patils* and *kulkarni* collectively forming the *zamindar* class and were therefore the rural aristocracy. With large income from the land tenures they maintained large forts and a private army. There was a class of outsiders who served the village residents, but had no status within the rural society. In course of time they became an integral part of the village.

One of the important phenomenon that shaped the rural society in Deccan was the settlement of new villages by bringing land under cultivation. Several Marathi chronicles give us an account of how various lands were settled into villages and the groups involved in this process, who ultimately occupied the village. The settlement of a village called Murud in the Konkan area refers to the first settlers being the Chitpavan *brahmanas* who were granted lands by the king. The documents of Murud describe the members of the rural society. They were rural officers with social and religious duties. *Yavanas* i.e. the Muslims were provided with land on the outskirts of the village where they could build their houses and mosque. Another category of Muslims called the *Navayats* came from the West Coast and settled in the village. Occupational groups like the *sonar* (goldsmith), *gavada* (fisherman), *kumbhar* (potter), *parit* (washerman) and several others were mentioned in the Murud chronicle. Another example is of the Pune region which was a part of Shahji's (Shivaji's father) *jagir*. The region became desolate due to the famines of 1630-31 and invasions of the Adil Shahis of Bijapur. According to the Marathi chronicle, the manager of the *jagir* requested the Mavalas, i.e. a hilly tribe to kill the wild animals and robbers, cut down the forest and settle these areas for cultivation. In return for their service, they would be suitably rewarded. The chronicle states that the manager gave them a legal document ensuring their permanent settlement. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, 'The Indian Village: With Special Reference to Medieval Deccan', General Presidential Address, *Indian History Congress*, Fifty Second Session, Delhi)

In Eastern Deccan, in the region of the Kakatiyas of Warangal (AD 1000-1326) in Andhra Pradesh, the expansion of the agrarian base and transformation of the rural society involved construction of new temples. Such constructions required endowments of land to the temple for the maintenance of the priests, various temple servants and requirements for the worship of the deity. Numerous donations of land, especially the uncultivated forests, were made by the local chiefs, merchants, and the members of the royal family. For example, Mailamba, the sister of the Kakatiya ruler Ganapati was responsible for founding three villages. These lands were cleared of forest, irrigation tanks were built on them and cultivation was initiated. Several tribes who inhabited these forests became peasants and incorporated into the lower rung of the rural society. The *brahmana* functionaries of the temple as well the *brahmana* landholding class remained at the upper end of the hierarchy. The chieftains and their local lineage groups also formed a substantial part of the rural elite. Thus, the



construction of the temples, donation of land and building of irrigation tanks resulted in an increase in the rural population. The temple served as the 'social and political integrator'. It employed the peasants, artisans and pastoralist on the temple lands and for various temple activities and incorporated these different communities of the rural society within a single framework of religion. (Cynthia Talbot, 2001, *Pre-colonial India in Practice: Society, Region and Identity in Medieval Andhra*, OUP, Delhi. p.93-106).

### 18.3.2 Land and Social Hierarchy in the Rural Society

Land and landed rights were the basis on which the various sections in the rural society enjoyed privileges and acquired a certain status. It also defined the relations between the different sections in the village and established a rural hierarchy and stratification. There were six kinds of landed tenures and rights associated with them.

- 1) **Mirasi Tenure:** Originally an Arabic word, *mirasi* meant 'patrimony' or hereditary property'. Therefore, a *mirasdar* held proprietary rights on his *miras* lands. Usually *mirasdars* and their kin groups were the original settlers of the village. Even the state could not infringe upon the *mirasi* rights. In case of infringement of these rights by the village headman, the state would intervene on behalf of the *mirasdars* to stop such violations. If the *miras* holders left the village and returned after a long gap, they and their descendants could reclaim the land by paying the due compensation to the government. Their names were not removed from the village records because according to the tradition, land belonged to those who reclaimed it first and brought it under cultivation.

The *mirasdar* peasants belonged to the Kunbi caste and were permanent residents of the village. They regularly paid land revenue to the state. Though it was not a frequent practice, they could sell their own land. This can be seen from sixteenth century onwards. In the eighteenth century, the village headmen could appropriate the wasteland of their villages as *miras* land and the village assembly could dispose off the wastelands as *miras* lands through sale or gift to the willing peasants.

The *mirasdars* were influential members of the village community and participated in the deliberations of the "village *panchayats* and *gotsabhas* with their symbol 'plough' being affixed on all the *mahajars* (decisions) for attestation". (A.R. Kulkarni, 1992, p.33) They were mostly the rural rich. For instance, the Reddis of Eastern Deccan lived in stone houses and their women wore gold and silver jewellery and the Maratha peasants of the Western Deccan even had one or two slaves in the eighteenth century. (*The Cambridge Economic History of India*, p.472).

- 2) **Upari Tenure:** Peasants in this case were the temporary residents of the village. They usually migrated from their native villages under duress, like famines, destruction due to wars and other calamities. Many of them were tenants on the *mirasi* and *inam* lands. Thus, *upari* tenure was a temporary one and its holder was a tenant-at-will. They also held land on lease. *Upari* peasants could become *mirasdars* on payment of a regular fee, *nazrana*, to the state.

In the seventeenth century, the number of *upari* peasants was small. However, in the eighteenth century their population increased. This was because of the conscious policy of agrarian expansion under the Peshwas in Maharashtra. For expanding cultivation, peasants were needed. Therefore, several *upari* peasants were mobilized from other villages. Incentives in the form of privileges and concessions were promised provided they brought land under cultivation. They were allowed to build their houses on the border of the village and were exempted from house-tax and forced labour. Consequently, numerous peasant groups migrated to the Maratha region in the eighteenth century.

- 3) **State Lands:** was called *sarkarchi sheri*, *sherichen shet*, *khalisa jamin*. These were scattered all over in various villages in the Deccan. State lands were granted in *inam* or allowed for house-sites or were cultivated.
- 4) **Inam Land Tenure:** *Inam* is an Arabic word and means a 'gift'. This was not service tenure but a reward for the services rendered to the village, like religious duties, administrative duties and works of social welfare. An *inam* was created by an agreement called the *inam patra* or *karar* between the state and the individuals. *Inam* lands were held on hereditary basis by an individual or a particular institution. Village officials like *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil*, *kulkarni*, village watchmen, village astrologer and several others held *inam* lands. There were also the *inams* like the *dudhabhat* (milk and rice) and *sadi-choli* (*saree* and bodice) which were given by a king or a chieftain to their daughters for their maintenance. (A.R. Kulkarni, 1992, p.32). *Vritti* (a Sanskrit word, meaning, 'means of subsistence or livelihood') was type of religious *inam* for the office of a priest. In Eastern Deccan, particularly, the Andhra region, land donated to the deity of the temple was called *devaravritti*, or the god's *vritti*. Not only the brahmanas, but also some warriors possessed the *vrittis*. Warriors used this term in connection to the land over which they had proprietary rights and could alienate, i.e. *nija-vritti* (my subsistence grant).
- 5) **Watan Tenure:** Village officers, viz., the *deshmukhs*, *deshpandes*, *patils*, *kulkarni* and one of the *balutedars*, the *Mahar* community (the *Mahars* are discussed in the next section), held large *miras* and *inam* lands and were entitled to certain rights and privileges called *haklavajma*. They also received a certain amount of produce from the peasants and services of the village artisans. All these privileges along with their respective administrative positions (except probably in the case of the *Mahars*) were called the *watan*. The holder of a *watan* was called the *watandar*. *Watan* meant a patrimony which was not only hereditary but also saleable and transferable. *Watandars* of *pargana*, like the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* were superior to the *watandars* of the village, the *patils* and *kulkaranis*. The *watan* was valued, for it was not only a lucrative source of income, but also a symbol of social prestige. Despite acquiring political power and position in the state hierarchy, the Marathas were always keen to retain their original village *watan* which compared to the political power was permanent in nature. Several holders of temporary land tenures like *saranjam*, *jagir*, *mokasa* were always anxious to get these tenures converted to *watan* or *inam* that could remain with their family in perpetuity.
- 6) **Mokasa, Jagir Saranjam Tenures:** These were essentially military tenures. Though they were in principle temporary, in course of time, they became hereditary. Civil functions were often attached to these tenures. These military tenures were common in the seventeenth century in the Sultanate of the Adil Shahis of Bijapur in the north Karnataka region. They were powerful members of the Adil Shahi administration and held offices of the *vazir*, *amir* and *diwan*. In case, the *mokasadors* failed in performing their duties, they were transferred or replaced or sometimes their *mokasas* were confiscated. Like the *watandars* and the *mirasdars*, they also participated in the village councils. According to A.R.Kulkarni, "The *mokasadors* sometimes created sub-tenure to favour their relations or assistants. For instance, Shahaji who was a *mokasadar* of Pune, Supe and Shirval *parganas* under the Adil Shahis, granted a *pot-mokasa* of 36 villages of his Pune *pargana* to his son Shivaji." (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, p.34) According to Satish Chandra, the *mokasa* was a proprietary right in land, whether rent free or at low quit rent or on revenue farming terms on conditions of service. (Satish Chandra, 1982, *Society, the Jagirdari Crisis and the Village*, Delhi, p.106)

The *jagir* tenure was comparatively for a longer period than the *mokasa* tenure. The *sarjam* tenure was purely a military one. Its holders were entitled to a share in the village administration and land revenue. According to A.R. Kulkarni, the practice of granting military tenure was discontinued by Shivaji, for he feared that the *mokasadors* would become powerful at the rural level especially if they united with the sections of the rural aristocracy. (A.R.Kulkarni, p.36). Besides they also oppressed the peasantry. Satish Chandra does not agree and points out that Shivaji continued with this practice. (Satish Chandra, 1982, p.108-123) However, the *mokasa* increased during the Peshwa period, with the aim of encouraging the Maratha *sardars* (chieftains) like the Holkars, Shindes, Pawars and so on to join the military service.

In the Kakatiya kingdom of Eastern Deccan, various landed elements especially the powerful chieftains of the Andhra rural society were incorporated into the Kakatiya political network. These chiefs already possessed hereditary rights over their own plots of land and had a fixed share in the agricultural produce of the village. In lieu of their services to the Kakatiya state, they were granted additional land that was assessed at concessional rates. Such tenure was called *vritti*. These *vritti* lands were cultivated by tenant cultivators. In the post Kakatiya period, such a tenure was called *jivitamu*. Further, in order to incorporate the chiefs and warriors in to the political framework, the Kakatiya state created a new type of tenurial rights over territories called *nayankaramu*. Though better known in connection with the Vijayanagar Empire, the *nayankaramu* was a Kakatiya innovation. These were primarily revenue assignments delegated over several villages. The rights of the holders are difficult to determine. They were also obliged to maintain troops for the State.

Thus, the rural society in Deccan was not a homogeneous unit. Agrarian hierarchy and stratification can be seen in the caste structures as well as in the various classes whose status was based on the land and landed rights. The upper sections always attempted to exploit the peasant groups and were often successful. Tensions were inbuilt within the rural society. The rise of the Marathas can be traced to the tensions primarily within the rural society. The struggle for control over land brought the bigger, middle and smaller *watandars*, *mirasis* and *uparis* in conflict with each other. Shivaji united these different sections of the rural society providing a base for a strong movement. Several peasant groups like the Kunbis, Kolis and some tribes supported Shivaji in lure of loot and a high social status. The Marathas themselves belonged to the Kunbi caste. According to Grant Duff, the Maratha Kunbis were military families who claimed a Rajput-Kshatriya status. One aspect of this movement was the united front of the Marathas and the Kunbis. By joining Shivaji, low caste peasant groups could acquire political power and rise up the social scale. Therefore, the rural society was never stagnant and had avenues for social mobility.

However, there was a scope for co-operative interaction. For instance, in Western Deccan region, the village documents record the attestation of the villagers in landed transactions. In Eastern Deccan, the inscriptions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries refer to village groups called *ashtadash-praja* making endowments of land to the temples. Literally meaning eighteen people; *ashtadash-praja* also implied eighteen castes that represented the entire village. Brahmanas, land controllers (*bhumi-prabhu*) and peasants (*kampu*) are mentioned separately as making donations. Probably they did not belong to the group of eighteen castes. According to Cynthia Talbot, "It is possible that the *ashtadash-praja* was an officially recognised local body with distinct responsibilities in reference to the Kakatiya state, for instance in the sphere of revenue." (Cynthia Talbot, 2001, p.167). Since this body of the 'village collectives' was gifting lands to the temples, it also implies that they were an important part of the temple culture and the Kakatiya state.

Neither was the village a close-knit, self-sufficient unit. Interactions with the neighbouring and distant villages took place. Land was sold to the outsiders. There

was inter-village mobility. In case an outsider bought a land in the village, he need not live there and could visit his land in the village periodically. Similarly, though the village artisans served the village, they were not compelled to remain within the same village. Often they sold their rights to the members of their own caste and migrated elsewhere. They also worked in nearby markets, villages and urban centres to supplement their income.

The interaction of the village with urban classes also took place. Merchants invested in the land and made donations to the temples. For instance, a fourteenth century inscription in Chittapur, Metpalli taluk of Andhra region records an endowment of land to the temple for construction of a tank. The donor was one Bairi Setti, a merchant trader, who had actually purchased the field from the village brahmanas. Bairi Setti did not seem to have economically benefited. However, he was a recipient of religious merit which appeared to be important to him. Talbot (2001, p.96) and Stein (Burton Stein, 1980, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, OUP, Delhi, p.425-426) call this, “rural development entrepreneurship” as it resulted in agrarian expansion and personal gain for the entrepreneur themselves. The State also interacted with the members of the rural society. Numerous peasants were recruited as soldiers. As stated before, there were state lands in the villages, the state invited cultivators, and incorporated the powerful landed aristocracy within the political administration.

### 18.3.3 The Village Council

The village council was called *panchayat* at the village level and *gotsabha* or *majlis* at the *pargana* level. The *panchayat* not only settled disputes within the village, it was also a representative body of the village community set up by the community itself to manage its affairs. There were *jatigota*, *Dharma Sabha* and *Kula-Sabha* to deal with the matters of a particular caste, religion or a group of families. The rules of the caste were quite strict. A document dated 1693 specifies rules regarding the readmission of a converted person to his original caste. The individual was to be readmitted only after consultation with the other caste members. The Poona Shimpi (tailor) community admitted one person. This was disapproved by the Shimpis of the Saswad region on the ground that they were not consulted and that the Poona Shimpis could not alone decide on an issue affecting the entire Shimpi community. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, p.43).

The numbers of the members of the village council was not fixed. At the village level, the *panchayat* comprised of all *watandars*, *mirasdars* and *balutedars*. *Balutedars* also played an important part in the village council which will be discussed in the next section. At the *pargana* level, the *pargana* and village hereditary officers, state officials and the leaders of the village community concerned with a particular dispute were invited. The king did not interfere with the decisions of the village council, unless he received a complaint.

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## 18.4 THE VILLAGE SERVANTS: DECCAN

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The village servants were primarily artisans and formed an important section of the rural society in Deccan. They were called *balutedars* and their income, which was a share in the agricultural produce, was known as *balutas*. They were the counterparts of the *Kamins* of North India (Unit 17.5.6). However, compared to the *kamins*, their status was better off in the Deccan rural society. Several village documents, for instance, the *talebands* (village budgets), *thalzadas* (roll of land holdings), *jamabandis* (village rent roll), *watanpatras* (*watan* grants), *gaonkharcha* (village expenses) and so on record the participation of the *balutedars* in the decision making process of the village, especially where the disputes were concerned.

### 18.4.1 Composition

The term *bara* (twelve) was usually prefixed to the *balutas*. Based on their income, which was their respective share in the village produce, the twelve *balutas* were grouped into three rows called *kaas* or *oal*:

- 1) *Thorali Kaas*, i.e. major rows. In this category there were *sutar* (carpenter), *lohar* (blacksmith), *Mahar* and *Mang*.
- 2) *Madhali kaas*, i.e. the middle row. This category comprised of the *kumbhar* (potter), *chambhar* (cobble), *parit* (washerman) and *Nhavi* (barber).
- 3) *Dhakti kaas*, i.e. the last row and this category included *bhat* (bard), *mulana* (servant of the mosque and the Muslim community in the village), *gurav* (temple priests) and *koli* (water carrier).

Scholars differ in their opinion regarding the occupations included in this list. However, ten occupations were often regularly included. They were, carpenter, blacksmith, potter, leatherworker, rope maker, barber, washerman, astrologer, Hindu shrine keeper and *Mahar*. In addition goldsmith, bard, masjid-keeper and bearer of burdens were also included. (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.210). Sometimes, village officials were also included in the class of *balutedars*. However, the number twelve is a traditional one and varied from village to village. The composition and the groupings within the *kaas* also had regional variations. For instance, in Indapur *pargana*, a village-cum town in Pune district of Maharashtra, there were fourteen *balutedars*, instead of the traditional twelve. *Chambhar* conventionally in the *thorali kaas*, i.e. the first row was in this case in the *madhali kaas*, i.e. the second row. *Mang* in Indapur occupied the *madhali kaas*, instead of the customary *thorali kaas*. In the *dhakti kaas*, i.e., the third row, *bhat* did not figure at all, instead, *sonar* (goldsmith), *joshi* (the village astrologer) and *ramoshi* (the village guard) were included.

*Balutas* as a rule belonged to different occupational castes which were of lower status. However, there were some exceptions. The astrologer, bard and the accountant were brahmanas in Maharashtra. Similarly, the occupation of a particular *baluta* caste was not the monopoly of that caste. For instance, the carpenter of a carpenter caste in some villages was engaged to do the jobs of a blacksmith and vice-versa.

There was another class of village servants called the *alutedars*, who did not enjoy the same status as the *balutedars*. According to Grant Duff, the number of *alutedars* was also twelve and they were also known as *naru*. According to Fukuzawa, the Marathi documents of the pre-British period do not refer to the term *aluta* and it appears that unlike the *balutas*, the *alutas* were found in some villages occasionally and not in all villages. They were certainly not as indispensable as the *balutas* for the rural society. Perhaps, the term *aluta* was formed 'alliteratively' with the *baluta* (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.210). Sometimes, goldsmith, bard and bearer of burdens, traditionally a part of the twelve *balutedar*, were mentioned in the twelve *aluta* category.

### 18.4.2 Services and Remuneration of the *Balutedars*

Various records show that the *balutas* were never employed by separate families. Rather they were servants of the village as a whole. The documents have phrases like, *ganvachi sonarki*, i.e. 'goldsmith of the village'; *dehayachen kamkaj* or *ganvachi chakri*, both meaning, 'work for the village'. While serving the village as a 'territorial group', the *baluta* also served sometimes individual villagers belonging to the village irrespective of their family affiliation.

There were two kinds of *balutas*, *watandar* or *mirasi balutas* and *upari balutas*. The nature of service of the *watandar baluta* was hereditarily fixed. Generally they enjoyed monopoly over their respective occupations. But the services of the *upari baluta* was not so. They were employed on a temporary basis either to support the

existing *balutas* or provisionally work, in case, a *watan baluta* migrated or left the village. *Upari* means a 'newcomer', 'stranger' or 'extra'. As already mentioned, sometimes the same family performed both carpentry and blacksmithery. In such a case, there was a clear distinction between one who rendered certain service as his *watan* (patrimony) and another, who did the same but as *upari*. Therefore, not all *baluta* servants held hereditary monopoly (*watandar*) over the services they rendered. Since *watandari balutas* were highly remunerative, there were often multiple claimants over the same *watandari*. The documents record numerous disputes over a single occupational *watan* amongst the claimants.

A *watan baluta* could be sold, divided or transferred by its holder. Sale of *watan* amongst the same professional caste was common. If there were only one family of a serving caste in a village, it would be treated as the servants of the entire village. But when there were several families of the same occupational caste, they served different village families. In such cases they were not treated as the servants of the families and were considered as the servant of the village. This was because the division of the occupational *watan* did not mean the creation of new *watans*. Rather it meant multiple shares in a *watan*. Therefore, there was one *baluta watan* for every occupation in the village. The division was not of the 'service sphere'. It was the division of the emoluments such as the house sites, *inam* land, cash or kind. For instance two families of carpenters were expected to divide the house or the house site, *inam* land and other perquisites meant for the carpentry *watan*. Thus, the total amount of emoluments always remained the same, despite divisions within the *watan*. In effect, the burden of the village as a whole, especially of the peasants did not increase. Although the villagers and the village as a whole was not financially affected by the sale, transfer or division of the *watan*, their 'consent' or 'permission' was required for such transactions. The documents refer to phrases like, *gotache sakshi* (confirmation by local assembly) and *gotache mahajar* (the certificate of the local assembly) for such dealings to be effective.

Fukuzawa mentions three kinds of remuneration for the *balutas*. One was the main remuneration which could be given in cash or kind, called *baluta* remuneration. Both the *watan balutas* and the *upari balutas* were entitled to this kind of remuneration as long as they offered specific services to the village. However, if they were absent from the village for a long time, they were not entitled to the *baluta*-remuneration.

The second way of paying the *balutas* was small additional remunerations in cash or kind called *hakk* (rights), *lavajima* (perquisites) or *manpan* (privileges). This was given by the village as a whole, which included not only the peasants, but also village officers, merchants, and village servants. The payment was made in the form of offerings to the village shrine. There were variations from village to village regarding the amount and the kind of perquisites paid to each servant. Due to the lack of data, it is not clear whether there was any disparity in the payment of the perquisites to the *watan* holding *baluta* and the *upari baluta* of the same village. The third type of remuneration was revenue free *inam* lands. Since the *inam* land was hereditary, therefore only the *watan* holding *baluta* servant was entitled to it.

There were three different modes of payment, which corresponded to three different methods of land revenue collection by the state. Therefore, the peasants as a whole paid this kind of *baluta* remuneration while paying the land revenue. In the first method, the peasants brought the produce to a certain place in the village. Under the supervision of the headmen a certain amount of the produce was paid to the *balutas* and then a fixed proportion of the rest was collected as land revenue. In the second method, the peasant was not required to bring the produce to a specific place. Rather, fixed amount was collected from him for the payment of the *balutas* and the land revenue. The third method was to pay a certain amount of money to the *balutas* by peasants. Often the share of the individual *baluta* was decided on the basis of the negotiations between the peasant and artisan at the time of harvest.

### 18.4.3 Status of the *Balutedars*

As pointed out earlier, the status of the *balutedar* in the rural society of Deccan was higher in comparison to his counterpart in North India. Despite belonging to low castes, a large number of them participated in the decision making process of the village. For instance, documents from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century refer to the *balutedars* attending the *gotsabha* and endorsing the decisions by their professional symbols; the potter's symbol being the wheel, barber's was mirror, carpenter's symbol was chisel, shoe-maker's was thread and picker, goldsmith's symbol was hammer and so on. Sometimes only the concerned *balutedar* was invited to the council. In a boundary dispute of a village in Pune *pargana* in 1681 AD, six *mahars* were invited to a council as their profession included the measuring and fixing of the village boundary. The council was attended by the *kazis*, *deshmukhs*, *havalgars* and *patils* of eighteen villages- all of whom were rural elites and belonged to upper castes. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, pp.37-38)

Despite their low caste status, the village servants had an important place in the rural society. This can be seen in the examples of the *mahar*, *mang* and the *mulana* community. The importance of the *mahars* is evident in the kind of remuneration they received. They were paid in kind and also held *inam* lands. The *mahars* were entitled to carry all dead bodies of animals in their respective villages, but had to remove the skin of the dead animals and return them to the owners. Grant Duff sums up the duties and status of the *mahars*. According to him, the *mahar* "acts as scout, as guide, frequently as watchman he cleans travellers' horses, and is obliged, if required to carry the travellers' baggage; he is a principal guardian of the village boundaries, and in Maharashtra, the *Mahars* are a active, useful and intelligent race of people." (Grant Duff.) In fact, the *mahars* were considered as *watandars* in the Maratha country and their *watan* continued even during the British period by special legislation. The leader of the *mahar* community was known as the *mehtar mahar* and he was entitled to one-ninth of the total *mahar watan*.

*Mang* is the corruption of the Sanskrit word, *matang*, meaning the most powerful person. *Matang* Rishi of Varanasi was supposed to be born in the *mang* family. The legends say that they were initially rulers of Kishkinda state situated on the banks of the river Tungabhadra and the brahmanical domination reduced them to poverty and they became nomadic tribes. The occupation of the *mangs* was to make leather ropes and leather bags. They also performed the duties of the village watchmen. Similarly, the *mulana* was found in almost all the villages even if there were no Muslims. Grant Duff writes, "the *moolang*...is the *Moolla* or Mahomedan priest... The *moolana* had charge of the mosques and peers' places,-performs the ceremony of Mahomedan marriages but is often found when there is no Mahomedan family but his own and is chiefly known to the Maharatta population as the person who kills their sheep and goats when offered as sacrifices at temples or in their fields to propitiate the deities...."

We also find that the traditional division of the *balutedars* into *thorali kaas*, *adhali kaas* and *dhakti kaas* was irrespective of the earnings of the *balutedars*. The earnings of the goldsmith may be more than that of a carpenter or a *mahar*, but in the hierarchy of the services to the village community, the goldsmith would always be lower than the *mahar* or the carpenter. The goldsmith usually belonged to the *dhakti kaas*, i.e. third row and the carpenter and *mahar* usually belonged to the *thorali kaas*, i.e. the first row.

### 18.4.4 Other Village Servants

In addition to *balutedars* or *alutedars* there were a few other village servants in the rural society of Deccan. Two most common were the priests and the forced labourers.

- i) **Priests:** Referred to as the *upadhyaya* or the *gramaupadhyaya* in the documents, the village priest served specific families by officiating in various family rituals. The service of priesthood was hereditary. Therefore, the principle which marked out their service sphere was not the village as a whole, but certain families with specific caste status. Usually the priests were *brahmanas*. Some of the *brahmana* priests served the brahmana families, while some served the families with specific caste status of 'peasant and other caste', collectively called clean *shudras*. However, for the non-brahmana low caste families, there were non-brahmana priests. It is not clear whether their hereditary service-sphere was confined to certain castes or to certain families belonging to such castes. Families of *mirasdars* (land holding peasants) and watan *balutedars* could employ a priest on permanent basis. The *uparis* (temporary peasants) and *upari balutas* could not do so even if they spent considerable number of years in the village. They could employ priests only on ad hoc basis. According to Fukuzawa, since they served specific families, they were in 'direct clientele relationship' with these families and hence represented the 'prototype of the so-called *jajmani* system.' (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.235). A discussion of the views on *jajmani* system and the nature of relationship between the rural servants and the various families they served will be taken up in the next Section.
- ii) **Vethbega (Forced Labour):** This term is a compound of the Sankrit word *vishti* and the Persian word *begar* and means forced labour. This was prevalent in the rural society of Deccan and no payment was made in lieu of services rendered. Only free food was provided while the labour was being rendered. Also some cash or food grain was given, but not as wages at the market rate. Large scale construction of forts in the Maratha country due to increased military operations required constant construction, maintenance and repair. Therefore, the villagers had to provide compulsory service to the state. Other services also constituted *vethbegari*, viz., portering, fodder cutting, miscellaneous jobs at the government offices, and stables and watchmanship. Regular forced labour was extracted from the artisan and the menial castes, especially in the eighteenth century. The movement of the labourer in this case was restricted. The exploitation of the skilled and unskilled labour as a forced one often led to the desertion of villages. The local officials appealed often to the State to discontinue *vethbegari* as it adversely affected the cultivation and other activities in the villages. A levy called *begarpatti* seems to be a charge collected by the State to meet the expenses of the forced labour. (Kulkarni, 1992, p.42).

#### 18.4.5 Rural Servants: Debates

There has been a difference of opinion amongst administrators, thinkers and scholars about the nature of the service rendered by the rural servants in the village. According to Karl Marx, "this dozen of individuals maintained at the expense of the village community", served the village as a whole and were therefore, the 'servants of the village'. According to him, this contributed to the self-sufficiency of the village and was 'the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies.' (Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol.I, Chicago, 1915, pp.392-394). Baden-Powell also felt that these resident craftsmen and menials were 'not paid by the job, but are employed by the village on a fixed remuneration....' (B.H.Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community*, London, 1896, pp.16-17).

Max Weber in his General Economic History (1924) stated that the nature of the rural services was 'demiurgic mode of employment.' This meant that the rural servants were 'not paid for their work in detail but stood at the service of the community in return for a share in the land or in the harvest....They are essentially village serfs, receiving a share in the products or money payments.' A.R. Kulkarni (1992) feels that the rural artisans cannot be regarded as 'village serfs' for they were co-sharers in the village produce as a part of their right (*haqq*) and were actively participating in the village councils especially in the arbitrations of disputes.



In 1925, W.H. Wiser, an American Christian missionary, on the basis of his research of a north Indian village Karimpur, concluded that the village artisans served the individual families who were the respective clients of the artisans. The artisans were remunerated by these families and not by the village community. These client families were called '*jajman*' and the rights involved in such an economic interaction of services was called the *jajmani haqq*. Therefore, 'this system of interrelatedness in service within the Hindu community is called the *Hindu Jajmani system*.' (W.H. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System*, Lucknow, 1936, pp.vii-xxi). Wiser further added that these relationships were hereditarily fixed between the *jajaman* (patron) and his servants and the latter could transfer their rights to their respective caste members.

The theory of *jajmani* system influenced the sociologists for several decades. However, Fukuzawa does not agree with this theory. According to him, Wiser did not look at village as a territorial group with social relationships. The *jajmani* system evolved during the British rule, when village system was disturbed as a result of which 'village servants were transformed into family-servants'. (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.239). As mentioned above, the *jajmani* system was applicable only for the family priests and not for the twelve *balutedars* or *alutedars*. Fukuzawa agrees with Weber on the '*demiurgic* mode of employment' and feels that since the *jajmani* system evolved during the British rule, the sociological analysis of the *jajmani* system as continuing from immemorial times lacks a historical perspective. A.R. Kulkarni feels that the *baluta* system cannot be classified as *demiurgic* or *jajmani*. The only term that explains the system is *grambhrutak* or *gramasevak* traditionally used in the literature. This implied that the *balutas* were essentially the servants of the village as a whole. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, p.41).

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## 18.5 RURAL SOCIETY: SOUTH INDIA

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In this Section we will discuss the rural society primarily in the Tamil region. Presently the Tamil region comprises of Tamil Nadu, southern part of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The rural society in the medieval period comprised of the corporate institutions of the *brahmandeya*, i.e. brahmana dominated village, *ur*, i.e. a non-brahmana villages, temples and guilds. An interaction between these institutions formed the basis of the rural life. They also became the mechanisms through which various political groups strengthened their economic base and extended their control in various localities of the Tamil region. Hence, the *brahmadeyas*, *urs*, temples and guilds – all institutions of the rural society – were the basis of state formation in the medieval period.

Large territories in the Tamil macro-region were called *mandalams* (also referred to as sub-regions). Three of these *mandalams* corresponded to three major kingdoms of the Tamil macro-region, viz., Pallavas with their capital Kanchipuram in Tondaimandalam, Cholas with their capital Tanjavur in Cholamandalam and Pandyas with their capital Madurai in Pandiamandalam. Both Tondaimandalam and Cholamandalam were in the northern part of the Tamil region with Kaveri river valley as its core. The Pandiamandalam comprised the southern part of the Tamil region, drained by river Vaigai and Tamraparani. Each of these river valleys were the focus of dense rural settlements especially before the thirteenth century. Between Tondaimandalam and Cholamandalam was the region called Naduvil Nadu that was drained by Pennar and Vellar rivers. Between the Cholamandalam and Pandiamandalam lay the semi-arid region of Pudukkottai. The western boundary of the plain is marked by the plateau and the ranges of Eastern Ghats, parts of which lie in the upper reaches of Kaveri. This area was called Kongu Nadu or *mandalam* of the Tamil macro-region. The epigraphs and literary sources mention three types of agricultural land, viz., wet, dry and mixed. Each of them had their respective social milieu. The development of irrigation technology in the forms of tanks and canals transformed

these regions into paddy growing rural settlements that were ordered according to the Brahmanical ideology and around deity worship in the temples.

### 18.5.1 Rural Society and Institutions: Seventh to the Twelfth Century AD

From the seventh to the thirteenth century the regions of the Tamil macro-regions were integrated and organized through institutional means of the *brahmadeyas* and the temple. Located in the rural surroundings they had an impact in the rural society. The expansion and integration of various peasant settlements in the river valleys and the transformation of the tribal population into settled peasant communities provided a base for the emergence of new state systems. Beginning with the Pallavas of Kanci in the northern part, the Pandyas of Madurai in the south and the Cheras in the southwest, the political processes culminated with the Cholas in the Kaveri valley by the ninth century AD. The consolidation of these states depended on the integration of various local and supra-local institutions, mainly the *nadus*, *brahmadeyas* and the temples.

As a 'peasant micro-region' and an eco-type, the *nadu* had already emerged before the seventh century. From seventh century onwards, these *nadus* increased in number, representing a process of agrarian expansion based on the irrigation projects sponsored by the Pandyas and Pallavas in the wet and dry areas. Often such an expansion took place at the expense of the erstwhile tribal population, who eventually were sedentized as peasants. Palar-Cheyyar valley in the north and Vaigai-Tambraparani in the south exhibited such agrarian developments. Thus, *nadu* as a territory was a grouping of *vellanvagai* villages, i.e. the agrarian settlements. The *nattar* was the spokesman of the *nadu* locality, primarily of the *vellanvagai* villages. These villages included habitation sites, cremation ground, irrigation channels, cultivated area, and pasture lands and so on. They had residential quarters of the landholders, cultivators called *ur-nattam*, residences of artisans or *kammanas* called *kammanacceri* and that of the agricultural labourers or *paraiyas* called *paraicceri*. There was therefore, stratification in these villages, with landholders at the top of the rural hierarchy, artisans in the middle and agricultural labourers at the bottom. The landholders seem to have enjoyed parity in an economic sense with the brahmanas where the control over land was concerned. These owner-cultivators, i.e. the *kaniyudaiyar* got their lands cultivated by tenant cultivators, i.e. *ulukudi*. Both were known as vellalas. The assembly of the *nadu* was known as *ur*, dominated by the *nattars*, the powerful landed class of the rural society.

These river valleys also witnessed a proliferation of the *brahmadeyas* and the temples that restructured and integrated the rural economy and society. The *brahmadeyas* were land grants given to the brahmanas and thus were the centres of the landowning groups of brahmanas. The temples were the 'nerve centres' of these brahmanical villages. Since the *brahmadeyas* and the temples dominated by these brahmanas were the repositories of better irrigation technology and farming methods, the land granted to them became a mechanism for the extension of agriculture into unsettled areas and extraction of the surplus from various peasant groups. The assembly of the *brahmadeyas* was called the *sabha* or the *mahasabha*, which also controlled the large irrigation systems. Such irrigation systems created favourable conditions for dense population in these areas. Paddy cultivation was dependant on irrigation and was labour intensive. There was network of relations between big and small *brahmadeyas* and *brahmadeya* and non-*brahmadeya* villages, indicating the fact that the rural society was not isolated.

The conversion of the *brahmadeyas* into *tan-kurus* or *taniyurs* from the tenth century AD led to the emergence of independent revenue units (separated from the *nadus*) that had significant economic and political ramifications. *Taniyurs* acquired several villages (*pidagais* and *purams*) and craft centers. A new type of *nadu* called

the *perimalai nadu* evolved around *taniyurs*, comprising of velalas and cultivators. The *taniyurs* had distinct socio-political characteristics and introduced a hierarchy amongst the *brahmadeyas*.

The significance of the *brahmadeyas* and the temples stemmed from their brahmanical ideology that provided the social rationale for integrating diverse peasant and tribal groups through the institution of caste. For instance, the temples controlled by the brahmanas and situated in the *brahmadeyas* and the *vellan-vagai* provided a space for ritual integration to the new entrants within the *varna-jati* paradigm. The tribal divinities were made an integral part of the brahmanical temples. The hierarchical structure of the *varnasramadharm*, i.e. the caste system was relevant in these villages, where the distribution and circulation of resources took place within the authority structure of landed rights. Besides peasants, various categories of chiefs, artisans and craftsmen were incorporated through ritual ranking within the temples. Thus, commanding an allegiance of various local groups, this institution of the *brahmadeya* generated economic activities of diverse nature that eventually became the basis of urbanization. Therefore linking peasants, local chiefs and other groups to the royalty, both *brahmadeya* and the temple were also utilized as the institutional channels of transmission and dissemination of the royal ideology in the village settlements. Naturally, then the location of the royal centres coincided with the location of the temple and *brahmadeya* centres spread over numerous rural settlements. The semantics of *koyil* acquired a new dimension with the royal patronage to the temples. Earlier used for palace, it now implied the temple as well. Hence, temple and palace became interchangeable with both representing the temporal and the sacred sphere, where obedience to the authority, i.e. the king and the god was mandatory.

The process of agrarian expansion that provided the crucial resource base to the Cholas and Pandyas brought forth the wet zone areas of the Tamil sub-regions, particularly in the Kaveri and Tamraparani valleys. The villages of these wet zone areas became the centre of king's and chiefs' authority and financial claim. By thirteenth century, five hundred and fifty *nadus* had come into existence indicating large number of agricultural settlements, majority being in the Kaveri valley of Cholamandalam. The proliferation of *brahmadeyas* and temples located in the *nadus* of these river valleys were also instrumental in extending agriculture. They implemented the royal irrigation projects and this gave them the crucial right to organize and manage the production and water resources, often with the *velala* community, i.e. the powerful non-brahmana landowners. These landowners also partook in the administration of the temples along with the brahmanas. Therefore, created at the royal initiatives, the *brahmadeyas*, and temples were often strategically situated in the non-brahmana villages to ensure their loyalty and provided the much-needed manpower for the vast irrigation projects.

One of the direct consequences of the agrarian expansion was the escalation of commercial activities that led to the growth of market centres, *nagarams* and a network between them that linked towns and villages. The spread of guild activities and trading associations, namely the Ayyayole 5000, Tamil Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvar, foreign merchant organization, Anjuvannam brought forth the mercantile community with its diverse groups of traders, merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and itinerant traders. Often the mercantile communities invested in agriculture, gifted to the temples, further strengthening the ties of integration, and inter dependence within the rural society and with the urban centres and the village. One such weaver community, the *kaikkolas* had significant links with the temples and became an important social group within the rural society. By ninth century, clusters of *brahmadeyas* and temples had developed into centres of urban growth, thus connecting villages, rural society, urban centres and royal capital, diverse population and religion within the same complex. Thus, the *nadus*, *brahmadeyas*, temples and *nagarams* with their respective assemblies, viz., *ur*, *sabha* and *nagarams* linked the villages, various peasant communities and locality chiefs to the political network of the Cholas and Pandyas.

### 18.5.2 Rural Society: Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Century

By the end of the twelfth century, the clusters of agrarian settlements both in the wet and dry zones comprised of various agricultural and artisanal castes. *Brahmanas* and *Velalas* emerged as dominant, followed by the Pallas, Pariahs and Vanniyars and several others. Though hierarchically arranged within the caste structure, these groups were linked to each other with ties of economic interdependence. For instance, in the Pandya kingdom, the hilly regions with their tribal population were linked to the core area dominated by the Vellala peasant groups, due to their forest products and constant flowing streams which could be exploited for irrigation purposes. Since uncertainties were intrinsic in such an economy due to constant warfare and resource appropriation that most of these peasant groups were armed and had such military alliances with the tribes. In several places, the *kaikkolas* formed their own-armed bands and emerged as the 'merchant-warriors'.

Amidst such a diverse socio-political fabric, the temples formed the most crucial as well as stable institution within the rural society. The 'superordinate' character of the temple was evident in its complex role in strengthening the territorial sovereignty at the rural level through negotiations and transactions that culminated into a network of alliances between the various locality chiefs. Such alliances were significant in the contemporary situation where warfare, unsteady boundaries and shifting frontiers were common. This shared power structure manifested in the institution of gift giving to the deities in the temples. This ritual gifting generated a redistributive system that facilitated the disbursement of resources and political power within the rural society. The gifts to the temples in turn were recirculated in the society in the form of ritual goods, for instance the *prasadam* (food offering), stimulating economic transactions. The local chiefs also made gifts to the king or donated to the temples in the name of the king and received titles and honours that enabled them to become the members of the royal alliance network. Sometimes, these chiefs made grants to the temples situated outside their local domains and built their individual power network, connecting the two rural domains. Apart from its political ramifications, the temple further provided the 'ideological apparatus' for different sections in the South Indian rural society by bringing together the religion of various social groups. Therefore, a heterogeneous religious pantheon developed with numerous gods and goddesses and led to the celebration of temple festivals within the village. The calendar of these festivals was often linked to the agricultural calendar of sowing and harvesting.

By the twelfth century, inscriptions record the gradual marginalization of the *brahmadeyas*, their institutional capacity to integrate was exhausted. This led to the rising importance of the temples in the society in general and the agrarian settlements in particular. Though the *sabhas* continue to function and the various political powers till the eighteenth century continued to establish *brahmadeyas*. The Pandya and the Chola records of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries cite several instances of the *brahmadeyas* converted into *vellan-vagai* villages and donated as *devadanam* to the temples. Either the brahmanas migrated from the Tamil country to the northern regions or converged increasingly towards the temples, further highlighting the latter's significance. This coincided with the re-emergence of the local chiefs within the agrarian localities.

In addition, with the occupation of the Kaveri delta by the Hoysalas, the migration from the Karnataka region was accelerated. Hence, an altered base of power and power structure emerged. The expansion of agriculture led to an increase in landed transactions, private and temple holdings, particularly in the non-brahmana villages. This created a hierarchical structure of the landed rights with the increasing prominence of the Vellalas as the dominant agricultural community *vis-à-vis* the lower agricultural groups, escalating the tensions within the agrarian community. The growth of urban centres and intensification of mercantile activities led to the rising importance of the *nagarams*, merchants, craftsmen and weavers, especially the *kaikkolas* that altered

their relationship with the *nadus*. Hence, the rising social importance of the various non-brahmana groups, especially within the rural society led to a movement towards a higher caste status, especially the claims of the artisans and dominant peasant caste for a respectable ritual space within the temples. This bid for social mobility in the twelfth century culminated into a “societal crisis”. The conflicts that escalated this social crisis were usually between the artisans and agriculturists, sub-castes of the artisan like the *kaikkolas* and *saliyas*, hill and forest people and the different merchant groups. The existing social structure weakened and led to the crystallization of the low caste non-brahmana communities into a dual vertical division of the *Valangai* (Right hand castes) and *Idangai* (Left hand castes), within the traditional caste structure of the rural society. However, the Vellalas and the brahmanas remained outside this dual division.

In this altered social environment within the village localities, undoubtedly temples forged links amongst chiefs, merchants and the newly emergent groups. The popular religion of the Saivas and Vaisnava community responded to this social change by providing a broad social base with ideological sanction, which would accommodate the diverse ethnic groups. Attempts were made to provide them a ritual place within the respective temples.

From thirteenth century onwards, the core riverine areas of Kaveri, Pennar, Tamraparani and Krsna-Godavari with numerous agricultural settlements and important trading centres became the focus for competitive resource appropriation, particularly amongst those social groups who were located in areas of narrow resource base. One of the most important political developments that influenced the social composition of the rural societies in South India was the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire in the fourteenth century with its capital Hampi in Karnataka. This initiated a chain of political processes that integrated the peninsular region south of river Krsna by bringing together the three cultural zones of Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka.

The most important factor underlying these political processes was the phenomenon of migration. From the end of the twelfth century, Kannada and Telugu peasant groups migrated from areas of marginal resource base to the wet riverine regions, ‘receiving new traditions and religious symbols from the valley culture and leaving their own marks on the society of rice-belt.’ Changing political boundaries, ever mounting military requirements of the kingdoms, especially of the Vijayanagar Empire and the expansion of the agricultural frontier contributed to the increasing migration of the Telugu warrior class to the river valleys and peripheral areas of potential development. Referred to as the *nayakas*, they impinged upon the pre-existing local power groups and their respective spheres of control and emerged as the major benefactors of the temples in the rural settlements. Migration also brought into prominence a new class of itinerant merchants and traders to the villages, several of whom gradually settled down and emerged as powerful landowners. The inscriptional references to the Kaikkola, Vaniya, Sikku Vaniya Vyapari, Mayilatti, Kanmala, and Komatti traders, Pattanulkar (silk weavers) from Saurashtra point to the development of a brisk trade and increased craft production which found a thriving market in the rural and urban areas.

Apart from the groups mentioned above, peasant communities and agricultural specialists like Shanars (tank-diggers) formed one of the significant migratory groups that modified the pre-existing regional population. New irrigation technology and forms of production were introduced that ‘established new domains for competition over territorial control.’ Consequently, the migratory processes integrated the dry upland areas and the river valleys of Kaveri and Tamraparani. By fifteenth century, agrarian expansion not only took place in the wet areas, but also in the dry zones through artificial irrigation technology, especially the tank and well irrigation. The corporate and individual efforts of the migrants and investment in labour and capital facilitated the implementation of

the new technology particularly in the black soil region. In these dry upland zones, the agriculturists came into conflict with the hunters and pastoralists that often led to the incorporation of the latter into the agricultural community. These changes provided the context for the emergence of a warrior peasant class, both economically and politically powerful and primarily non-brahmana and Telugu in composition. The settlement of the migratory Telugu or the Vaduga groups in the central Deccan and the Tamil wet regions often displaced the older Tamil peasants and landholders; especially brahmanas already settled there and created a new class of landed magnates with new groups of artisans and merchants. Further, some of the locally entrenched Vellala landed communities emerged as big landowners with titles like *nadudaiyan* or *nadalvan*. Largely, the local and the migrant landed community paid regular tribute to the Telugu commanders of the Vijayanagar army and allied themselves to the local chieftains. In this context, the Reddis, Velalas, Gavundas, and Manradis further enhanced their position as the dominant peasantry and acquired armed power. Further, new network of relations were forged between the dry upland zones and the wetland agricultural community. Thus, the whole of peninsular India witnessed a concerted warrior-peasant effort that culminated into a new regional order, with the coercive power of the new warrior kings.

Each agricultural zone, dry, mixed and wet had a distinct social and material milieu. Kinship networks organized into specific caste groups were important for striking alliances and exchange networks, over the control of agricultural production. The Chola period *nattars*, mainly the Vellalas tied to each other by kinship transformed themselves due to changes in the land holding system and influx of the migrants. Thus, a multi community composition of the agriculturists emerged who related the local rural society to the political authorities. There were diverse agricultural communities and building of sub-regional agrarian domains around important towns in developing agricultural zones. The medieval configurations of the *nadus* vanished, replaced by a set of sub-regions defined as hinterlands of towns along routes of transport and communication.

By fourteenth century, new changes took place with the influence of the *nayakas* as a military class. The old elites confined to the wet zones depended for their protection on these *nayakas*. Over a period, these *nayakas* became influential, as they were 'protectors, patrons, and arbiters, whose power rested first on military might, and more essential in the long run on their resourcefulness in their transactions with the existing dominant elites in temples and local assemblies.' The *nayakas* were more successful in bringing together the wet rice areas and the unsettled migrants together. They also encouraged commercial activities and often employed merchants and moneylenders in the rural administration.

Against this backdrop of migration of various social groups and the growing power of the martial communities in both wet and dry areas, the worship of the warrior goddesses became popular. This period registered a dramatic increase in the Amman shrines, which had become new cult centres for the various rural elites and peasant and artisan communities within the rural society. These cult centres were associated with the particular lineage god and then with the brahmanical temples in the villages. Hence, a large pantheon was created comprising of the local warrior gods, goddesses and the brahmanical divinity of Siva and Visnu. This represented a vast cross section of the society that was linked through temple rituals in a hierarchical manner. Further, the non-brahmanical *Vellala* village priest also participated in the ritual activities of the large temples along with the *brahmana* priests. In this way, the brahmanical temples were linked through a priestly network with the village deities. The religious scenario became more complex as some of the migratory groups carried their own gods and goddesses from outside the Tamil region into the new regions, and 'constructed a new temple, thereby creating a cross-section of worshippers beyond the locality and developing a network of intra-regional devotion and pilgrimage.'

The political as well as the economic aspects converged in the temples, which became the mechanism for generating agricultural developments and a network of linkages with the help of the powerful sectarian leaders based in these institutions. The numerous endowments made by the diverse social groups generated resources that were managed and invested by the temples for tank irrigation. Hence, areas of limited agricultural opportunities transformed into that of high yielding mixed agriculture of food and cash crops with a flourishing trade. Such developments continued even in the eighteenth century.

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## **18.6 SUMMARY**

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This Unit highlights various themes that have been researched on the rural society of Deccan and South India. The rural society in Deccan comprised of hierarchical land rights that influenced the nature of agrarian stratification. The village artisan class usually called *balutedars* also played an important role not only in the economy but also in various matters of the village. This can be seen in the documents that refer to their participation in the deliberations of the village council. The rural society of South India was a complex network of corporate institutions like the *brahmadeya* (with their assembly *sabha*), *nadu* (with their assembly *ur*), and the temples that integrated various social groups within the village as well as the localities and larger political kingdoms. However, this process of integration was influenced by several factors of ecology, migration and control of the corporate institutions by powerful political group. The aim of the Unit is to show that the villages and the rural society were not self-sufficient isolated units, neither were their internal structure homogeneous and stagnant.

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## **18.7 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Discuss briefly the composition of the *balutedars*. Analyse the types of services performed by them and the pattern of remuneration.
- 2) Critically examine the position of village servants in the rural society.
- 3) Analyse briefly the structure of rural society in South India during 7-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 4) Analyse the role of the corporate institutions in the integration of various social groups of the rural society in South India.
- 5) How did migration in the 14<sup>th</sup> century influence the rural society?

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**EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA  
THROUGH THE AGES  
MHI-06**

**ILLUSTRATIONS**  
(for Blocks 1 & 2)

Indira Gandhi National Open University  
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## UNIT 19 CLANS AND CONFEDERACIES IN WESTERN INDIA

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### Structure

- 19.0 Introduction
- 19.1 Clan Formation As a Political Process
- 19.2 Clan Formation: Patron-Client Framework
- 19.3 Developmental Cycle Framework of Richard Fox
- 19.4 Summary
- 19.5 Exercises

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### 19.0 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit, we will examine the early medieval and the medieval period of growth of Rajput clans and confederacies in Rajasthan. This will be done mainly through two accounts. One of B.D. Chattopadhyay's early medieval story of emergence of the Rajputs and second of the medieval period by Norman Ziegler. The two accounts based on different sets of evidences may be compared to gain an insight into the process of clan formation of Rajputs. It would be evident that even the perspectives of the two scholars differ on this issue. For B. D. Chattopadhyaya the use of the concept political in delineating the emergence of the Rajputs is critical. The rise and achievement of Rajputs into the fold of warriors of honour is seen essentially as a political process. For Ziegler on the other hand the transition from kin based clan structures to service and exchange networks is the key to understanding the Rajputs in the Mughal times. He uses the patron-client framework to designate this process. Now these two frameworks have often been at clash in the writing of Indian history. However, recently it has been argued that at local level patron-client framework is useful in understanding social phenomenon. Ziegler through the use of local Marvari chronicles and *khyat* records does just that. Chattopadhyay on the other hand uses genealogical lists, contemporary accounts, inscriptions and hero-stones to construct his picture.

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### 19.1 CLAN FORMATION AS A POLITICAL PROCESS

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Study of the origins of Rajput dynasties in western India in the early medieval period reveals that it must have been a political process. Here there is an agreement between different scholars on the issue. However the nature of the origin of the Rajputs is very much controversial. Their *gotrochara* makes them kshatriyas of the lunar family (*Somavanshi*) while on the basis of old *kavyas* some maintain that they were of solar race. The myths of origin regard them as kshatriyas created in *kaliyuga* to wipe out the *mlecchas* (foreigners). Rajasthanian bards and chroniclers regard them as fire-born (*agnikula*).

According to the *agnikula* version of origins which comes to us from a court poet, the founder of the house of Paramaras came from the firepit of sage Vashishta on Mount Abu. The man who came out of fire performed the first act of wresting the wish-granting cow of sage Vashishta from sage Vishwamitra and restored it to former. It was sage Vashishta who gave him the name of paramara - slayer of the enemy. The myth then goes on to posit that from him sprang a race which obtained the esteem of good kings. The Rajasthanian poets and story tellers ascribed the fire origin not only to the Paramaras but also to the Pratiharas, the Chalukyas of Gujarat and the Chahamanas.

As some scholars point out that the problem of origin “when viewed in its totality instead of viewing it from the angle of any particular dynasty would help us understand its political significance”. The practise of new social groups claiming kshatriya status became, as they argue, widespread in the early medieval period. Kshatriya status was one of the symbols that the emergent social groups sought for the legitimation of their newly acquired power. The early medieval and medieval Rajput clans representing a mixed caste and constituting a fairly large section of petty chiefs holding estates, achieved political eminence gradually. There was “corresponding relationship between the achievement of political eminence by Pratiharas, Guhilas, Chahamanas and other clans and their movement towards a respectable social status for example acquiring a kshatriya “lineage”. It has been pointed out that “in this context it is important to note that these dynasties claimed descent from ancient kshatriyas long after their accession to power”. It has been pointed out that the Gurjara Pratiharas one of the earliest Rajput dyansties claim origins from Lakshmana, the brother of epic hero Rama, only in a 9<sup>th</sup> century inscription of king Bhoja. The entry to the Rajput fold was then possible through the acquisition of political power and this was legitimised by claiming linkages with the kshatriya lines of the mythical past.

The distribution of political power, as some scholars point out, did not follow a uniform pattern. The process of emergence of the political power in western India shows that the distribution of political authority could be organised by a network of lineages (*kula*, *vamsha*) within the framework of monarchical form of polity. B.D. Chattopadhyaya also asserts that the emergence of Rajputs may be seen in the context of existing hierarchies of political structure. The evidence is from dynastic accounts of Chahamanas of Rajasthan and Parmaras of southern Rajasthan, Gujarat and Malwa.

The formation and consolidation of lineage power as we stated did not develop in a uniform way. One of the indicators of the lineage power formation was the colonization of new areas as can be seen from expansion of the number of settlements. Colonization came about from annexation of the new territories by means of organised military strength. The Chauhan kingdom of Nadol known as *Saptshata* is said to have been made into *Saptashrika* by a Chauhan chief who killed chiefs at the boundaries of his kingdom and annexed their territories. Territorial expansion of the western Indian powers was accomplished on some areas, at the expense of tribal settlements. Kakkuka of Mandor Pratiharas is credited with resettling a place inhabited by Abhiras. Suppression of tribal population like Shabaras, Bhillas and Pullindas in western and central India also took place. Similarly, the Guhila kingdoms in south Rajasthan, according to bardic tradition, succeeded the earlier tribal chiefdoms of Bhils. The movement of Chauhans from Ahichhatrapura to Jangaldeva (Shakambhari) led to colonization of that ‘inhospitable area’. A tenth century record cites that Lakshmana, the son of Vakpato-I of Shakambhari Chahamanas lineage started with a few followers and fought against the Medas who had been attacking the people around Naddula with their raids. This pleased the brahmana masters of the area and they appointed him the guard of the towns. Gradually, Lakshamana gathered a small band of troopers and challenged the Medas in their own territory. The Medas agreed to keep away from the villages paying tribute to Lakshamana. He became a master of 2000 horses and extended his dominions and went on to build a grand palace at Nadol. This leads B.D. Chattopadhyaya to suggest that process of origin of Rajputs may be seen in terms of transition from tribalism.

The link to brahmanas is further made by B.D. Chattopadhyaya who asserts that ‘when we look at the different stages in which the genealogies were being formulated, it further appears that the majority of the new emerging royal lines, *brahmaksatra* (Brahman-Kshatriya) was a transitional status, which once acquired was not however entirely given up, and explanations continued to be given for the supposedly authentic transition from Brahman to kshatriya status. If it be accepted, on the strength of their

relatively later records, that both Guhilas and Chahamanas were originally of Brahman descent although no claims to such descent have been made in their early records—then the status was being projected in order to legitimize their new Kshatriya role. Chattopadhyaya argues further that, ‘it may also well be that the *brahmaksatra* was a relatively open status, as can be gathered from its wide currency in India in this period, which was seized upon by the new royal families before they could formulate a claim to pure Kshatriya origin’.

B.D. Chattopadhyaya also suggests that detailed genealogies of ruling clans which came to be formulated only in the period of change from feudatory to independent status ‘can hardly be extrapolated for an assessment of actual origins. Further, the different stages in the formulation of genealogical claims thus also reveal a political process, that of upward mobility from an initial feudatory position. Here examples of the Gujarat Gurjaras who in their claims and titles suggest allegiance to the Valabhi king or Guhilas of Kishkindha and those of Dhavagarva are cited as starting from an original feudatory position. The transition from feudatory to independent status was ‘clearly through the growth of military strength.’

Thus in contrast to the origin myths which suggest a sudden and a brilliant debut of the Rajputs on the North Indian political scene, it is important to examine them in the existing hierarchies of the existing political structure. Points out Chattopadhyaya that, ‘an understanding of this initial political stage is important on more than one count. It provides us the vantage point from which to examine further processes namely, how from their initial feudatory position the Rajput clans, in their bid for political ascendancy moved towards creating economic and social bases for their interlocking interests’.

What were the features of this economic basis of Rajput clan network? First, was the distribution of land among royal kinsmen. This was mainly associated with the spread of the clan of Chahamanas. Terms such as *Vamsapotakabhoga* (estate to be enjoyed by the descendants of the lineage) occurring in the Rajogarh inscription of Gurjara – Pratihara Mathana of Alwar have been understood in the sense of clan patrimony. Clan exclusiveness was also denoted in the Harsh inscription of AD 973 from the Jaipur area. Here we get reference of *svabhogas* (personal estates) of king Simharaja, his two brothers Vatsraja and Vigraharaja, and his two sons Chandaraja and Govindaraja. The inscription also mentions another assignee, probably of Guhila clan, holding a *bhoga* (estate). A *duhsadhya* (official) had his own estate too within the kingdom, but his rights were obviously limited in as much as his authority to grant land depended on the approval of the king. On the other hand the others did not need such a sanction and made grants on their own. This process went through further development till the 12<sup>th</sup> century when under the Nadol Chahamanas the assignments, termed variously as *grasa*, *grasabhumi*, or *bhukti* came to be held by the king, the *kumara* (the crown prince), the *rajaputras* (the sons of the king), the queens and in one case the maternal uncle of the king who obviously was not a member of the same clan.

The second important feature of Rajput economic basis in this period is the construction of fortresses. These seem to have occurred in a large number of cases during this time and appears to be a marked characteristic of Rajput territorial expansion of this period only. Inscriptions suggest their location in different parts of Rajasthan. Some of these forts were in Kamyakiyakkotta in Bharatpur area, Rajayapura at Rajor in Alwar, Mandavyapura-durga at Mandor near Jodhpur, Chitrakulamahadurga at Chitor, etc. The fortresses were not only for defence but as Chattopadhyaya notes had, as the composition of population in some of them will show, wider functions. They represented the numerous foci of power of the ascendant ruling families and appear to have had close links with landholdings in the neighbouring areas. These forts then could have been the means to control the rural surroundings and are therefore an indication of the assumption of control and consolidation of the clan over these areas.

Perhaps an economic exchange between the forts and the rural areas also can be envisaged. This exchange would then be controlled by the forts.

The consolidation of clans at the level of social relations can be gauged from the marriage network among the clans. Here Chattopadhyaya is drawing upon inscriptions and genealogical lists. The recording of some few marriages in the genealogical lists leads one to assume 'with certainty that they have been recorded because of their significant political implications for the family'. Chattopadhyaya in examining the marriage evidence chronologically detects a change in the marriage network patterns in which not only the supposed origin of family plays an unimportant part, but there is also a development towards an understandable pattern of inter clan relationship'. In an inscription of 837 AD of the Pratihara family from the Jodhpur area, the originator of the family is mentioned as having married a Bahaman and a Kshatriya wife. In a later inscription in 861 AD the Brahman wife is dropped from the account of ancestry. Similar genealogies suggest intermarriage between the Pratihara and Bhatti clans. Similarly, Chahamanas inscriptions suggest a preference towards Rashtrakutas, Ratraudhas and Rathors for marriage network.

Chattopadhyaya suggests that inter-clan relationship through marriages could, at a certain point of time, be limited to two clans and 'any consistency in the pattern may have been due to the nature of political relations between such clans or as in the case of Guhilas, it could be quite expansive'. Further 'the network operated mostly among such clans as came to constitute the Rajput category'. The choice was essentially political, he suggests, because the evidence cited here is from that of the ruling elites of early medieval Rajasthan.

Chattopadhyaya further argues that 'inter-clan relationship through marriage seems to have had wider social implications as well. It could provide social legitimacy to such groups as Hunas, who had acquired sufficient political power in western India by this period, leading finally to their inclusion in the Rajput clan lists'. Inter-clan marriage relations 'may have (also) led to collaboration in wider areas of social and political activity'. Here the evidence of Guhila Allata is cited who was married to a Huna princess and had a Huna member in a *goshti* (assembly) in the kingdom of his son Naravahana. In another instance, Ana belonging to the family of the Hastikundi Rashtrakutas, was involved in activities of a religious institution in the kingdom of Paramara Dharavarsha who was married into the Hastikundi family. These examples show how essentially a political process of legitimization through which the Rajputs began, turned towards a social process which though had a political dimension, still indicates a different stage in the process of emergence of the Rajputs.

### **Proliferation of Clans**

B. D. Chattopadhyaya further argues that gradually the term *rajaputra* along with maharajkumara (sons of king) came to denote descent groups and 'not necessarily an exalted political status'. Asopa has cited a Chitor inscription of AD 1301 which mentions three generations of *rajaputras*. This according to Chattopadhyaya suggests 'that by the close of 13<sup>th</sup> century the term *rajaputra* conveyed not merely a political status but an element of heredity as well'.

That there was proliferation of the Rajputs in the early medieval period is indicated by a variety of sources, points out Chattopadhyaya. He cites Hemachandra's *Trisastisalapakuru-sacarita* which refers to *rajaputrakah* or numerous persons of *rajaputra* descent. A Mount Abu inscription of late 11<sup>th</sup> century tells us of all the *rajaputras* of the illustrious Rajaputra clan. The term *rajaputra* then came to cover a wide range, 'from the actual son of a king' to the lowest landholder'. *Kumarpalcharita* and *Rajtarangini* suggest that the number of clans recognised as Rajputs had become substantial in number. These texts suggest, according to Chattopadhyaya, not a definite number of clans but the *idea* of descent as marking out the *rajaputras* from the other.

The feudatory terminologies of *Samanta* and *Maha-Samanta* are used less and less from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onward. The most common terms used later on were *rajaputra*, *rautta*, *rauta*, *rajakula* or *ravala*, *ranaka*, etc. To these official titles are added the titles *samanta* or *mahamandalesvara* 'indicating the ranks that the *rajaputras* and such others may have attained in the administrative arrangement'. The inscriptions also suggest that the term *rajaputra* or *rauta* were not confined to a few clans as is evident from expressions like *rauta* of the shri lineage. These indicate, says Chattopadhyaya, 'a measure of the flexibility of the system in which new groups could be accommodated by virtue of their political initiative and power'.

This proliferation is accompanied by two distinct phenomena in this period as Chattopadhyaya points out. The first was undermining of the political status of the early kshatriya groups 'who were taking to less potent occupations'. This is indicated by inscriptions which show that kshatriyas were taking to professions of artisans and merchants. The preferred term for the ruling stratum now was mostly Rajput and not 'kshatriya'. The second phenomenon was the growing 'inter-clan collaboration' between different Rajput clans. The evidence of this comes from their participation in various military exploits. Here Chattopadhyaya examines evidences from the memorial stones of this period. These stones indicate a wide variety of social groups who came to participate in these activities. Here the memorials to violent deaths relate mostly to such groups as 'came to be recognised as Rajputs'. The names of clans found in these stones include Pratihara, Chahamana, Guhila, Parmara, Solanki, Rathor, Chandela, Bodana, Mohila, Devara, Doda, Dahiya, Bhichi, Dharkata, etc. The stones also indicate titles such as *rajaputra*, *rana*, *rauta*, etc. to indicate the political and social status of those commemorated. Argues Chattopadyaya 'the way these memorial stones were fashioned and the contexts many of them represent in early medieval Rajasthan relate largely to the new kshatriya groups which together made up the political order of Rajasthan'.

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## 19.2 CLAN FORMATION: PATRON-CLIENT FRAMEWORK

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As Chattopadhyaya succinctly puts it, 'in this expansion of mere 'dynastic' relations towards a wider arena of social relations that seeds of the future growth of the Rajput network in space and time are to be found.' (*Idea of Rajasthan* Vol 1 p. 186.) Norman Ziegler writing of the Mughal times found the a movement from kinship and descent relations to service and exchange networks amongst the Rajputs. What follows is a description of the expansion of Rajput social structure based mainly on Ziegler. We will tie this up with accounts of Richard Fox later on.

Ziegler points out that by the medieval period there were two primary units of reference and identification for the Rajput. These were his brotherhood (*bhaibandh*) and his relations by marriage (*saga*). Broadly speaking the brotherhood was a patrilineal unit of descent represented by clan (*vamsha/kul*), which included all those related by ties of male blood to a common ancestor (*vadero*). The clan was itself spread over different territories within Rajasthan and it was not the classical corporate group that enjoyed joint control over a specific territory. The corporate groups on the ground were the *khamp* or the *nak*. These consisted of members from three to five or six generations and included all members related by close ties of male blood, their wives, sons and unmarried daughters.

The brotherhood was territorially linked to lands obtained through division of shares among brothers (*bhai-vant*). This territory was referred by the brotherhood as its birth-place or homeland (*vatan/janm-bhoomi*). The birthplace was both the centre of brotherhood's origin and expansion, and the land from which it was felt to derive its sustenance and strength. Ziegler points out the 'two entities brotherhood and land

were felt to be inseparably linked and mutually supportive.’ B.D. Chattopadhyaya points to, in the earlier period, a new land unit which appears to have consisted of six villages and multiples thereof. The use of this land unit was by no means limited to Rajasthan even so incidence of its use in this period appears to have been higher in western India than elsewhere. Then ‘the earliest references to units of 84 villages seem to be available in Saurashtra which was held by Gurjara-Pratiharas towards the close of 8<sup>th</sup> century and its spread to Rajasthan was perhaps intended to facilitate the distribution of land and political control among the ruling elites. By the later part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the ‘chaurasia holders of 84 villages had become a well known class of chiefs’. Chattopadhyaya further points out ‘the chaurasia arrangement was not always strictly adhered to in the territorial system of Rajputs but it did provide a “theoretical frame” to that system in which the hierarchy of units and linkages between clan members and units could be worked out fairly well’.

Ziegler points out that the other primary unit of reference and identification for the Rajput was his *saga*, those to whom he gave daughters and/or from whom he received wives in marriage. This relationship was of particular importance for at the same time, ‘the act of marriage was seen to unite a woman with her husband’s brotherhood, it was also seen to create an alliance.’ However the brotherhood of father of the woman continued to refer to her as ‘sister’ and in the classical Levi Strauss conception of kinship there is evidence of strong affection between ‘a mother’s brother (*mama*) and her son.

Ziegler further points out ‘the importance of *bhaibandh* and *saga* as primary or primordial units of reference and identification persisted during the Mughal period because of their centrality in defining who the Rajput was. They were also units of natural affinity which called forth immediate settlements of reciprocity, support and assistance, and in this sense organised the basic loyalties of most Rajputs. They did not necessarily command all his allegiances, however, for the complex of loyalties within territories which particular brotherhoods dominated display complexities generated by structural features of these groups themselves”.

From the account of Ziegler the institution of kinship remained dominant in this period. This is evident according to him in the Rathor brotherhood of western Marwar. Within their unilineal descent and the principal of equality among brothers with right of access to land prevailed. Internal differences among brothers concerning positions of rank and authority also remained minimal. However, these Rathor brotherhoods were relatively independent of Mughal or Rajput rulers. Elsewhere as Ziegler points out, ‘brotherhoods were more highly stratified and their membership internally differentiated on the basis of wealth and access to positions of power and authority’. Ziegler points out the organisation of these brotherhoods was ‘also greatly influenced by two additional institutions, namely rulership and clientship. These institutions were closely interrelated and in contrast to the relatively undifferentiated corporate brotherhood were not defined in terms of kinship and associated territory but in terms of hierarchical ties and common allegiance among residential groups and individuals to a superior – the local ruler (*thakur*). It was these ties and allegiances which both defined a local kingdom of Rajput ruler and determined the extent of his territory. They also formed the primary basis of solidarity within that kingdom’.

Ziegler, as we mentioned, uses the concept of patron-client to describe the relationship between different clans and individuals and clans. Now the concept of patron-client has been often used in Indian history. Studies such as that of David Hardiman show that the concept may capture a local reality very well but we need to use it with some caution. Meta generalisations like the ‘great Indian faction’ should not be used for example. We should then cautiously accept Ziegler’s contention that ‘outside the immediate family of the ruler, clientship was the prime determinant of both access to land and to positions of authority”. Ziegler further points out the value of the concept in saying ‘clients as a body included not only Rajputs of the same clan and Brotherhood



as that of the ruler, but also other Rajputs from different clans and brotherhoods'. He points out that the, 'texts generally refer to them as *Cakar* which carries the general meaning of 'servant' but in Marvari usage designates a 'military-retainer', one who held rights over villages on the condition of provision of arms to a superior or who was included as a member of his patron's personal household'. Moreover 'hierarchical ties of patronage and clientship extended throughout all levels of Rajput society.' Clientship was an important institution in Rajasthan because it superceded kinship as a basis of organisation. In addition, it not only regulated access to land and to positions of authority but also made available to a local ruler, upon whom clients depended for favours and rewards, a coercive force which he could in turn employ to support to strengthen the local hierarchy itself'. Ziegler notes here that, 'while the institution of internship and clientship existed in Rajasthan prior to the Mughal period, they developed greatly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at the expense of kinship as a basis of organisation'. The development of these institutions he attributes to the Mughal policy of indirect rule. This assumed the right to appoint successors to positions of rulership in Rajasthan and in turn 'supported them with arms and resources in the form of *jagirs* of ancestral land (*vatan-jagirs*) inside Rajasthan and other lands outside'. It is with these resources that allowed local rulers to consolidate their own areas of authority and centralise their administration. Thus it is in this period (early 17<sup>th</sup> century) based on these developments that we see the 'first true Rajput states in the sense that there was a defined and institutionalised locus of power from whom regulations emanated with appropriate sanction and enforcement'. It is also in this period that the Mughal rulers granted local rulers with more extensive authority over the primary source of honours and rewards in the local hierarchical system to access to land. It is thus Ziegler argues that, 'as local rulers gained wider control over lands which representatives of their own class had traditionally dominated, they sought to transform relationships on these lands from those based on kinship and customary access by birthright, into relationship based on service and exchange.' This met with resistance as is evident from local *khyat* records. This resistance 'generally took the form of challenging the basis upon which a ruler claimed dominance over an area or high right to precedence at all and often ended in armed conflicts.' This conflict then between descent based ties and emerging *cakar* (patron-client) ties then symbolises the change taking place in the Rajput confederacy and 'evoked sentiments of the brotherhood and values of equality and rights to inheritance of and dominance over land by birth'. Ziegler argues, 'these sentiments and values form an undercurrent during the Mughal period which resurfaced periodically, and it is important to note that differing interpretations of rights to particular lands play a role not only locally, but also in connection with Rajput adherence to the Mughal throne.'

### **Bureaucratisation**

Another aspect of changing Rajput relationships to land in this period is the increasing bureaucratization of these relationships as administrative procedures became more refined. In Marvar a beginning was made with issuing of written title deeds (*pato/pata*) to villages. Ziegler notes, 'already by the early Mughal period, the possession of such deeds had acquired a legitimacy which superceded prior claims to land on descent or based on verbal grant'.

The *pato* was a deed modelled on Mughal prototypes for granting of *jagirs* and was a 'movable grant based on prebendal tenure'. It not only granted access to villages but also included a valuation (*rekh*) of these villages for the 'determination of troopers and animals the thakur was to supply for military service.' A tax on succession (*nazrana*) was also imposed on *thakurs* based upon a percentage of the total valuation (*rekh*) of their villages.

Ziegler points out, 'by the time of Maharaja Jasvant singh (1638-78) deeds were issued not only to heads of families but also to junior members and individual Rajputs who were regularly transferred from one village to another like the Mughal *mansabdar*.

From genealogical evidence, it also appears that while in the early years local rulers confined grants to particular local areas where individual brotherhoods were concentrated, later on they moved their *Cakars* about increasingly wider areas, effecting by this mechanism the break up of local lineage territories.’ It also appears by this time that *cakars*, clan brothers or not, all performed service as candidates for receipt of *patas* before they actually gained access to lands.

It is important to note as Ziegler tells us that spatial expansion of Rajputs also occurred in this period through ties of marriage. Individual Rajputs it seems also gained access to lands in the process of alliances formed in marriage ties. These ties as explained by him through the institution of gifts in *sala-katari* created alliances which ‘acted to create a sentiment of corporate territoriality which cross cut that of the brotherhood, but was in many respects similar to it. Inherent in both were expected rights of access to and use of land’. The two phenomenon of service and exchange networks and the marriage alliances need to be distinguished but as Chattopadhyaya had pointed out for earlier period were instrumental in placing Rajputs within the wider arena of social relations.

### **Ideology**

The co-existence of descent kinship based networks, marriage networks and service and exchange networks often led to inconsistent interpretation of norms and conduct of the Rajputs placed within these networks.

Ziegler tells us that in the seventeenth century the traditional Rajput literature put forth the appropriate norms of conduct in terms of general rules. These rules were as it were the Rajput *dharma* which was felt ‘to be an inborn, moral code for conduct which each individual inherited by birth along with an innate potential to fulfill it’. With inconsistencies in the expectations after the move to service and exchange networks one of the cardinal principles of refraining from *gotrakadamb* i.e. refraining for killing of members of one’s own *gotra* (clan sub-group) came into crisis. The question was, which was supreme, protecting members of the *gotra* or protecting the master to whom one was a *cakar*. Ziegler notes a shift in the ideology of honour here when he examines cases in the Mughal time which increasingly stress the demerit of *gotrakadamb*. This shift was facilitated by the very way in which the Rajputs viewed their origins Ziegler point out. According to the myth the *rajputs* came up in times when traditional hierarchical order had collapsed. It was only with great effort and the opportunities provided by the Rajput rulers and the Mughals that they had rebuilt themselves. In moving towards this new society where they were actually coming to their own by blessings of various kul devtas and deities of their rulers and later on Mughals that the Rajputs had reestablished themselves. In such a situation then this *process* of rebuilding was given primacy and a traditional concept like *gotrakadamb* was demerited.

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## **19.3 DEVELOPMENTAL CYCLE FRAMEWORK OF RICHARD FOX: AN ADDENDUM**

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It may be useful to bring in Richard Fox here. The picture of Rajput clan formation which we are getting from Ziegler is that of a unilinear movement from descent to service and exchange networks. Based on local records of Rajasthan it presents one kind of picture. Though Fox is talking of Rajput lineages in U.P. and in a different time period (19<sup>th</sup> century) he gives us the scenario in a broader perspective. Broadly speaking he conceives the development of Rajput lineages in developmental stages. That is, he considers, the interaction of closed brotherhoods, with the raja or the state as different stages in the development of the lineage. These stages may be considered a part of the developmental cycle as it were with the possibility of lineages returning to earlier stages depending on the context or the situation. This basically means we

may see the movement of lineages from descent to service networks as going back to descent as well. He calls this 'traditional circularity'. As Fox himself puts it 'the developmental cycle of Rajput lineages has four interrelated factors. Some of these concern the ecological and demographic dispositions of the lineage. Others concern its relationships with the central authorities'. These factors he identifies as firstly the extent of land available for territorial expansion. He explains 'territorial expansion consisted of either of bringing waste or underpopulated lands under cultivation or physical conquest of populous cultivated regions. Virgin tracts existed in the *terai* region. Waste lands arose due to famine, epidemics or wars when cultivators left their land or were decimated. Outright conquest depended largely on the population and process of the lineage. Territorial frontier conditions greatly influenced the internal organisation of Rajput lineages and were an indication of their relationship with the central power. In general, territorial frontiers existed only when the state was weak because anarchic period created waste-lands and the state when powerful could militarily restrict or control lineage expansion'. In Rajasthan such vast tracts were already available as the frontier for expansion as B. D. Chattopadhyaya points out.

The second factor was the 'population, cohesiveness and military success of the lineage'. Fox points out, 'a large population usually aided military process in the initial stages of the lineage's development or when the central power was weak. However, a large population often caused the kin body to be less cohesive and corporate. Since kin cooperation was necessary for military success, population and cohesion were balanced or else the lineage fissioned. The cohesiveness which underlay the military folk of a kin group was sometimes based on kinship etiquette and genealogical appeal. Later cohesion was the result of the internal stratification of the lineage which gave the raja and elite a predominant authority. Similarly, military cooperation at first emerges mainly from kinship discipline; later on it is due to feudalization' of military service owed to the lineage elite.

The third factor is 'the nature and power of the lineage elite. This factor is closely tied to the level of stratification within the lineage. Sometimes internal rank and economic differentiation within a lineage was small. When this occurred, the minimal lineage of the hereditary or elected lineage leader was no more elevated than other minimal lineages of the kin brotherhood. The lineage leadership merely represented the interests of the lineage as a whole, and its bargaining ability with central authority depended on the military threat of the entire kin body. At other times, stratification within the lineage was great and the lineage raja and his close kinsmen formed a powergroup which often seized the proprietorship and other prerogatives of their kinsmen. In such lineages internal hostility ran high the disenfranchised lineage members rebelled and palace revolts occurred in the lineage elite. Whether or not a raja proved powerful, depended in some measure on his charismatic definition of his office. But, more important, it depended on the favourable occurrence of the factors of population, military success, territorial expansion and the organisation of the state'.

The fourth factor in the developmental cycle is the 'nature and power of the state'. Fox points out 'when the influence of the state at the local level was weak, the state had little power to control local events or counter a strong lineage. When strong, the state might decide to subsidize newcomers to reduce a turbulent lineage and its elite to cultivators or the state could undertake military punishment of dissident lineages. The kin segmentation or military success of a lineage was often greatly influenced by the actions of central authority. If the state was powerful, it could restrict the expansion of a lineage even though waste lands or natural frontier existed. A strong state hindered the internal stratification of the lineage'.

Now these four factors influenced, as Fox points out, the traditional circularity of the lineages in a major way. It may happen that some lineages may stay on at one stage or undergo a situation in which two or more stages may confluence. At any rate, we

get a picture of clan formation of Rajputs which is more dynamic and takes into account a wider range of factors. His account though restricted to the 19<sup>th</sup> century provides us with critical element of diversity in the state and lineage interaction. While Ziegler is content with a patron-client relationship Fox is able to take into account factors such as population, ecology, and the fluctuating nature of state power to posit a rich theory of clan development amongst the Rajputs. Ziegler however is richer in his use of local records. But then a gap remains.

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## **19.4 SUMMARY**

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In this Unit, we placed before you two accounts of Rajput clan formation by B. D. Chattopadhyaya and Norman Ziegler. These two authors have examined evidences from early medieval India and medieval India about the rise of the Rajput clans. This will help you in understanding the processes of clan formation in a comparative perspective. Admittedly the perceptions of the two authors differ in characterising this process. But both focus on questions of process as opposed to the questions of origin. It is this focus which helps us in understanding the concreteness of clan formation in both the periods. Richard Fox is brought in as an addendum to get a wider perspective on clan formation of the Rajputs.

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## **19.5 EXERCISES**

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- 1) How did the Rajput social structure move from political to social in the early medieval period?
- 2) Do you think if Ziegler had used the concept of political instead of patron-client framework his analysis would have been richer?

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## UNIT 20 URBAN SOCIAL GROUPS IN NORTH INDIA

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### Structure

- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Elites in the Urban Setting
  - 20.2.1 *Iqtadars, Mansabdars and Jagirdars*
  - 20.2.2 Social and Racial Composition of the Elites
  - 20.2.3 Power and Position of the New Ruling Elite
- 20.3 New Social Groups
- 20.4 Professional Classes
- 20.5 Trading Groups
- 20.6 Urban Artisans
- 20.7 Slaves/Slavery
- 20.8 Women in Medieval Society
- 20.9 Religious Classes
- 20.10 Summary
- 20.11 Exercises

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### 20.1 INTRODUCTION

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When we visualise urban society few things immediately came to our mind – people, their inter-class and intra-class affiliations and associations vis-à-vis contradictions, tensions and conflicts, social stratification, and so on. Medieval period is significant on number of counts – a new ruling elite, coming from an alien environment, governed by own sets of rules; emergence of *bhakti* and *sufi* movements; introduction of new technologies as a result of distinct needs and requirements of the new ruling elite resulting in emergence of certain new crafts; and above all fusion of two distinct cultures that led to a new kind of social formations distinct from the age old tradition. Diffusion of new techniques during the 13th century onwards points towards great adaptability of Indian society. Political ‘unification’ of the country, expansion in trade and commerce, urban character of the new ruling elite, monetization, commercialisation of agriculture, cash nexus all contributed to vibrant town activities. Cities like Delhi emerged as ‘chief centre’ of cultural activities in the whole Islamic world. The turmoil in Central Asian and Persian polities also resulted in large scale migration of men of letters. Minhaj-us Siraj comments that, ‘This city (Delhi) through the number of grants and munificence of the pious monarch (Iltutmish) became the retreat and the resting place of the learned, the victorious and the excellent of the various parts of the world’. Isami also describes Delhi as hub of foreigners – ‘Many genuine descendants of the Prophet arrived there from Arabia, many artisans from Khorasan, many painters from the country of China, many *ulema* (learned men), born in Bukhara, many saints and devotees from every quarter (of the world). There also came craftsmen of every kind and every country,... many experts knowledgeable in precious gems, innumerable jewel merchants, philosophers and physicians of the Greek school. In that happy city they gathered like moths around a burning candle’. The process that began with the Turkish conquests continued unabated throughout the medieval period. Mughals also, rather with greater fervor, patronised men of arts and culture of Central Asia and Persia. Delhi continued to enjoy the centre-stage among the Islamic cities throughout the medieval period.

As a result of growth of money economy towns witnessed great mobility in the social structure during this period. Medieval ruling elite was largely urban based. This urban

orientation resulted in the emergence of a distinct ‘town-centred culture’ that Mohammad Habib describe as ‘urban revolution’.

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## 20.2 ELITES IN THE URBAN SETTING

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Medieval period is important for this is the period when several new social groups emerged on account of the entry of the Turks and the Mughals on the scene and the ranks of the ruling elite (nobles) swelled phenomenally. Qasbas and towns were filled with petty government officials. Since the new ruling elites (nobles) were largely urban based and they evolved ‘national cultural ethos, which became the standard of high culture and social intercourse...’ (Satish Chandra, 2005) Musical concert, poetical recitations, and religious festivals became the life-breath of the city culture. ‘The city and the court also acted as a school of manners’. However, issues were not settled or else the elites were not divided on the basis of religion. Even during the war of succession among Shahjahan’s sons the ruling elite was not divided on religious lines. Delhi emerged as the chief centre of liberal literary tradition.

We do not possess much information pertaining to common masses (other than the nobles), therefore, in this Section we will confine our discussion largely on ruling elites. Here our concern is not to highlight the political role played by the nobility but to analyse their role and position in the contemporary society as a prominent group.

### 20.2.1 *Iqtadars, Mansabdars and Jagirdars*

*Iqtadar* and *mansabdar* were two major categories of the ruling estates that evolved during the Sultanate and Mughal period respectively. A detailed account of the growth of the *iqta* and *mansab* systems and the power and positions of the *iqtadar* and *mansabdars* are already dealt in our course MHI-04. Here our purpose to incorporate them as a distinct social category is to acquaint you with the dominant position *iqtadars* and *mansabdars* enjoyed as important social groups during the medieval period.

Turkish rulers paid their nobility in the form of *iqtas* (revenue assignments) and its holders came to be known as *iqtadar*, *wali* or *muqti*. These assignees were allotted a specified territory (*iqta*) and they were supposed to collect the revenue and sent the *fawazil* (surplus) to the state. *Iqtadars* were supposed to maintain law and order in the territory and extract land revenue. Generally, the provincial administration was headed by these *muqtis* and *walis*. *Iqtas* did not imply right over land, nor they were hereditary. *Iqtas* were transferable as well. However, Firuz made *iqtas* hereditary and permanent.

The Mughal ruling elite can be grouped into one single category of *mansabdars*. All Mughal nobles, were the *mansabdars*. The term *mansab* itself denotes a place or position. All Mughal nobles at their entry were allotted a *mansab* (rank). *Mansab* determined the status of nobles in the Mughal hierarchy. However, *mansabdars* were not a ‘homogeneous’ category. Under Babur we do not come across this category, instead the term *wajhdar* was used. It received its proper shape during Akbar’s reign. *Mansab* is dual in nature – *zat* and *sawar*. While *zat* determined personal pay and his status in the hierarchy, *sawar* solely indicated the number of horses and horsemen to be maintained by the *mansabdar*. Granting *mansabs* was the prerogative of the emperor. Lineage and performance were two major criterion for promotion. The most favoured category belonged to the sons and close kinsmen of those already in the imperial service. This group was known as *khanzads*.

Largely these *mansabdars* were paid in the form of *jagir*, thus holder of the *jagirs* were known as *jagirdars* and *tuyuldars* under the Mughals. The nobles were assigned a territory to collect a portion of the produce (revenue; *mal-iwajib*) in lieu of their salaries in a specified areas. One should keep in mind that these *jagirs* were

neither hereditary nor permanent. They were frequently transferred and *jagirdars* enjoyed no proprietary right over the land so assigned to him. *Jagirdars* used to appoint their own agents (*gumashta*, *amils*) to collect revenue. However, imperial officials used to keep strict vigilance over the activities of these *jagirdars*. The *diwan* of the *suba* were to keep close watch to prevent oppression of the peasants at the hands of the *jagirdars*. However, often these *jagirdars* oppressed the peasants. Bernier (1656-68) mentions that on account of the oppression of the *jagirdars* peasants often fled to the territories of the Rajas.

### 20.2.2 Social and Racial Composition of the Elites

K. M. Ashraf divides the nobility into two major categories a) *ulema* – *ahl-iqalam* (intelligentsia; largely constituted the religious classes), and b) *umarah* – *ahl-itegh* (soldiers). Here we will primarily focus on the second group. Ashraf argues that the nobility hardly existed without the ‘personality of the sovereign’ for the nobles completely owed their position to the sovereign – the Sultan. Mohammad Habib has defined the organisation of early Indo - Turkish nobility in terms of ‘joint family organisation’ since nearly all recruits were of the Turkish origin; though a few were Khaljis (Bakhtiyar Khalji) and Tajiks (foreigners). Largely early Turkish nobles were slaves, who later achieved the distinction of *amirs*, *maliks*, *khans* depending upon the meritorious services performed by them. Khaljis opened the door for all irrespective of race, birth or creed thus breaking the monopoly of Turks in the nobility. This phenomenon is largely viewed as ‘Khalji revolution’ by the historians. Tughluq discouraged favouring any particular racial group. Instead they encouraged all – foreigners, Hindus, Mongols, Khorasanis and the Arabs. Thus it was not ‘racial’ composition but ‘loyalty to sultan’ which became the crucial determining factor to gain power. However, if ‘racialism’ was the hallmark of early Turkish nobility ‘hereditary’ succession became the chief feature of Tughluq nobility, particularly from Firuz Tughluq’s reign onwards. In the Mughal nobility also a large number of nobles were of foreign origin. According to *Ain-i-Akbari* under Akbar 70 per cent of the nobles were foreigners. However, Athar Ali points out that after Akbar there was a declining trend of nobles of foreign origin.

#### Turks

Early Turks (Ilbarites) were largely slaves, even the most favoured Shamsi Maliks, the *turkan-i chihilgani* (‘Group of Forty’; nobles of Iluttmish), were slaves. There were Tajiks (free born) as well. These Turks considered themselves belonging to ‘high-birth’ as against the Indian Muslims. Their cause was championed by Barani who looked down upon the ‘low-born’ (*jawahir-i lutrah* i.e. Indian Muslims) and resisted giving them high positions. Barani praises Balban for appointing only people of ‘noble birth’ in the state service. Barani lamented when Alauddin Khalji appointed Malik-ut Tujjar (chief of the merchants) to the post of chief *qazi* (*Quzzat-i Mumalik*) and Muhammad Tughluq entrusted charge of *diwan-i wizarat* to Pira Mali (gardener).

Under the Mughals Turanis were Turkish speaking Central Asians. Babur himself boasts of possessing Turkish descent from his father’s side. During the initial reigns of Babur and Humayun Turks were dominant social group among the Muslim elite, controlling the highest offices. However, following Mirza’s rebellion (1581) the position of Turkish nobles drastically declined. Turanis, during the Mughal period, generally hailed from Badakhshan and were regarded ‘uncultured’ compared to their Irani counterparts.

#### Iranis

Iranis, also called Khorasanis and Iraqis, were first introduced in the Sultanate nobility by Muhammad Tughluq. He called them ‘*aizza* (the dear ones). They were appointed as *sadah amirs* in the Deccan who later established their independent kingdom.

In the Mughal nobility Irani element was introduced by Humayun, particularly after his return from Persia. On his return, out of fifty seven nobles twenty seven were

Turanis while twenty one were Iranis. Iranis received special favour from Jahangir's reign onwards and enjoyed prominence throughout the Mughal period..

### **Afghans**

At the beginning of Medieval period Afghan tribals are reported to have lived on the frontiers of north-west region. They got converted to Islam during the reign of Sultan Mahmud (998-1030) and by 12<sup>th</sup> century their conversion to Islam was almost completed. Minhaj-us Siraj (1259) records them as 'ferocious' and 'rustic'. Amir Khusrau (13-14 centuries) also speaks of them as 'uncultured'. By mid-thirteenth century they are reported to have entered in the service of the Sultanate as soldiers. Balban entrusted them the charge of his newly established *thanas* (police posts) around Delhi. By 14<sup>th</sup> century they appeared to have assumed the position in the nobility. Under Muhammad Tughluq they specially attained prominence. In the fifteenth century Malik Khurram Nuhani (Afghan) was the first Afghan who succeeded in carving out an independent kingdom at Jalor (Rajasthan). Afghans rose to prominence especially during Saiyyad (1414-51), Lodi (1451-1526) and Sur (1540-55) periods. However, they faced a great jolt to their position during the Mughal period. They were particularly distrusted by the Mughals. They did improve their position under Jahangir (1606-1627) when Khan-i Jahan Lodi emerged prominent. But soon they receded into the background after Khan-i Jahan Lodi's rebellion. They could only recover during the closing years of Aurangzeb's reign (1656-1707) as a result of influx of Afghan nobility from Bijapur kingdom.

### **Indian Muslims/Shaihzadas**

Indian Muslims, during the Mughal period were known as *Shaihzadas*. They emerged into prominence from Nasiruddin Mahmud's reign (1246-1266) onwards when Imaduddin Raihan was raised to the highest position. But he had to face stiff resistance from Balban, a Turkish noble of the select 'Shamsi' group.

Kambohs were originally Hindus of Punjab and largely belonged to the peasant community. In Multan region they embraced Islam under the influence of *suhrawardi* saint Shaikh Bahauddin Zakaria. By 15<sup>th</sup> century they emerged as prominent *ulama* (scholars) and *mashaikhs* (*sufi* saints). Shaikh Samauddin Kambo even achieved the status of a patron saint of the Lodi dynasty (1451-1526). Shaikh Samauddin Kambo's son-in-law Shaikh Jamali assumed the status of poet in the court of Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517). Imad-ul-Mulk Kambo headed the department of *amir-i ariz* under Sher Shah (1540-45).

Under the Mughals Saiyyids of Baraha emerged prominent. However, Saiyyids of Baraha had to face the wrath of Aurangzeb since they supported Dara Shukoh during the war of succession. Towards the closing years of Aurangzeb's reign Kashmiris emerged prominent. Inayatullah Kashmiri was one of the favourite noble of Aurangzeb.

### **Hindu Elites**

Under Alauddin Khalji Hindu nobles received special patronage. Rai Ram Deo of Deogir was one of the prominent nobles of his reign. He received the title of Rai Rayan. Malik Naik was made *muqta* of Samana and Sunam. Hindus also received patronage under Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-51). Ratan, a great scholar of mathematics received the title of *Azim-us Sindh* and Muhammad Tughluq appointed him governor (*wali*) of Sind.

### **Marathas**

Marathas emerged as prominent group during the seventeenth century. They played an important role in Deccan affairs. Marathas were enrolled in the Mughal nobility from Shahjahan's reign (1627-1656) onwards but they became a sizable group during Aurangzeb's reign.



## Rajputs

Rajputs were among the most prominent social group under the Mughals. They maintained cordial relations with the ruling class, particularly from the reign of Akbar. They continued to enjoy prominent position throughout the seventeenth century. Mirza Raja Jai Singh and Jaswant Singh were the two most prominent Rajput nobles under Aurangzeb.

## Other Groups

Alauddin introduced Mongols into his nobility. Muhammad Tughluq also enrolled Mongol commanders of 10,000 (*amiran-ituman*), commanders of 1,000 (*amiran-ihazara*) into his nobility in large numbers.

Abyssinians also left their mark during the reign of Sultan Razia (1236-1240). Jamaluddin Yaqut – the famous Abyssinian, was raised to the prominent post of *amir-i akhur* (master of the royal horses) during the reign of Razia (1236-1240).

## Jains

Jains attained high position during the Sultanate period. Alauddin Khalji appointed Pheru Jain, a gemmologist, as superintendent of royal mint. Jains emerged prominent in the Nagaur region (western Rajasthan). They maintained close contacts with the Muslim elite. Like Muslim elite they also constructed schools for children to instruct them in the traditional sciences. Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) granted a land-grant to a Jain saint Janbuji.

### 20.2.3 Power and Position of the New Ruling Elite

The new ruling elite enjoyed immense wealth, power, and status in the society on account of being closer to power. A. Jan Qaisar (1965) has calculated the amount of wealth concentrated in the hands of the higher category *mansabdars* (rank-holders). During Shahajahan's reign concentration of resources in the hands of the *mansab*-holders of 500 and above were 61.5 of the total *jama* (estimated-revenue); while *mansab*-holders of 2500 and above enjoyed 37.6 per cent of the total *jama*.

Apart from their salaries these nobles frequently tried their fortunes in overseas trade. Tavernier (1640-67) mentions that, 'on arrival for embarkation at Surat, you find plenty of money. It is the principal trade of the nobles of India to place their money on vessels on speculation for Harmuz, Bassora, and Mocha, and even for Bantam, Achin and Phillipenes'. Aurangzeb's noble Mir Jumla was so rich that he even used to advance money to the English factors. His ships used to ply between Arakan, Southern India and Persia. Shaista Khan was another important noble involved in the internal trade during Aurangzeb's reign.

Besides trade, these nobles also maintained huge *karkhanas*. As early as Firuz Shah's reign (1351-1386) we find the kings'; princes'; and nobles' interests in establishing the *karkhanas*. Bakhtawar Khan (Aurangzeb's period) established number of *karkhanas* in various towns. Even Princess Jahan Ara Begum (Shahjahan's daughter) maintained her own *karkhana*.

These elites were equally involved in the public welfare activities and charitable works. Our accounts are full of descriptions of *havelis*, *sarais* (resting places), mosques, tombs (*rauza*), gardens, tanks, etc. built by the nobles. Fakhruddin, the famous *kotwal* of Delhi Sultanate was known for his charity. He patronised orphanages and even used to pay dowry money to the poor to facilitate the marriages of their daughters. A. Jan Qaisar argues that there appears to be a linkage between the 'social values' and the building activities of the Mughal ruling elite. He highlights that social prestige and desire to be remembered by the posterity appear to be the major factors behind such large scale building activities of the Mughal nobles. Murtaza

Khan, Shaikh Farid Bhakkari (Akbar's period), Abdur Rahim Khan-i Khanan, (Akbar-Jahangir's period) were great builders. They were also involved in establishing new townships (*puras*) and markets (*katras*). Modern Faridabad near Delhi is attributed to be Shaikh Farid Bukhari's contribution. Mir Muhammad Baqir Azam Khan during his tenure as *faujdar* (commandant, incharge of law and order over a group of *parganas*) of Mathura constructed a township (*pura*) near the city. In the vicinity of Agra, during Jahangir's reign, two townships were constructed by his nobles – Itimad Khan Khwaja Sara built Itimadpur and Miyan Rup Khawas, founded Rupbas. Similarly, Maharaja Jai Singh of Amber constructed Jaisinghpura and Jaswant Singh of Marwar (d. 1678) Jaswantpura in the outskirts of Shahjahanabad, Delhi.

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### 20.3 NEW SOCIAL GROUPS

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The hallmark of the period was the emergence of new social groups. With the establishment of the Turkish and Mughal power during the medieval period large number of groups/individuals accepted Islam. There were forcible conversions as well as some were motivated by political patronage; while some were also possibly guided by material gains. Some got converted willingly, largely as a result of *sufi* influence and interactions. This process of acculturation resulted in the formation and emergence of new social groups. The important question is, as S.C. Misra puts it, 'In societal, cultural and personal lens, to what extent was the mark of the new faith imprinted upon the neo-converts – in other words, what was the degree of 'Islamization'? S.C. Misra argues that there emerged, 'two social systems'. 'The upper classes were however nearer to the sources of Islamic culture, as defined by the law-givers and their contemporary interpreters. The faith of the lower was a graft on the popular forms of the abandoned faith'.

Some social groups accepted Islam on account of their clan affinity. Once their clan chief got converted the entire clan followed the suit. Qaim Khanis were one such social group who accepted Islam through this process. They were the Chauhan Rajputs of Danera. During Sultan Firuz Tughluq's reign (1351-1388) under the influence of Firuz's noble Saiyyid Nasir, Karam Chand, their chief accepted Islam and christened Qaim Khan. Thus the entire clan came to be known as Qaim Khanis. Interestingly, those who followed Muslim lifestyle came to be known as Muslim Qaim Khanis and those who continued with their traditional customs and practices were known as Hindu Qaim Khanis. Qaim Khanis continued to take in marriage the daughters of non-Qaim Khani Hindu Rajputs. Rao Jodha of Jodhpur (1438-1489) gave his daughter to Shams Khan Qaim Khani. But it appears that ordinary Qaim Khanis found it difficult to marry among non-Qaim Khani Hindu Rajputs. Initially they tried to have matrimonial ties with high class Muslims – Pathans, Saiyyids – but their response was not positive. Therefore, with the passage of time this group of Muslim Qaim Khanis developed into more 'homogeneous and close caste society'. (Zaidi, 1993) Another such important group was those of the Mewatis/Meos. They were originally Meenas/Meds who accepted Islam. For long they continued to marry within their own 'clan'.

However, the story of individually getting absorbed within the society after accepting Islam appears to be somewhat different than those where entire 'clan' adopted new religion. Inayat and Sunita Zaidi (1993) have highlighted an interesting case of the emergence of a new social group as those of the Sipahis as a result of such conversions in Rajasthan-Gujarat. They appear to be Rajputs of different clans. Zaidis argue that, 'to get absorbed in the caste-based society, these Rajputs of different *gotras* coalesced to form a caste which they named after their profession, that is, *sipahi*. They served the state as retainers and enjoyed the rights of the landed gentry. This process also gave them a homogeneous character, and, to strengthen it further they remained endogamous'. There also emerged another group of Qasbati Sipahis in Gujarat. But on account of their distinct geographical location and environment these Qasbati

Sipahis who were more exposed to commercial world, in their Islamic traits appears to be stronger than their Rajasthani counterparts and they appear to be more heterogeneous and exogamous in character.

Similar group, of the converted Muslims from Rajput clans which emerged during this period was those of the Nayaks (distinct from the Nayak rulers of Medieval South India). These Nayaks were incharge of the keys of the *pols* (gates) of the Jodhpur fort. These Nayaks belonged to different clan groups – Rathor, Chauhan, Sisodia and Joya – of the Rajputs. To maintain their higher status in the social hierarchy they continued to marry within their own social group. (Zaidi, 1993)

Equally important are the Deswali Muslims who were Rajput converts, but they largely followed Hindu customs and rituals except marriage customs (they performed *nikah*) and death rituals (they bury their dead). On account of the geopolitical situations the Deswali Muslims of eastern and western Rajasthan on account of their proximity to Agra and Delhi, converted to Islam more. The Hindu Deswalis while did not mind eating at their Muslim counterpart's house in western Rajasthan; in eastern Rajasthan Hindu Deswalis did not dine together. Even the eastern Deswali Muslims generally adopted Muslim way of life.

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## 20.4 PROFESSIONAL CLASSES

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### Emergence of Middle Class

The notion of 'middle-class' developed quite late in Europe in the fourteenth century. This class generally constituted not only the merchants but also the professionals (medical practitioners, craftsmen, etc.) who worked independent of the state control. During the medieval period in India we do not find modern professionals like lawyer, educationists and journalists instead people in the profession of medicine, learning, literature, art, music and lower bureaucracy primarily formed the middle class.

Historians have debated over the existence of middle class during the medieval period. The issue came to be debated with Bernier's (1656-68) often quoted statement that under the Mughals there existed 'no middle class'. Karl Marx, and Max Weber also reject the idea of the presence of proto-capitalists or middle class during the medieval period in India. Moreland argues that, 'The educated middle class was very small, and the physician or artists or literary men could hope to obtain an adequate income only by attaching himself to the imperial court or to the principal governors'. In 1944 C. W. Smith's article – 'The Middle Class in the Mughal Empire' (*Islamic Culture*) brought the issue to the fore. He recognised the presence of numerous groups of merchants, bankers and professionals. Iqtidar Alam Khan in his study on the middle classes ('The Middle Classes in the Mughal Empire', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 5, Nos., 1976) highlights the presence of 'middle class' during the Mughal period. Other than the merchants and bankers he includes in his list the physicians, architects, teachers, scholars, poets, painters, musicians, master craftsmen, members of lower bureaucracy (state functionaries holding the rank of 500 *zat* or less).

### Professional Classes

Medieval period saw the emergence of new classes of professionals – medical practitioners, artists, petty bureaucrats, etc.

Kayasthas emerged into prominence during the early medieval period. By medieval period they almost dominated the scene as skilled scribes and revenue record keepers. They were employed by the Mughal state in large numbers.

Khatri emerged prominent largely in Punjab-Delhi region during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. They were recorded as experts in accountancy and arithmetic and largely employed

in the revenue department. Malik Shah Khatri, Jivan Khatri, and Rai Das Khatri were the trusted nobles of Muzaffar Shah, founder of the Gujarat kingdom in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Under Saiyid ruler Khizr Khan (1414-1421) and his successor Sultan Mubarak Shah Khatri enjoyed high positions. Babur was astonished to see that the revenue department was almost wholly dominated by the 'Hindus'. By seventeenth century Khatri were the most noticeable merchant group that emerged during this period in the Punjab region. They were also recorded as petty government officials.

This period also saw the emergence of medical practitioners employed in various capacities by the state. *Masalik-ul Absar* mentions twenty hospitals in Delhi. Shihabuddin Ahmad Abbas refers to number of court physicians to 1200. *Hakims* also received *mansabs* (rank) and thus formed part of the Mughal bureaucracy. *Hakim* Mamina Shirazi got the *mansab* of 1000 *zat* and an annual allowance of 20000 rupees by Jahangir. Similarly, Hakim Daud who was earlier court physician of Abbas Safavi, King of Persia, Shahjahan bestowed upon him the *mansab* of 1500/200 and rupees 20000 in cash. Later he rose to a *mansab* of 4000. Hakim-ul Mulk was another physician of Shahjahan with a *mansab* of 2000. Though *tabibs* and *jarrahs* were not bound by any obligation to stick to the same employer, often they joined Mughal nobles' services in large numbers. Ali Nadeem Rezavi's (Kumar, 2001) calculations suggest the wide range of salaries were given to this class. He has tabulated that the salaries varied from Rs. 3600 per annum to Rs. 100,000 per annum. Iqtidar Alam Khan points out that physicians and *jarrrahs* also earned their livelihood by treating people. Pir Hassu Teli clearly mentions the availability of their services at the markets of Lahore.

By the seventeenth century the class of astrologers and astronomers became so common that Niccolao Manucci (1651-1712) mentions the presence of this class in each nobles'/elites' household. He adds 'bazar swarmed with these folk'.

Iqtidar Alam Khan (1976) highlights the 'exceptional' prosperity of the accountants, clerks and other petty bureaucrats connected with revenue administration. Quoting *Tazkira Pir Hassu Teli* (1644-47) he mentions that Khwaja Udai Singh, a petty official, constructed a well attached to a *dargah* at Lahore at the cost of Rs. 3000.

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## 20.5 TRADING GROUPS

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Merchants and pedlars was a common sight in the medieval period. As early as 1304-5, when Cambay was finally annexed to the Sultanate, we find that Cambay emerged as centre of activities of immigrant Muslim merchants. They possessed beautiful fortress like mansions and constructed beautiful mosques. Ibn Battuta's account clearly points out the power and prestige enjoyed by this class during Muhammad Tughluq's period (1325-51). He mentions that even Sultan entrusted the administration of Cambay in the hands of leading merchant, Malik-ut Tujjar Pirwiz of Gazrun (Iran), succeeded by another merchant Malik-ut Tujjar Tajuddin al-Kawlami. These merchants even established charitable institutions. Khwaja Ishaq set-up a *khanqah* (hospice) at Cambay where travellers were served free food and destitutes received alms.

There appears to have existed hierarchy among the merchants. In western Rajasthan *fadiyas* were retailers; below them were *bichhayats* (itinerant) of the localities. Similarly, *bypari* used to operate across *parganas* and were generally not local merchants but outsiders; while *mahajans* were local merchants. There were separate merchants (*baldiyas* or *banjaras*) who specialise in grain trade. Evidences from western Rajasthan suggest that *sah* merchants dealt in grain trade and maintained direct links with the peasants. Barani also mentions about the *sahs* of Delhi who used to lend money to the nobles. *Sahukars* dealt in wholesale transactions and ensured continuous supply of grain to the urban markets. They maintained *kothas* and *bhakharis*

at the urban markets for storage of commodities. Even the state viewed them differently and separate taxes were imposed on them. While *bichhayats* had to pay both *mapa* (sales tax) and *biswa* (a tax), *Mahajans* had to pay *dan* (transit dues). Even when these *bichhayats* brought goods from within the locality they were charged  $\frac{1}{4}$  *ser* per maund, while goods brought from outside had to pay both *dan* and *biswa*. *Banias* possessed *kothis* in the urban areas and called *kothiwals* in western Rajasthan. Bernier mentions wealthy merchants living in double storied houses with beautiful terraces.

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## 20.6 URBAN ARTISANS

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The establishment of the Islamic Sultanate by the Turks and the Mughals brought far reaching changes in the existing social structure, particularly as a result of distinct needs of the new ruling class which created demand for new products resulting in the introduction of new technologies and services. Mohammad Habib has viewed the radical changes in the urban society as 'urban revolution'. He emphasises that the Turkish conquest liberated the town-based artisans. There appears to be no restriction for mobility. This is very much evident in the Punjabi saying, 'Last year I was a weaver, this year I am a Sheikh, next year if prices rise I shall be a Saiyyad.' (Chetan Singh, 1991). Sultan Mahmud Begara raised one Bailu (a local carpenter who constructed for him a beautiful garden based on Khorasani technique) to the status of a grandee and rewarded him with *khilat-i khas* (special robe of honour). During this period several new towns emerged. New cities attracted skilled workers and artisans. When in 1506 Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) made Agra his capital, ironsmiths from Rapri and stone cutters from Nagaur also settled down there. *Sarrafs* got attracted to the city by trading prospects. Thus process of urbanisation helped in the expansion of artisans and trading castes. Chetan Singh's study for Punjab shows that largely the artisans in Punjab were Muslims – 92 percent of the Julahas were Muslims; *kamangar* (bow-makers) were largely Muslims; similarly, *raj*, *kalal*, *rangrej*, and *teli* were also Muslims.

Mulla Daud in his *Chandayan* (1379) refers to *panchawan* (fifth *varna*) – the outcastes. He also mentions the presence of *pauni-praja* (low castes, service and artisan groups) in large numbers in the city. A comparison of *Chandayan's pauni-praja* with *Ardhakathanak's* (mid-seventeenth century) thirty six *paunis* presents an interesting contrast. One clearly finds swelling up of the ranks of this class. There is no mention of *Rangbaz* (*Rangsaz*; dyer), *Dhunia* (cotton-carder), *Lakhera* (lac-workers), *Chitera* (painter), *Kundigar* (presser of cloth), *Raj* (construction worker; brick-layer) *Sisgar* (glass-worker) *Thathera* (metal-worker), *Sakligar* (sharpeners of knives), *Kagadi* (paper-maker), *Hwaigar* (fire-works-maker), *Bindhera* (hole-makers in pearls and diamonds for strings), *Kalal* (wine-distiller), *Silawat* (stone-cutters), *gilgars* (workers in lime). It clearly indicates the emergence of new social groups largely as a result of new technologies. These new castes were identified on the basis of professions – Julaha, Chimpa, Pinjara, Chungar, Baghaban, Chobdar, Saqqa, Qalaigars, gilgars, etc. Spinning-wheel revolutionised entire textile industry and one finds that many addition of new social groups emanated from the textile workers. The caste of *Khammar* (distillers) rose into prominence. During Muhammad Tughluq's reign Azizuddin *Khammar* enjoyed higher status among his nobles.

With the introduction of distillation on a wide scale, *Kalals* emerged prominent. Barani calls them *khumars* (wine-makers) and *araqis* (distillers). Some of its members appear to have accepted Islam. During Muhammad Tughluq's reign Aziz Khumar, revenue collector of Amroha belonged to this caste. Zafar Khan, founder of the Sultanate of Gujarat and his brother Shams Khan Dandani, were sons of Saharan, a *Kalal*. These *Kalals* appeared to be quite a rich community. A 1436 inscription records that Bholi Maharaj Khumar got a step-well constructed in Jahtra for the benefit of the people. In Malwa they are reported as traders in utensils.

It appears that there emerged new forms of industries, specialisation and division of labour during the medieval period. We do not get references of carding or ginning as separate activity prior to Turkish period. With the introduction of cotton gin and cotton carder's bow during the Turkish period we find the emergence of a new class of Dhunia that later assumed the status of a caste. In eastern India we get references to new sub-castes of weavers – Jola, Shavaka – these castes were unknown prior to 12-13th centuries. (Majumdar, 1969) Art of dyeing probably assumes specialised form during this period. Thus emerged the new caste of Rangrez.

With the specialisation in sugarcane production, on the basis of the type of sugarcane produced different castes were identified. In eastern India the caste engaged in jaggery making from sugarcane was that of Modakas and those who prepared jaggery from date palms were called Siuli. With the introduction of paper by the Turks during the thirteenth century not only a distinct profession of paper-making emerged, there also emerged a distinct caste Kagazi during this period. Teli were very much present prior to the Turkish conquest, but in Punjab they were mostly Muslims. This suggest that the profession was opted by Muslims in large number.

With the introduction of separating zinc (*jasta*) from ore sometime in the fifteenth century, emerged a class of tinsmiths (Qalaigars). Zinc was used by them to protect copper vessels from caustic acid reaction.

There appears to be a distinct hierarchy among the artisan class. Position of *ustad* was definitely superior and respectable in the society.

Artisans appear to have enjoyed respectability considering the fact that Abul Fazl in his classification put merchants and artisans after warriors and above the intellectual and religious classes.

Even caste and clan affiliations played a role in social interactions. Hindus were largely divided on the basis of castes such types of caste groupings were generally absent among the Muslims. However, we do get references of Muslim *biradaris* (brotherhoods) in the fifteenth century on the lines of Hindu 'caste' system. The Afghans were also divided into *biradaris*.

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## 20.7 SLAVES/SLAVERY

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Irfan Habib draws a parallel between the introduction of new crafts and the growth of slavery/slave market in India as a result of diffusion of new technologies during the medieval period. He argues that, 'the need for establishing new crafts led to a premium on slave-labour that could be used whatever way the master wished; in the short term, at least, the large scale immigration of artisans from Islamic lands was accompanied by extensive forcible enslavement inside the country and the formation of a large slave market at Delhi'. (Habib, 1980)

Under Islamic law slave was property of the master. Slaves were employed for every kind of work from domestic to the rank of high officials. Even they succeeded in assuming the status of a king. Early Turkish Sultans, from Qutbuddin Aibak to Balban, all were slaves. Thus, during the medieval period slaves emerged as competent statesmen. Malik Kafur, architect of Alauddin's southern campaigns was a slave. Thus slavery was no hindrance assuming the highest office during the medieval period. Slaves even took active part in the wars of succession siding with one or the other group. Female slaves were employed for singing, dancing, and beautiful one's even served as concubines in the elite establishments. These slaves were treated like a family members. Skilled slaves were employed as artisans in the *karkhanas*. In the establishment of Firuz Shah Tughluq there were 1,80,000 slaves out of which 12,000 were employed as artisans. Irfan Habib (1987) argues that in course of time

when these slaves got manumitted (became free) ‘they probably created, along with artisans, the core of many Muslim artisan and labouring communities’.

During Sultanate period an ordinary slave girl could be obtained at 8-15 *tankas* to as high as 20000 *tankas* depending upon their qualities and beauty. One could get slave boy at as low a price as 4 *dirham*.

Mithila documents (north Bihar) refer to sale/purchase of slave girls (*Gaurivavatika-patras*); sale of slaves (*bahi-khatas*); emancipation of slaves (*ajatpatras*) during the seventeenth century. (Thakur, 1959) The important aspect of these documents is that they indicate that the slaves were the property of their masters and could be bought and sold like a commodity. However, these deeds refer more to domestic slavery than the slaves who were employed as artisans and those who occupied high ranks in the Turkish nobility.

Asit Kumar Sen (1956) argues that ‘the slavery was a drag on Mediaeval Society. The Slaves in Mediaeval India no doubt received generally better treatment at the hands of their master’s than the slaves of Afro origin in the Nineteenth century. But economically slavery was a source of cheap supply of labour, politically it helped the aristocracy, morally it proved unjustifiable’.

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## 20.8 WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

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In the traditional law-books women were treated inferior to men. Probably the concept of equality between men and women were alien to medieval period. Writings and views of *bhakti* poets give us some information on the status of women during this period. Mulla Daud in his *Chandayan* (1379) advocated against giving much freedom to women and argued in favour of keeping them under control. In Kabir’s perception also women were ‘subordinate’ to men. Kabir applauded women as *pativrata* (devoted to husband only). We hardly get any radical voice of Jaisi in his *Padmavat* in favour of contemporary women. Jaisi appears to be in agreement with the view that ‘land and women can only be kept under control by strength’. (Shobha, 1996) In Jaisi’s ideal *sati* symbolises total devotion of a wife for her husband. Jaisi appears even in total agreement with popular prejudices that they were generally *matihien* (fool) and men who generally took their advice were presumed to be foolish. But in Mira there appears a dichotomy. She herself is viewed by the society as violator of social norms taking a bold step by leaving Rana’s house; nonetheless she hardly questioned the traditional role of women in contemporary society. Surdas’ depiction of women as freedom loving and rejecting traditional matrimonial bondage suggests him somewhat supporter of ‘freedom’ of women folk. But here we have to keep in mind that Surdas was depicting Ahir society whose women were already co-sharer in the process of production. In contrast, Tulsi Das, representing the elite ‘urban’ women feels that *maryada* (modesty) should not be transgressed. For him women were an ‘article’ and should be looked down upon: ‘A drum, a villager/rustic, a shudra, and an animal, and a women deserve chastisement’. (Shobha, 1996)

Islam bestowed upon Muslim women comparatively greater rights. In Central Asia, in Timurid and Mongol tradition alike women were taken in high esteem. Mongol queens usually shared the seats in the court and freely ate and drank. But by the 12-13th centuries when Islam made inroads in a big way in India the laws of the new ruling elite (Muslims) were in no way drastically different. In the Muslim law as well women were considered intellectually inferior to men. However, *sufi* attitude towards women was somewhat radical. *Sufi* saints did accept women as *murids* (disciples) and considered them worthy of religious guidance. Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag Delhi, successor of Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia even desired that his relics should be distributed among his four disciples; out of them one was a woman. Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia even fixed the allowance for the destitute and needy widows. Shaikh Farid Ganj-i

Shakar (d. 1269) was so much impressed by the religious piety of his daughter Bibi Sharifa that he used to say, 'Had it been permitted to give *Khilafatnama* (grant of authority by a *sufi* master to his disciple to enrol his *murids* in the *silsilah* of the Shaikh and his *sajjada* to a woman, I would have given them to Bibi Sharifa...If other women had been like her, women would have taken precedence over men'. (I.H. Siddiqui, 1993)

Early marriage and dowry was a common feature of medieval society. The main female character Chanda in Mulla Daud's *Chandayan* got married at the age of four. Akbar tried to restrict the age at 16 for boys and 14 for girls. Dowry was more common among the higher castes/rich and the elite. Polygamy also appears to be common and accepted norm in the society. The hero of *Chandayan*, Lorik, had two wives, Maina and Chanda. While divorce was permitted by Muslim law and also prevalent among the lower caste Hindus, among higher castes, rich and the elite it was not approved of. The practice of *pardah*, though already existed in India from long time, its rules became more and more stringent among the elites. Widows' position was somewhat precarious. However, Savitri Chandra Shobha feels that perhaps 'poor treatment of the widows was confined to brahmana household'.

Some women were also highly educated. Main character of Usman's *Chitravali* appears to be a good painter. She possessed an art studio of her own. We do hear of some women *hakims* during the Mughal period. Umdat-un Nisa and Satti Kunwar were famous *hakims*.

Elite women wielded great influence in the political arena. The well-known names in this regard were Sultan Razia, Akbar's mother Maham Anga, Jahangir's wife Nurjahan and Shahjahan's daughter Jahanara Begum. Jahandar Shah's famous concubine Lal Kunwar and her associate Zohra's influence over Jahandar Shah is well known. Farrukhsiyar also appointed Kokiji as his minister.

Compared to their elite counterpart (both rural and urban) peasant women appear to have enjoyed greater freedom during the medieval period. Surdas' description of the Ahir women of Braj joining freely in the *raslila* is suggestive of the freedom enjoyed by them. Savitri Chandra Shobha argues that 'this freedom was based on their active and almost predominant role in the economic life of the community'. Surdas presents a graphic description of the involvement of these *gopis* (milkmaids) of Braj in the activities of milking the cows and selling the milk and the milk products in the streets.

The most cruel and wicked custom prevalent in all parts of India during the medieval period was *sati*. Foreign travellers' accounts were full of such horrendous tales of burning of women on their husband's pyre. Though instances of *sati* among the lower strata were not uncommon, it was more rampant among the higher strata. Teixeira records in 1611 that on the death of Nayak of Madura his 400 wives set themselves ablaze. Alberuni (11<sup>th</sup> century; for north India), Frier Odoric (c. 1321-22), Careri (for Rajasthan) state that generally women of age and having son/children were exempted from self-immolation. But on the contrary, Pelsaert (c. 1626) informs us that even women having a year old baby and another having three months old baby sacrificed her life. Even women of ten or twelve years were not spared. It appears that women were provided with intoxicants to dull her senses. At times they were tied with the logs so that she may not escape. She was set ablaze amidst lots of noise and drum beating which drowned her cries. In this act the role played by the Brahmans was utterly ignoble. Bernier has addressed them as merciless. Sushil Chaudhuri argues that there were some material gains involved in it. For all the jewellery worn by the *sati* customarily belonged to the Brahmans. However, Ibn Battuta informs us that she also possessed the right to give them in charity. Abul Fazl refers to four different forms of *sati* performed: a) those performed out of sheer love for her husband; b) fear of reprimand; c) bound by tradition and custom; and d) by force. The root cause



behind the prevalence of *sati* appears to be the miserable condition of widow and absence of widow-remarriage in the medieval society, particularly among the elites and upper castes. Practice of *sati* was looked down upon both by the Turkish and the Mughal rulers alike. Muhammad Tughluq was the first Turkish Sultan who raised his voice against the evil custom and ordered to take licence or permission to perform *sati*. Humayun also issued such orders prohibiting the performance of *sati* on women who crossed child bearing age. But the order was soon cancelled. Akbar took conscious efforts to stop the prevalence of such evil practice by issuing order that 'women should not be forced to perform *sati* against her will. Though his successors Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb continued his policy, the practice continued to prevail during the medieval period.

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## 20.9 RELIGIOUS CLASSES

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*Ulema* constituted the intellectual elite group, termed by K. M. Ashraf as *ahl-i-qalam*. They enjoyed state patronage and privileges. In turn state needed their support for legitimization of their power and actions. Though *ulema* never participated directly in political affairs, they did lend their support to one or the other, in the tussel for the 'crown'. Ahmad Khan Sarang Khani, governor of Jaunpur under Sikandar Lodi was the disciple of Shaikh Husain Nagauri. Shaikh Ghiyasuddin Khalji also, on his visit to Mandu offered him treasure. Shaikh Husain Nagauri's many disciples were weavers and dyers who achieved the stature of *dervashes*. They received revenue grants in large numbers known as *madad-imaash* or *suyurghal*.

At the centre, the *ulema* functioned as the religious benchmark of the political empire – apart from acting as judges [mostly in civil cases], *alims* were sometimes appointed as principals of *madrasas* [educational institutions] such as Minhajuddin Siraj, the author of the *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, who was appointed to head the Nasiriyya Madrasa in Delhi. Through these formal and informal channels, the primary aim of the *ulema* was to spread the religious Word, and uphold the Islamic religio-moral order as far as was possible. This was often a contentious issue since the Sultan's ultimate objective was never the glorification of Islam but the success of the political life of the Sultanate. Given the fact that the majority of the subject population was non-Muslim, the sultan was more keen to act in a politically tactful way rather than solely uphold the banner of religion. (MHI-04, Block 6)

This brought the interests of the *ulema* and the sultan in direct clash on frequent occasions, and the reign of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq is particularly significant in this regard. Muhammad bin Tughluq had appointed a number of non-Muslims in royal service since they were meritorious, and *alims*. Ziauddin Barani strongly condemned it in his writings. Fakhr-iMudabbir's *Adabu'l Harb Wa Shujaa't* written in the honour of Sultan Iltutmish also lays emphasis on the noble birth of state officials. Muhammad Tughluq's policies show that the upholding of religious ideals was not always the priority of the Sultan. Moreover, the interests of the Sultan and the *ulema* and the learned hardly coincided (MHI-04, Block 6).

*Sufis* enjoyed considerable influence during the medieval period. (See Unit 21 for the growth of *sufism* in India) Ibn Battuta informs us that at Cambay Shaikh Ali Haidary Qalandar enjoyed great respect among common masses, even foreign merchants paid visit to him. *Sufi khanqahs* (hospice) also helped in social mobility. On account of their association with prominent *sufis* their *murids* (disciples) also assumed importance and status. One of the disciple of Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri was a sweeper who later turned a devout *sufi*. During medieval period there developed a tradition of imperial visits to *sufi* shrines. This suggests rulers' acknowledgement of religious and spiritual authority of the *sufi* saints. Babur after his success in the battle of Panipat in 1526 paid visit to the *sufi* shrines of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya and Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. Such visits became the regular feature of the Mughal

period. Abul Fazl remarks that Akbar paid visits to the shrines to ‘strengthen his heart by the influences of holy recluses’. Ebba Koch emphasises that, ‘The imperial Mughal ritual of pilgrimages to Chishti *dargahs* reflected the specific relationship between *sufis* and kings as exponents of worldly and spiritual power which was already an object of continuous reflection and discussion during the Delhi Sultanate’. Akbar constructed *dargah* of Shaikh Salim Chishti as part of his Sikri, the new capital of Agra. Even Akbar used to regularly visit the *dargah* of Shaikha Muinuddin Chishti, the revered saint at Ajmer.

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## 20.10 SUMMARY

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The present Unit deals with the urban social groups during the medieval period. We have already seen in Unit 17 how the existing ruling elite receded to background giving way to the emergence of new classes of elites – the *iqadars*, *jagirdars* and *mansabdars*. Muslims formed a big chunk of class of urban elites. As a result of introduction of new technologies, we find there emerged several new professional classes. Urbanisation, monetization, commercialisation and presence of highly centralised bureaucracy paved way for the emergence of middle class during the medieval period. Slavery was another important feature of this period.

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## 20.11 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the powers and position of the urban elites during the medieval period in north-India.
- 2) Analyse the emergence of middle class during the medieval period in north-India.
- 3) Examine the emergence of new social groups during the medieval period in north-India.
- 4) Write a note on the emergence of slavery during the medieval period.
- 5) Discuss the position of women during the medieval period.

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## UNIT 21 CHANGING SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN PENINSULAR INDIA

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### Structure

- 21.0 Introduction
- 21.1 Political Elites
- 21.2 Landed Elites
  - 21.2.1 *Watandars*
  - 21.2.2 Landed Elites in the Tamil Region
  - 21.2.3 *Palaiyakkarars*
- 21.3 *Valangai-Idangai* Groups (Right-Hand-Left-Hand Castes)
- 21.4 Traders and Artisans
- 21.5 Religious Groups
- 21.6 *Sufism* in Deccan
  - 21.6.1 The Historical Background and the Development of *Sufism* in the Deccan (Fourteenth To Seventeenth Century A.D.)
  - 21.6.2 The Political Role of the *Sufis*
  - 21.6.3 The Social Role of the *Sufis*
- 21.7 Summary
- 21.8 Exercises

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### 21.0 INTRODUCTION

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There were certain factors that accelerated changes in society during the medieval period in the region of Deccan and South India. These factors were related to political, economic and religious developments that often led to the rise of new social groups and changed the nature of the pre-existing one. The decline of the Yadavas around tenth century AD, rise of the Kakatiyas in eastern Deccan, the establishment of the Bahamani kingdom in the fourteenth century followed by the establishment of the four Deccani sultanates of Adil Shahi, Nizam Shahi, Qutub Shahi and Barid Shahi and Imad Shahis, the Mughal invasion and expansion of Deccan in the seventeenth century and finally the establishment of the Marathas-all led to changing political configurations that influenced the society at the village and urban levels. Marathi, Kannada and Telugu speaking groups apart from having their individual spheres of interaction also interacted and influenced each other. The development and growth of Dakhani language and culture that began even before the establishment of the Bahamanis in 1347 AD was accelerated with its establishment and introduced new aspects in the social life. Dakhani Urdu emerged as the local language in the Deccan region and was influenced by Marathi, Kannada and Telugu linguistic and cultural forms. In order to enhance their resource base, the state polities expanded agricultural areas and activities. The expansion of agriculture in the hilly and the forested areas and the settlement of new villages influenced the social composition significantly. (This has been discussed in the Unit 18, Block 5) In Eastern Deccan, in the region of the Kakatiyas of Warangal (1000-1326 AD) in Andhra Pradesh, the expansion of the agrarian base and transformation of the rural society involved construction of new temples. Numerous donations of land, especially the uncultivated forested ones, were made by the local chiefs, merchants, and the members of the royal family. These lands were cleared of forests, irrigation tanks were built on them and cultivation was initiated. Several tribes who inhabited these forests were converted to peasants and incorporated into the lower rung of the rural society. The temple served as the 'social and political integrator'. It employed the peasants, artisans and pastoralist on the temple lands and for various temple activities and incorporated these different

communities of the rural society within a single framework of religion. From the fourteenth century onwards, the various *bhakti* and *Sufis* cults in the Deccan due to their popular social base and a broad religious outlook represented in their interaction with the society a process of ‘acculturation’ that involved interaction and diffusion of cultural values and traditions between the various social groups, resulting in the development of new cultural characteristics.

Similarly, political changes in the peninsular region led to changing social situations. A period of transition can be seen during the gradual decline of the Cholas in the twelfth- thirteenth centuries, the invasions of the Delhi Sultanate in the fourteenth century and the rise of the Vijayanagar Empire in the fourteenth century. Especially, the Hoysala occupation of the Tamil region and the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire by AD 1336, led to the integration of the three cultural zones of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. As a result, a network of relations developed between wetland agricultural settlements and dry upland zones with a narrow resource base. This brought into focus the Telugu warriors as well as the dominant agricultural community of the Velamas from the arid northern zones of the Deccan plateau and a new warrior class, subsequently known as the *nayakas*. Consequently, unsettled forested areas and hilly tracts situated on the peripheries of agricultural settlements gradually evolved into major political and economic centres. The population of these inhospitable tracts comprised of hunting tribes whose martial tradition became the basis of their recruitment in the Vijayanagar and *nayaka* armies. Subsequently, military recruitment began to attract a socially diverse group of troopers from beyond the boundaries of South India. A large number of North Indian, Deccani and Rajput warriors migrated southwards to join these armies. According to Susan Bayly, a ‘large number of Islamic motifs’ filtered through to South India during the Vijayanagar period (AD1336-1576) through this avenue of migration. (Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society 1700-1900*, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 31-68).

Simultaneous with the changing political conditions was the expansion and growth of trade, trading networks and urbanization. The merchant and the artisan class were much more mobile, territorial barriers being of little significance to them. For instance, Kanmala and Komatti traders and Pattanulkar (silk weavers) from Saurashtra finally settled in the Tamil region during the Vijayanagar period. Particularly, the Pattanulkars migrated from Saurashtra, briefly settled in the city of Vijayanagara in northern Karnataka, from where they again moved out, and finally settled in the pilgrimage centers of Kancipuram, Madurai and Ramesvaram. The emergent mercantile communities were the followers of different religious traditions – Saiva, Vaisnava and Islam and their complex network of economic interaction influenced the society in the medieval period.

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## 21.1 POLITICAL ELITES

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The new warrior class, subsequently known as the *nayakas*, emerged as the patron of temples and *mathas* that promoted various religious systems during the medieval period. The *nayakas* were also involved in the management of the temples. Although the *nayakas* are primarily associated with the Vijayanagar Empire, the beginning of this social group as significant political elite is first noted in the Kakatiya kingdom of eastern Deccan. In the Kakatiya kingdom various landed elements especially the powerful chieftains of the Andhra rural society were incorporated into the political network. They were of non-noble ranks and their incorporation was at the expense of the older, established princes and chiefs of noble lineage. These chiefs already possessed hereditary rights over their own plots of land and had a fixed share in the agricultural produce of the village. In lieu of their services to the Kakatiya state, they were granted additional land that was assessed at *concessional* rates. They had the

power to remit taxes within their localities and held military titles like *angaraksha*, *lenka* and *nayakas*. (Cynthia Talbot, 2001. *Pre-colonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.pp.48-84) Such tenure was called *vritti*. Further, in order to incorporate the chiefs and warriors in to the political framework, the Kakatiya state created a new type of teneurial right over territories called *nayankaramu*.

Changing political boundaries, ever mounting military requirements of the kingdoms, especially of the Vijayanagar Empire and the expansion of the agricultural frontier contributed to the increasing migration of the Telugu warrior class to the river valleys and peripheral areas of potential development. Referred to as the *nayakas*, they impinged upon the pre-existing local power groups and their respective spheres of control and emerged as the major benefactors of the temples and *mathas*. These *nayakas* were also called *amaranayaka*. According to Fernao Nuniz and Domingo Paes, the two Portuguese travellers who visited the Vijayanagar Empire during the sixteenth century in the reign of Krishnadevaraya refer to the *nayakas* as the agents of the Vijayanagar rulers, the *rayas*. The *nayakas* collected taxes from the territories on the *raya's* behalf and rendered military service. They had a certain number of troops under their control and possessed revenue rights over land and territory called *amaram*. They also had the obligations of giving gifts to the temples, repairing and building tanks and reclaiming land for agriculture. Later on these *nayakas* became powerful and established independent states during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

According to Noboru Karashima, the *nayakas* were large military commanders who were granted land by the king in the fifteenth century and functioned somewhat 'like the feudal lords of medieval Europe and Japan.' He says that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the legitimacy of the *nayaka's* territorial rule was initially derived from the authority given by the king. The *nayakas* during this period were important officials like governors, *mahamandaleshvara*, generals, *dandanayakas*, revenue officers, *adhikari* and administrators. It is only in the sixteenth century according to Karashima that, they displayed more feudal characteristics. They had clear cut territories called *nayakkattanam*. "This feudal relationship was seen not only between the kings and the *nayakas*, but also amongst the *nayakas* themselves, between superiors and inferiors, which is also well reflected in the references to the merit given by the under lord for the benefit of the lord. At the bottom level, this feudal hierarchy embraced the big landholders in the village." (Noboru Karashima, 1994. *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.pp.35-38). Therefore there was a hierarchical network of lord-vassal relations which reached down the landlords and the occupant cultivators of the village.

Several historians like D.C.Sircar do not agree with the view that the *nayakas* and the *nayankara* system represented a feudal structure, for 'fealty', 'homage' and 'subinfeudation' associated with feudalism seems to find little evidence here.

An analysis of the *nayaka* rule shows that under them, there was political and economic stability and there was an expansion of manufacture and trade. They encouraged artisans and merchants and gave them protection as shown by the tax remission given to the *kanmalas*, and *talarikkam* collected from the weekly fair.

The political elites in the Deccan comprised of various sections of nobility and the *iqtdars*. In the Bahamani court, one of the influential factions within the nobility was the Afaqis. The term means universal that is those who do not have any roots. The Afaqis were therefore foreigners. The Afaqis migrated from Iran, Transoxiana and Iraq and became influential in the Bahamani court from the fifteenth century onwards. This created resentment amongst the older nobility called the Dakhanis. The Sultans

of the Bahamani kingdoms and the subsequent Deccan Sultanates often tried to support one group of nobility against another, so that neither group became strong enough to overwhelm the Sultan. These recurring factional fights imparted an unstable character to the polity and often led to the decline of that particular state.

After establishing his sovereignty in the Deccan, Hasan Bahaman Shah appointed all his allies who had helped him to drive out the Tughlaqs and establish the Bahamani kingdom with administrative posts. They were given revenue assignments known as the *iqtas*. The institution of *iqta* resembled the *iqadari* system of the Delhi Sultanate. The *iqta* holders had to maintain the troops and equipments and these were to be proportionate to the size of the *iqtas*. The *iqtas* given to various power groups by the Bahamani and the Deccani Sultanates were transferable assignments.

Though not so initially, the *iqadars* in the Deccan subsequently emerged as absentee landlords based in the cities. The *iqtas* in the Deccan were centred around the towns and forts and attracted trade and commerce as they provided security for the movement of the traders, cash and goods. There are evidences to show that the Bahamani *iqadars* often gave *iqtas* from their own assignments to the local *zamindars* that represented the powerful indigenous class of hereditary landholders. This has been seen as a process of sub-infeudation since it was not the central government that granted *iqtas* to the local *zamindars*, but one of its own *iqadars*. Therefore, the *iqtas* became a mechanism by which the Bahamani state controlled the villages by absorbing the rural elites as a part of the political frame work.

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## 21.2 LANDED ELITES

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In this Section we will primarily focus on landed elites who happen to possess urban base as well.

### 21.2.1 *Watandars*

In the Deccan region, one of the powerful agrarian classes was that of the *watandars*. The holder of a *watan* was called the *watandar*. *Watan* meant a patrimony which was not only hereditary but also saleable and transferable. *Watandars* of *pargana*, like the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* were superior to the *watandars* of the village, the *patils* and *kulkaranis*. The *watan* was valued, for it was not only a lucrative source of income, but a symbol of social prestige. Despite acquiring political power and position in the state hierarchy, the Marathas were always keen to retain their original village *watan* which compared to the political power was permanent in nature. Several holders of temporary land tenures like *saranjam*, *jagir*, *mokasa* were always anxious to get these tenures converted to *watan* or *inam* that could remain with their family in perpetuity. Village officers, viz., the *deshmukhs*, *deshpandes*, *patils*, *kulkarani* and one of the *balutedars*, that is the village servants the *Mahar* communities held large landed holdings and were entitled to certain rights and privileges called *haklavajma*. All these privileges along with their respective administrative positions were called the *watan*. The position of the *watandars* in the agrarian hierarchy and their rights and privileges has already been discussed in detail in the unit on the rural society.

### 21.2.2 Landed Elites in the Tamil Region

In the Tamil region there were agrarian elites of diverse social background whose status in the agrarian hierarchy as well as in the political structure of the various states kept on changing. The river valleys from the sixth century onwards, witnessed a proliferation of the *brahmadeyas* and the temples at the royal initiative that recognized the potential of these two institutions for restructuring and integrating the economy and society. Therefore, a class of brahmana landed elites emerged. Since they were the repositories of better irrigation technology and farming methods, the land granted

to them became a mechanism for the extension of agriculture into unsettled areas and extraction of the surplus from various peasant groups. The significance of the brahmanas in the *brahmadeyas* stemmed from their Vedic-Puranic-Sastraic discourse that provided the social rationale for integrating diverse peasant and tribal groups through the institution of caste. Therefore linking peasants, local chiefs and other groups to the royalty, both the brahmana and the *brahmadeya* also utilized as the institutional channels of transmission and dissemination of the royal ideology. The proliferation of *brahmadeyas* in the river valleys was also instrumental in extending agriculture. The brahmana landed class implemented the royal irrigation projects and this gave them the crucial right to organize and manage the production and water resources, often with the *vellala* community, i.e. the powerful non-brahmana landowners. Therefore, the brahmana landed elites often by their presence, in the non-brahmana villages promoted the royal strategy for ensuring the loyalty of the various social groups there and provided the much-needed manpower for the vast irrigation projects.

Political and economic changes further influenced the caste equations within the rural society, when the brahmana landed elites in the *brahmadeyas* were replaced by several non-brahmana groups as the powerful landed elites. For instance, in a village called Ukkal situated in the lower Kaveri valley of the Tamil region, the brahmanas were prosperous landholders controlling the agricultural production till twelfth century. However, by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they were selling their lands. The immediate cause was the heavy taxation imposed by the Vijayanagar rulers. The non-brahmanas bought the land in Ukkal, thereby emerging as new landed magnates of the village towards the end of Chola rule.

During the Chola period, there was an influential non-brahmana landed group called the *nattavars* or *nattars* meaning the people of the territory of the *nadus*. But inscriptions refer to only the influential representatives of the *nadus* implying that the *nattavars* were the landed elites and the representatives of the big landholders. They collected dues, imposed forced labour and have been portrayed as an exploitative class. (Noboru Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp.42-61). They were actual controllers of local production, having under them small landholders, cultivators and perhaps artisans and merchants. *Nattavars* controlled funds for worship in the temples and conducting repair works. Their power was rooted deeply in the locality. The Chola period *nattavars* were mainly the *Vellalas* tied to each other by kinship network. Some of the locally entrenched *Vellala* landed communities emerged as big landowners with titles like *nadudaiyan* or *nadalvan*. Some of them also had titles like *arayan*, used by the big landholders in the later Chola period. The *nattavars* included the Pillais, Mudalis, Reddis, and Vanniyas.

In the Vijayanagar period their status underwent transformation due to changes in the land holding system and influx of the migrants. One of the *nattavar* groups, the Vanniyas from fourteenth century onwards joined the Vijayanagar army. They had appropriated the *kaniyatchi* rights or proprietary rights of several villages and became the local leaders. While the *nattavars* in the Chola period were mostly *Vellalas*, those in the Vijayanagar Empire, belonged to several different communities, like, artisans, merchants and so on. The exploitative attitude of the *nattavars* is ascertained by the inscriptional evidence when the *Valangai-Idangai* groups, that is the left-hand and right-hand castes (to be discussed in the following section) comprising of producers and merchants revolted in 1429 against the landholders and the Vanniyas. (Noboru Karashima, 1994, p.57) Thereafter, the power of the *nattavars* were substantially reduced and with the consolidation of the *nayaka* regime by sixteenth century the *nattavars* were marginalized, though some of them continued to function as the local link between the state and the villagers.

*Nattavars* often collaborated with the *nayakas* in making grants to the temples. However, their status had declined for the taxes which they collected like *nattu-viniyogam*, *nattu-kanikkai*, *nattayam* were no longer seen in the epigraphs of the sixteenth century illustrating a decline in their status. Besides, during the Vijayanagar period, the importance of *nadu* as a territorial unit for local production had decreased. Probably, this was because of a new trade centre *pettai* or the reorganization of the local production system after the establishments of the *nayakkattams*. The term *nattavars* was used but the actual unit of local administration shifted from the *nadus* to the area called *parru*. Consequently in many localities the *nattavars*' original character as the corporate unit of landholders in a locality must have been lost.

Thus, a multi community composition of the agricultural elite emerged who related the local society to the political authorities. These diverse agricultural communities contributed to the building of sub regional agrarian domains around important towns in developing agricultural zones. The medieval configurations of the *nadus* vanished, replaced by a set of sub regions defined as hinterlands of towns along routes of transport and communication.

### 21.2.3 *Palaiyakkarars*

Amongst the rural landed elites were also the warrior peasant communities during the sixteenth century. In the dry upland zones, the agriculturists came into conflict with the hunters and pastoralists that often led to the incorporation of the latter into the agricultural community. These changes provided the context for the emergence of a warrior peasant class, both economically and politically powerful and primarily non-brahmana and Telugu in composition. These warrior peasant groups later developed into *palaiyakarars* or poligars. They are called so because in the sixteenth century they were made incharge of military camps called the *palaiyams*. Later these camps evolved into 'small kingdoms' ranging from three villages to almost 2,000 square miles. They were probably the descendants of the local chieftains, *araiyars*. Nicholas Dirks refers to them as the 'little kings'. The *palaiyakarars* comprised mainly of the Telugus, Kannadigas, Kaladi, Kallars, Vokkaligas, Maravas, Vadugas and so on. The warrior chiefs reclaimed vast stretches of land and developed them into towns. They used to impose heavy taxes on the peasants, artisans and merchants that often led to rural tensions. The rise of these poligars displaced the older Tamil peasants and landholders; especially the *brahmanas* already settled there and created a new class of landed magnates.

With the decline of the Vijayanagar Empire in the seventeenth century and the *nayakas* in the early eighteenth centuries, these *palaiyakarars* with their small political systems gained importance. Caste and territorial loyalties were important for them as on the basis of kinship networks they consolidated their respective status. The *nayakas* especially of Madurai attempted to bring the poligars into the fold of the ruling elite.

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## 21.3 VALANGAI-IDANGAI (RIGHT HAND AND LEFT HAND CASTES)

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The expansion of agriculture led to an increase in landed transactions, private and temple holdings, particularly in the non-brahmana villages. This created a hierarchical structure of the landed rights with the increasing prominence of the Vellalas as the dominant agricultural community *vis-à-vis* the lower agricultural groups. The agrarian hierarchy escalated the tensions within the agrarian community. Simultaneously, the growth of urban centers and intensification of mercantile activities led to the rising importance of the *nagarams*, merchants, craftsmen and weavers, especially the *kaikkolas*. Hence, the rising social importance of the various non-brahmana groups led to a movement towards a higher caste status, especially the claims of the artisans



to a twice-born caste status with a respectable ritual space in the temples. This bid for social mobility in the twelfth century culminated into a “societal crisis”. The conflicts that escalated this social crisis were usually between the artisans and agriculturists, sub-castes of the artisans like the *kaikkolas* and *saliyas*, hill and forest people and the different merchant groups. The existing social structure weakened and led to the crystallization of the non-brahmana communities into a dual vertical division of the *Valangai* (Right hand castes) and *Idangai* (Left hand castes), within the traditional structure of the caste society. However, the Vellalas and the brahmanas remained outside this dual division. Further social tension manifested in 1429, when the *Valangai* and *Idangai* groups revolted against the brahmanas and the Vellalas.

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## 21.4 TRADERS AND ARTISANS

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One of the direct consequences of the agrarian expansion was the escalation of commercial activities in the ninth century that led to the growth of market centers, *nagarams* and a network between them that linked towns and villages, to the *managaram*, usually a royal centre and a port. Due to commercial activities of overland and inland trade, new trade routes and urban centres came up linking the remote and newly conquered regions with the nuclear areas and the coast. The spread of guild activities and trading associations, namely the Ayyayole 5000, Tamil Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvar, foreign merchant organization, Anjuvannam brought forth the mercantile community with its diverse groups of traders, merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and itinerant traders. One such prominent trading community that became prominent in the ninth century was the *nagarattar*, whose members applied the *chetti* suffix. Often the mercantile communities invested in agriculture, gifted to the temples, further strengthening the ties of integration, and inter dependence. One such weaver community, the *kaikkolas* had significant links with the temples and became an important social group that the religious traditions attempted to incorporate in order to project a liberal outlook. In several places, the *kaikkolas* formed their own-armed bands and emerged as the ‘merchant-warriors’.

By ninth century, clusters of *brahmadeyas* and temples had developed into centers of urban growth, thus connecting villages, urban centers and royal capital, diverse population and religion within the same complex. The multi -temple complex of Kancipuram and Tanjavur emerged as important politico-urban centers. The economic outreach of the temple at Tanjavur covered the whole of Cola kingdom and even northern part of Sri Lanka. The emergence of different mercantile classes and weavers due to migration has been discussed at the beginning of this unit.

From the eighth and ninth century onwards, due to trading interaction with the Arab merchants, numerous towns along the Coromandel coast developed. Pulicat, Karaikal, Nagore, Nagapattinam were some of the well known trading settlements along the coast. Since most of these port towns had trading relations with the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean, they came ‘to be identified as centres of formal Islam in South India. By thirteenth century a significant number of Tamil speaking Muslims could be recognized. Muslim traders were involved in the trade of gem stones, pearls, cotton goods and most important horses that were supplied to the Pandyas, Cholas and the Vijayanagar states. These traders had well developed international links in south-east and West Asia. The maritime trading towns came to be dominated by the Sunni trading families known as the *maraikayars*. They were primarily ship owners. Another group of Sunni Muslims who were based in these towns were the Labbais. They were pearl divers, fishermen, weavers and artisans by profession. Migration in the seventeenth century to the Tamil trading towns brought a group of Dakhani speaking Muslims, the Navaiyats. The Navaiyats were elite Shafai Muslims who were in Mughal service in the Deccan during seventeenth century. The Mughal occupation of Deccan resulted in the migration of the Pathan warriors, Pathan merchants and

artisans to South India, many of whom settled in the maritime towns of the Coromandel coast. (Susan Bayly, 1992. *Saints Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 71-103).

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## 21.5 RELIGIOUS GROUPS

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There were several religious groups during the medieval period who were attached to the temples, *mathas*, *khanqahs* and *dargahs*. A large number of them had a popular social base and some of them were exclusive in their following. Amongst the religious groups two were significant, the *Sufis* and the *matha* and sectarian leaders attached to the temples. A discussion on the rise of *Sufis* as a social class and their increasing power is provided in the next section.

In the Deccan, the complex network between the court and the different *Sufi silsilahs*, *Sufis* and the *ulemas* and *Sufis* and the larger society, broadened the sphere for the *Sufis* from mere pious saints engaged in religious contemplation. Some *Sufis* emerged as orthodox groups whose aim was to purify Islam of its folk elements. There were some *Sufis*, who were important writers. They wrote numerous mystic and popular literatures, which became an important vehicle of integrating the non-elites, especially the non-Muslims. Another kind of *Sufis* were those who accepted land grants from the state and emerged as the landed elites or *inamdars*. These landed *Sufis* were called the *pirzadas*, literally meaning born to a saint. For these *Sufis*, the court politics, royal attitudes and patronage were important. Such conservatism and preference for court patronage produced a reaction from some of the *Sufis*. These *Sufis* were known as *dervishes* and ranged from spiritual heretics to non-conformists. They were hostile to the *pirzada inamdars* as they found them to be too compromising. The *dervishes* rejected Islamic orthodoxy and its urban materialistic orientation and withdrew partially or totally from the 'structural relations' of the world. At no point of time were the *Sufis* involved in conversion. *Sufis* were not Muslim 'missionaries' as they made no conscious attempt to gain non-Muslim followers. Most of the devotees who regularly visited the *dargahs* and their shrines came usually from a marginalized social background and gradually came under the influence of Islam.

Along with the temples, the institution of the *mathas* assumed further importance in this period. As a powerful institution within the larger structure of the temple, the *mathas* were either a competitive unit *vis-à-vis* the temple authorities or participated along with them in various transactions. The religious leaders or the *acharyas* and the *mathadhipatis* were the vital link between the local population and the new class of rulers, thereby enabling the establishment of political authority over the newly conquered areas. The gifts were made to the deities and the sectarian leaders or the *acharyas* and the head of the *mathas* were the instruments through which the gift was made. In return, they were the recipients of privileges from the ruling class and also gained greater control over temple organization and administration. Thus, these sectarian leaders established religious, political and economic control over the society and legitimized themselves as central figures of the community. A *guru* commanded a large group of followers, thereby linking the different groups in the society into the mainstream of the community. The *guru* initiated the disciple into the community and was instrumental in the dissemination of the theology. The *acharyapurushas* as well as the *mathas* had their respective retinue of servants, system of recruitment and organization comparable to any political system. The influence of the *jiyars* and *acharyas* was so pervasive that they were even deified and worshipped.

## 21.6 SUFISM IN DECCAN

*Sufism* refers to various mystical tendencies within Islam. The main idea of *Sufism* is to develop religious experience in direct communion with god, based on the spirit of *Quranic* piety. The *Sufis* while accepting the *Shariat* did not confine their religious practise to formal adherence. In order to have religious experience with god; the *Sufis* advocated the importance of traversing the *Sufi* path, *tariqa*, under the guidance of a spiritual person known as *shaikh*, *pir* or *murshid*. The *shaikh* himself should have successfully traversed the *Sufi* path and established direct relationship with god. The disciple was called *murid* who had to pass through series of stages, *maqamat* and changing psychological conditions, *hal* to attain concentration, *zikr* and consequently attain communion with god.

There developed a number of orders within *Sufism* called *silsilahs*, in and outside India with their distinct characteristics. The centre of the *Sufi* activities was the *khanqahs* or hospices, where the *pir* imparted spiritual training to his *murids*. The popularity of the *khanqahs* depended upon the reputation of its *pir*. Some of the well known *silsilahs* in the medieval period were the Suhrawardi, Chishti, Qadri, and Shattaris. Out of these, except Suhrawardi *silsilahs*, the rest flourished in north Indian as well as the Deccan region. The *Sufis* organized impassioned musical recital, *sama* to induce a mystical state of ecstasy. However, there were differences of opinion amongst the *Sufi* orders over the forms of *sama*.

With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the beginning of the thirteenth century, various *Sufi* orders migrated from Central Asia, where they were originally based. The attack of the Mongols in Baghdad that subsequently ruined the city and the execution of the Abbasid caliphate by the Mongols in 1258 AD, created a situation of insecurity and persecution. Under these circumstances, the *Sufis* along with other refugees migrated to India. They established several *khanqahs* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in various parts of India, including Deccan. Although an offshoot of Iranian and Central Asian philosophy and practice *Sufism*, as it developed in India, was influenced by environment of the sub-continent. The various *silsilahs* were located in different socio-economic and political context and responded to that context in their own way. Hence, each *silsilah* had its individual phases of growth, stagnation and revival.

### Three Stages of *Sufis* Order

Scholars (J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufis Orders in Islam*, Oxford, 1971) have identified three stages in the *Sufi* institutional orders:

- 1) **The *khanqah* Stage:** This stage was a period of *Sufi* mysticism, from ninth to the twelfth century, when contemplation and introspection on matters of religion produced prolific mystical literature. The *Sufis* led a simple and often an austere life. The *Sufi* orders were undifferentiated, where the relation between the master and disciple was not formal and neither did the master in any way claim to be the mediator between god and the student.
- 2) **The *Tariqa* Stage:** From the thirteenth century onwards, the *Sufi* orders underwent significant transformations. The mystical techniques that were the means to achieve communion with god were systematized through specific spiritual exercises. There were spiritual lineages or *silsilahs* which were a distinct school of thought and had respective founders. A person had to take a vow of spiritual allegiance, *baiat* from the *pir*, who usually represented a particular spiritual lineage and was the head of the *khanqah*. The spiritual lineages went right up to Prophet himself. This vow of allegiance (*baiat*) carried with it several rituals, like bestowing the *khilafat-nama* (a written certificate), *khirqa* (a patched frock) and other objects of spiritual succession. Thus, initiation involved the consecration of the initiate in a formal ceremony.

A hierarchy emerged with the formalization of the teacher-disciple relationship. Veneration and worship of *pir* became important. *Pir* was now the mediator between god and man and became a saint, or *wali*, literally meaning a friend of god. Thus, the *Sufi* orders gradually transformed from spiritual school to saint-centered cults in which the spiritual power or *barkat* of the individual *pir* was significant. As the system got consolidated the succession was based on family ties, where the descendants of the *pir*'s family became the successor. In India, they were called *pirzadas*, i.e. born of a *pir*.

- 3) **The *Taifa* Stage:** This stage can be discerned from fifteenth century onwards. *Barakat* or spiritual power that qualified a saint was transmitted to his grave, which now structurally became a tomb. This tomb, known as the *dargah*, emerged as the centre of pilgrimage attraction. Therefore, *Sufism* now emerged as a devotional movement, the object of devotion being the saint. It no longer remained a mystical movement. The cult of saint had greater attraction for a common man who would find it difficult to grasp the abstract ideas of mysticism and spirituality.

However, this classification has certain limitations. It does not help to understand the relations of the *Sufis* with the *ulemas*, court and the non-Muslim population. Some *Sufis* belonged to more than one order; others belonged to the same order but interacted in a contradictory way with the society. (Richard Eaton, 1978, *Sufis of Bijapur. 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*. Princeton)

### 21.6.1 The Historical Background and the Development of *Sufism* in the Deccan (Fourteenth to Seventeenth Century AD)

In 1327 AD, the Tughluq ruler of Delhi Sultanate, Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq, ordered the transfer of capital from Delhi to Daultabad which was situated in the Deccan. This transfer also involved the shifting of bases of the residents of Delhi. One such group who were ordered to migrate was the *Sufis*. Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib (d.1340), of the Chishti *silsilah* was one such well known *Sufi* who migrated to Daultabad and subsequently made it his centre of activities and introduced the Chishti order there. Another well known saint who migrated was Gesudaraz. Gesudaraz at that time was a child. However, after sometime he returned to Delhi only to leave it after several years for Deccan, when Delhi was invaded by Timur in 1398. Both the saints belonged to the Chishti *silsilah*.

Of all the *silsilahs* the Chishti *silsilah* was most popular in the north as well as in the Deccan, especially during the period of the Bahamini Sultanate (1347-1489AD). The Chishti *silsilah* originated in Herat and was introduced in India by Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti who migrated to India and finally settled in Ajmer in 1206. He had a large number of Muslim and non-Muslim followers. His successor was Bakhtiyar Kaki in Delhi, Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri in Nagaur in Rajasthan. Bakhtiyar Kaki had several well known descendants. His immediate descendant was Khwaja Fariduddin Masud, also known as Ganjshakar or Baba Farid. He ultimately settled in Ajodhan in Punjab. Baba Farid's disciple was Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya (1236-1325) who made Delhi the most famous centre of the Chishti order. Later his successors spread the Chishti order to various parts of the country including Deccan. Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib was Nizanuddin Auliya's successor. Some Chishti saints like Nasiruddin Chiragh-i-Delhi, were also popular in Delhi during Mohammad bin Tughlaq's period. However, since he never appointed a successor, the Chishti *silsilah* after his death did not have any commanding figure. Gesudaraz was one of his disciples.

With the decline of Delhi Sultanate, the *Sufis* dispersed to stable provincial kingdoms and established their *khanqahs* there. One such area which attracted the *Sufis* was the region of the Deccan plateau. The migration of the *Sufis* to the region of Deccan, particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries should be seen against the

background of the establishment of the Bahamani kingdom and the subsequent five Sultanates in the Deccan, viz., the Adil Shahis (AD 1490-1686) of Bijapur, Nizam Shahis of Ahmadnagar (1496), Barid Shahis of Bidar (1504), Imad Shahis of Berar (1510) and the Qutub Shahis of Golkanda (1543). Hasan Bahman Shah who was the founder of the Bahamani kingdom was one of the governors of the Tughlaq provinces in the Deccan. He asserted his independence against the Tughluqs, drove them out and established a new political state. The various Telugu chieftains of eastern and southern Deccan who had fought against the Tughlaqs, some of them successfully, assisted Hasan Bahman Shah in founding the Bahmani state in Western Deccan. Since Bahman Shah was in service of the Tughlaqs, this gave him political authority and legitimacy to generate support amongst the Telugu chieftains, and therefore, the Bahamini could be considered as the Tughlaq successor state in Deccan.

During the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the plateau had emerged as a stable political, social and cultural centre. The development of the Dakhani culture imparted a distinct identity to the region. The cities like Gulbarga, Bidar and Bijapur were the centre of political and cultural activities. This attracted a large number of *Sufis*, who primarily had an urban orientation. For instance, as already stated, Gesudaraz, the Chishti saint migrated from Delhi to Gulbarga. A number of Qadri *Sufis* migrated from Arabia to Bidar. Several *Sufis* came from Safawi Iran. However, the Adil Shahi dynasty, despite being well established by sixteenth century failed to attract any *Sufis*, for it was dominated by Shias, who were antagonistic to *Sufis*. (Richard Eaton, 1978, p.286). The Qadri *Sufis* were affiliated to the Sunni sect and the Shattari *Sufis* were antagonistic to the Shias. It is only in the reign of Sultan Ibrahim II (1580-1627) that *Sufis* entered Bijapur. The reasons were mainly two. First, the disturbances in Gujarat and Bidar in late sixteenth century drove some *Sufis* towards Bijapur. Second, there was a significant transformation in the state religion from *isna-ashari* Shi'ism to Sunnism. This meant that the political power shifted from foreign Iranis to native Deccanis. Besides, the Sultan himself adopted a broad outlook, encouraging both Muslim and non-Muslim traditions. Hence numerous *Sufis*, especially of the Qadri and the Shattari *silsilahs* were attracted to Bijapur. Most of these *Sufis* were first generation immigrants from places outside Deccan, mainly from the Arab world.

Therefore, the court politics, royal attitudes and patronage were important for the *Sufis*. Several tombs were built during the Adil Shahi period indicating a transition from *tariqa* to *taifa Sufism* in Bijapur.

In connection with this, the attitude of the Chishtis is important as there was a shift from earlier indifference towards politics to interest in it and finally distancing from the state and its mundane affairs. During the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries in the period of the Bahamanis, the Chishtis developed close relations with the Sultan, accepted court patronage and were important in politics. This was a departure from their earlier attitude in Delhi where they often declined court patronage. The Bahmani kings realizing the spiritual potential of these *Sufis* and their close network with the society and popular social base gave them land grants and built magnificent *Sufi* shrines. The most prominent of these Chishtis was Muhammad Banda Nawaz Gesudaraz (1321-1422). Sultan Feroz Shah Bahamani (1397-1422) granted him four villages. After his death, his descendants continued to receive land grants from the Bahamani Sultans and they eventually became the landed elites in Deccan. His tomb later developed in to a popular pilgrimage site. The *urs* at the *dargahs* especially of Gesudaraz had become a major festival by the seventeenth century attended by the ruling and non-ruling classes. Gesudaraz brought about changes in the Chishti philosophy especially those aspects that were not in favour with the *ulemas*. He was an orthodox *Sufi* and declared the supremacy of the *shariat* over all *Sufi* stages.

The changing trends in politics and shifting royal patronage finally led to the decline of the Chishti order in the Bahamani kingdom. The change of Bahamani capital from

Gulbarga to Bidar in 1422 and the pro-foreigner and anti-Deccan attitudes of the Bahamanis at Bidar encouraged the immigration of the foreign *Sufis*, who were now being patronized at the expense of the Chishtis as the latter were considered to be too 'Indian.' Thereafter, from the end of the fifteenth century, the Chishtis again thrived in Deccan till seventeenth century. They distanced themselves from the court politics of the Adil Shahi kingdom as can be seen in the location of their new centre, the Shahpur Hillock, which was outside Bijapur, the capital of the Adil Shahis. The Chishtis reverted to their original attitude. They maintained distance from the court and the *ulemas* and drew inspiration from the local influences, hence resembling the earliest Chishti saints of Delhi. It is for this reason that the Chishti *silsilah* unlike the other *Sufis silsilahs* were not affected by the sectarian conflict between the Shias and Sunnis in the Adil Shahi politics because they no longer depended upon the court patronage and were not interested in political affairs. The Shahpur Hillock had a single *khanqah* where several *Sufis* congregated, unlike the Shattari and Qadri *Sufis*, who had several hospices in the city patronized by the state.

By eighteenth century, with the decline of the Adil Shahis, natural calamities and epidemics and the Maratha invasions in Bijapur reduced the city to ruins and the urban culture almost disappeared. This was a setback for the *Sufis* and *Sufism*, which primarily had an urban orientation, as has been mentioned earlier. Hardly any *khanqah* remained in Bijapur as functioning unit. The landed elites amongst the *Sufis* known as the *pirzadas* were forced to migrate to Hyderabad and Arcot for state patronage, without which they could not survive. However, the Chishtis continued to be in the Shahpur Hillock outside Bijapur and emerged as a significant and popular *Sufi* order.

### 21.6.2 The Political Role of the *Sufis*

It was widely recognized in the medieval politics that because of their special spiritual powers, *barakat*, their direct communication with god, and their popular social base, the *Sufis* had the authority to grant moral legitimacy to a state and make them a legitimate part of the Indo-Islamic world. This political role of the *Sufis* in granting legitimacy to the state was based upon the following developments:

- 1) For the Sunni Muslims, the spiritual leadership formally rested with the Caliph and informally with the *Sufis*. However, with the downfall of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in 1298 AD due to the Mongol invasions, the *Sufis* were now considered virtually the spiritual leaders, who had the capability to authenticate the political leadership of the Sultan and his sovereignty, i.e. *hukumat* over his domains.
- 2) The *wilayat* or the spiritual territory of a *Sufi shaikh* theoretically had no territorial limitations. Hence, it followed that the *Sufis* could bestow moral legitimacy to any state anywhere in the world.
- 3) If a *Sufi shaikh* authenticated a state, then the character of that state transformed from *Dar-al-Harb*, i.e. the Abode of War to *Dar-al-Islam*, i.e. the Abode of Peace, implying that the state could no longer be attacked by any Islamic polity and the rebellion, which often became the basis of the foundation of the state could now be justified.

The importance of the above mentioned aspects were particularly crucial for a newly established state like the Bahmani, whose founder, Hasan Bahman Shah rebelled against the Tughluqs and acquired power in 1347 AD. Further this legitimacy provided an ideological support to Bahman Shah for expanding and consolidating his political and social network. In association with this, the prophecy of the *Sufi shaikh* in predicting the political future of an individual especially the Sultan was taken virtually to be an appointment. It was understood that the *shaikh* was conveying the divine will, since he was already in direct communion with god to 'lease out the political

sovereignty.’ This is illustrated in the recorded sayings, i.e. *tazkira* of Nizam-al- Din Auliya, the Chishti saint in fourteenth century Delhi. Having just met with Sultan Mohammad bin Tughluq at his *khanqah*, and while Hasan Shah Bahamani, then in the service of the Tughlaqs was waiting outside, Nizam al-Din Auliya is supposed to have remarked, ‘One Sultan has just left my door; another is waiting there.’ (Richard Eaton, 2000, *Essays on Islam in Indian History*, Oxford, p.168. The evidence is from Saiyid Ali Tabataba’s *Burhan-i-Maathir* and Muhammad Qasim Firishta, *Tarikh-i- Firishta*).

When Hasan Bahman Shah revolted in 1347 and became the ruler, Nizam al-Din’s prophecy was used as an ideological mechanism for declaring the rebellion and the foundation of the state a legitimate one that could be accepted by the larger society. Hasan Bahman Shah recognised this and patronized various Chishtis in the Bahamani kingdom and made lavish endowments to the shrine of Burhan al-Din Gharib, the disciple of Nizam al- Din who had migrated to Deccan. The shrine was located in Khuldabad in north Deccan. Such gifts to the shrine implied that Sultan was also acknowledging Burhan al-Din Gharib’s as his own *pir* or master, Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi, especially when Delhi was still under the control of the Tughlaqs. Such an acknowledgement was to highlight Nizamuddin Auliya’s prediction about Hasan Shah becoming a Sultan that became the basis of the ruler’s authority.

Hence the Chishti *shaikhs* played crucial role in the state formations in Deccan. There were several reasons for the importance of the Chishtis in polity and society in medieval India, especially the medieval Deccan. Unlike the other *Sufi* saints whose tombs were located outside India, in Central and West Asia, those of the Chishti saints were located within the sub-continent. This was important for the *khanqahs*, tombs and shrines were the focus of pilgrimage and *Sufi* activities. This gave the Chishtis the double advantage of having an Indian as well as Islamic character. Such a broad based outlook of the Chishti *silsilah* was useful for the Deccani states to establish their legitimacy *vis-a-vis* the political partners and the local population of the Deccani society, amongst whom the Chishtis were already popular.

Another factor that affirmed the spiritual power of the *Sufis* in the political sphere was their tendency to be highly mobile. Wherever the Delhi Sultanate extended itself, and appointed imperial governors in the far flung areas, the *Sufi* shaikhs, especially the Chishtis accompanied them and established their *khanqahs* in these areas. These imperial governors were the future rulers as it happened in the case of Hasan Bahman Shah. Under these circumstances, Chishti *shaikhs* who had already developed a wide social base, “indigenized and legitimized new, satellite Indo-Muslim polities.”

Apart from the state, the society also recognized the *Sufis*’s political potential. The popular perception was reflected in Abd al-Malik Isami’s *Futuh-i-Salatin*. According to Isami the well being of the sultan and the prosperity of his domain was dependant on the blessings and auspicious presence of the *Sufi shaikhs*. He illustrated this by giving the example of Nizam al-Din Auliya, on whose death in 1325, Delhi was reduced to a city of chaos. Further, Daultabad in the Deccan plateau prospered when Burhan al Din Gharib migrated there. His successor was Shaikh Zain al-Din Shirazi, who was the contemporary of Hasan Shah Bahmani.

However, despite the relations of mutual dependence between the Sultan and the *Sufis* saints, there conflicts and contradictions too, often made this relationship tense. The very spiritual authority on the basis of which the predictions were made and legitimacy was bestowed became a source of conflict between *shaikhs* and the Sultans. For instance, Feroz Shah Bahamani (1397-1422) and Gesudaraz had numerous differences. The most important issue that soured the relation between the two was that of succession. The Sultan wanted his son Hasan Khan to be anointed as the successor by the *shaikh* and the *shaikh* clearly favoured the Sultan’s younger

brother, Ahmad. Thereupon the Sultan shifted his patronage to the tomb and shrine of a Muslim holy man locally known as Khalifat al Rahman. The Sultan also favoured Baba Kamal Mujarrad, whose tomb faced the sultan's tomb in Gulbarga. Consequently, Gesudaraz was marginalized.

### 21.6.3 Social Role of the *Sufis*

- a) ***Sufis* as Disseminators:** The *Sufis* disseminated their teachings to the poor illiterate non-Muslim and Muslim population, like the cotton carders, barbers, smith, potter and so on through a range of literature. This literature comprised of folk songs which contained analogies from everyday life of the people. Written mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth century by Bijapuri *Sufis* belonging to the Chishti order, these songs have been preserved in the oral tradition of Dakhani speaking villagers throughout the Deccan plateau and represent the characteristics of folk Islam. These songs were not composed in Persian, but in Dakhani, the local language or the vernacular of medieval Deccan. Through these songs, attempt was to disseminate not the complex mysticism, but simple tenets of Islam and *Sufism*, devotion to god, Prophet Muhammad, respect for one's *pir* or spiritual guide. The songs were particularly aimed at the womenfolk, who would sing these songs while occupied in various household chores.

There were different categories of folk songs related to different types of household work and different aspects of woman's life. For example, *chakki-nama*, associated with grinding food grains at the grindstone, *charkha nama*, associated with the spinning of thread at the wheel or *charkha*, *lun-nama*, associated with lullaby, *shadi nama* or wedding songs, *suhagan nama* or married woman's songs and *suhaila* or eulogistic songs. (Richard Eaton, 2000, pp.189-202). These songs were meant to appeal to the women and had relevance to their lives, for example marriage, pining for the lover, mother and child relationship and so on. It was expected that while women would perform their household chores, they would sing these songs and practise *zikr* or the *Sufi* spiritual exercise of concentration and contemplation.

The *Sufis* who composed these songs were the immediate spiritual descendants of the great mystical *Sufis* of Bijapur who mostly wrote in Persian and articulated the mystic teachings of their master in a simple manner in these songs. Several themes from the pre-existing folk songs preserved in the oral traditions in Marathi and Kannada were also adapted. The Marathi village songs of this type had also a devotional purpose, focus being the deity of Vithoba in Pandharpur. Therefore, this literature bridged the gap between the mystical aspects of Islam with popular religion.

The trend of *pir* worship and devotionalism at *pir's* tomb that developed during this period linked the 'inner circle' of *pir's* disciples with the non-elite devotees who visited the shrines and were a part of the 'outer circle.' In this connection, the *Sufi* folk songs that expounded the tenets of Islam, the miraculous power, i.e. *karamat* of the *Sufis* and their role as the mediator between god and people played a significant role. Due to their popular circulation, different social groups, particularly rural women were drawn to these shrines. In this context women played a significant role in dissemination of the ideas in these songs and literature and subsequently became an important medium of spreading Islam. The women it appears were the most frequent visitors to the shrines or *dargahs* primarily because one of the *barakat* of the saint was associated with fertility. They also participated in various functions and festivals there. The *malfuzat* literatures in the seventeenth century points out that the women entered even the inner circles of *Sufi* followers and along with the men were instructed in the religious mysticism and exercises to achieve the goal of direct communion with god. Although a large number of women came from non-Muslim background, "they perceived no great theological or social wall existing between Islam and Hinduism. For them the village *dargah* formed only one more facet of an already diffuse and eclectic religious life." (Richard Eaton, 2000, p.198). Consequently, these women would



convey the teachings to their children. In this way, *Sufi* ideas through the folk literature and the cult of saints represented in the *dargahs* entered the household space through the woman, binding the members of the family to the *dargah* and that particular *Sufis silsilah* and subsequently Islam. In this manner Islam spread to the non elite, rural folks.

However, this should not be misunderstood as the attempt on the part of the *Sufis* to convert people to Islam. *Sufis* were not Muslim ‘missionaries’ as they made no conscious attempt to gain non-Muslim followers who for the reasons cited above were attracted to their shrines. Most of the devotees who regularly visited the *dargahs* came from a marginalized social background and gradually came under the influence of Islam. Hence, a following was created focused on the *pir*, and “the diffusion of the Islamic precepts was a by-product of this effort.” Besides, these *Sufis* were also trying to create a place for themselves as the mediator between god and people and win over the spiritual allegiance of the people. Therefore, there was never a sudden conversion to Islam at any point of time. The *Sufis* who entered Deccan in the thirteenth and fourteenth century have been portrayed in the later legends as militant champions of Islam. There is little historical evidence to show this. Those claiming that their ancestors were converted by some *Sufi* saint or the other are till day undergoing ‘a gradual process of Islamic acculturation’ which is also uneven in terms of food, dress and speech. Besides, such a claim was motivated by their desire to establish a long association with the *dargah* of the *Sufi* and their long standing in Islam. In fact the *dargahs* represented a process of Islamic acculturation, which represented a process of interaction and diffusion of cultural values and traditions between the two societies, resulting in acquisition of new cultural characteristics.

*Sufis* were not merely pious mystics preaching Islam. They were a heterogeneous group reacting to the social environment they were situated in. Richard Eaton in his study on the *Sufis* of Bijapur identifies *Sufis* as a class with their distinct affiliations. (Richard Eaton, 1978, *Sufis of Bijapur.1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*. Princeton). As a social class there were four types of *Sufis*. They were:

- 1) Reformist *Sufis*: These *Sufis* mainly belonging to the Qadri and Shattari orders flourished during the reign of the Adil Shahi sultan, Ibrahim II (1580-1627). Though the Sultan patronized them, but his broad religious outlook was not received favourably by these *Sufis*. They shunned the use of Dakhni language and were exclusive in their social interaction. This orthodox reaction intensified particularly during the times of Ibrahim’s successors.

The *Sufis* of the Qadri and Shattari order took upon themselves to reform Islam in Bijapur and influence the sultan. They were city based and had close ties with Arabic traditions. They often collaborated with the *ulemas*. They developed their *khanqahs*, had respective *murids* and received *khiilafat* from some *pirs*. Their hospices were centres of *Sufi* activities and discourses. Their *khanqahs* were popular and after death, their tombs became important pilgrimage centres, reflecting popular devotional attitude while in their lifetime they were antagonistic towards it.

- 2) Literary *Sufis*: Some *Sufis* were important writers who wrote numerous mystic and popular literatures. They were mostly Chishtis who lived in isolated place on the Shahpur Hillock outside Bijapur and were not significantly affected by the changing fortunes of the Bijapur court. Their mystical writings gave a respectable status to Dakhani Urdu, which was finally marginalized with the Mughal conquest of Deccan in the seventeenth century. Their role in developing the *Sufi* folk literature which became an important vehicle of integrating the non-elites, especially the non-Muslims has already been discussed. Their popularity also coincided with the *Sufi* faith which now heavily centered on the *dargahs*.

- 3) Another kind of *Sufis* were those who accepted land grants from the state and emerged as the landed elites or *inamdars* in Bijapur. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Bijapur state was undergoing social and political turmoil. At this juncture, the Sultan's political strategy was to placate the *ulemas* and win over the *Sufis* of non-Chishti origin whose ancestors had a popular social base. Therefore numerous land grants were made to them and the state patronage was extended so that these *Sufis* could communicate the royal ideology and legitimize it within the larger society. These landed *Sufis* were called the *pirzadas*, literally meaning born to a saint. Consequently, certain changes took place within the *Sufi* institutions. The *khanqahs* were ignored in favour of *dargahs*, which now started attracting numerous devotees and their management became a lucrative source of income. Besides, the state patronized those orders that had popular *dargahs* for it gave them an access to the larger society which they wished to control. Since the continuation of land grants was dependant on the state's will, therefore the state intervened and controlled the internal affairs of the *dargah*, especially in appointing, confirming or rejecting a successor. The *Sufis* now themselves gave less importance to the *khanqahs* and focused on the *dargahs*. The 'cult of personality' replaced the 'cult of order'. The concept of *pir* worship became popular and the intellectual mystical aspect of the *Sufi* philosophy receded into the background. The leadership of the *khanqahs* and *dargahs* was now based on family heredity that capitalized on the personality cult and became prosperous. With these land grants, the declining Adil Shahi state ensured the political loyalty of the *Sufis*, whereby the ruler expected this class to generate allegiance for the regime, pacify recalcitrant tendencies and legitimize the state policies. Such a strategy became crucial for the stability of the Adil Shahis in the seventeenth century as Bijapur became a disturbed province due to perennial revolts of the local forces against the state. There are cases of well known *shaikhs* being summoned to the court and made to pray for the well being of the Sultan in the face of Maratha invasions in the Deccan.

However, the *Sufis* protected their landed interests and ignored the popular following. In fact, with the decline of the Adil Shahi state in 1686, the fortunes of these landed *Sufis* did not suffer. Aurangzeb renewed the *inam* grants and granted the new ones. In fact, the landed *pirzaidas* were the first ones to accept the Mughal regime for in the existence of a state they saw their survival and prosperity.

- 4) *Dervishes*: Such conservatism and preference for court patronage over taking care of the religious needs of the devotees produced a reaction from some of the *Sufis*. These *Sufis* were known as *dervishes* and ranged from spiritual heretics to non-conformists. They were hostile to the *pirzadas* and *inamdars* as they found them to be too compromising. The *dervishes* rejected Islamic orthodoxy and its urban materialistic orientation. They adopted spiritual exercises to attain direct experience of god. They withdrew partially or totally from the 'structural relations' of the world. In fact stressing on religion's original purity and simplicity, the Bijapur *majzubs* resembled the early *Sufis* in Iraq and Khorasan. The *majzubs* completely repudiated the contemporary society going back to the original principles of *Sufism*. The contemporary *Sufi* literature calls them *majzubs*. In fact, the polarization between the *pirzadas* and the *dervishes* sharpened further with the decline of the Bijapuri state. One of the popular *dervishes* was a Chishti named Amin al Din Alah whose popularity and influence was feared by the *pirzadas*, especially of the Qadri *silsilah*.

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## 21.7 SUMMARY

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This Unit is a survey of various social groups that emerged in medieval period in South India. The historical context of social change and consequently changes in the social structure are located in the shifting political boundaries, development of trade

and commerce, expansion of agricultural activities, socio-religious movements based on *bhakti* and *Sufi* and finally, the growth of international trade and profits from it. The social groups discussed here are the political elites, landed elites, religious leaders, traders and merchants, artisans and *Valangai-Idangai* caste. A discussion on these groups has already taken place in the previous Units. Here an outline has been provided in order to understand the factors of social change, social mobility and social transformation.

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## 21.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) Examine the power and position of the landed elites in peninsular India.
- 2) Discuss different groups of political elites in peninsular India.
- 3) Analyse the changing social structure of peninsular India in the medieval period.
- 4) Discuss the different classes of *Sufis* in the Deccan region during the seventeenth century.
- 5) What was the socio-political role of the *Sufis* in the Deccan?

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## UNIT 22 SOCIO RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

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### Structure

- 22.0 Introduction
- 22.1 Development of *Bhakti* in Sangam Texts
- 22.2 Popular Devotional Movements: The *Bhakti* of the *Nayanar* and *Alvar* (AD 600-1000)
  - 22.2.1 Themes of *Bhakti* in the *Nayanar* and *Alvar* Hymns
  - 22.2.2 Nature of the Shaiva and Vaishnava Devotionalism
  - 22.2.3 Shankaracharya and Advaita Philosophy
- 22.3 Consolidation of the Religious Traditions: AD 1000-1300
  - 22.3.1 The Historical Background
  - 22.3.2 Socio-Religious Movements: The Role of the *Acharyas*
  - 22.3.3 Socio-Religious Movements: The New Trends
  - 22.4 Socio-Religious Movements: The Changing Social Base and Community Identities AD 1300-1700
    - 22.4.1 Mechanisms of Integration: Consolidation of Community Consciousness
    - 22.4.2 Socio-Religious Movements: Developments and Trends
- 22.5 Socio-Religious Movements in North India
- 22.6 Summary
- 22.7 Exercises

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### 22.0 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit various socio-religious movements that were inspired by the idea of *bhakti* will be discussed. Although *bhakti* has a general meaning, derived from the root word, *bhaj* in Sanskrit, implying, ‘partaking (of god), participation, and loving devotion to a personal god’, there are variations in interpreting *bhakti* that forms the basis of several devotional communities. There will also be a discussion of the historical context in which these movements were situated, the developments within the context and their individual responses to them. The Unit is divided into four sections:

- Section one is an introduction to the development of religion and ideas of *bhakti* in South India from fourth to the sixth century;
- Section two focuses on the popular devotional movements from seventh to the eleventh century;
- Section three focuses on the response of the various socio-religious movements to the material context from the eleventh to the fourteenth century; and
- Section four will discuss the changing social base and the community consciousness from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century.

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### 22.1 DEVELOPMENT OF BHAKTI IN SANGAM TEXTS

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The religious developments in South India in the medieval period can be traced to the trends in religion from the fourth to the sixth century. The information for this period is obtained from the texts which are largely called the Sangam texts. These texts did not mark out any formal religious community. The descriptions of the sounds of prayers, fragrance of flowers and incense, light of the lamps and a perpetual festive ambience highlighted somewhat unstructured ways of worship. The concept of the sacred was expressed in terms like *katavul* and *ananku*, both probably implying the divine form to be worshipped and *kantu* and *potiyil* (a pillared hall), probably prototype of a temple implying a sacred space. The term *koyil* signified the house of a chief

and not a temple, which was a later development. However, by the end of the fourth century, a systematic development of the divine took place with the association of religion with the *tinai* tradition in the famous grammatical treatise, the *Tolkappiyam*. The notion of *tinai* comprised of five eco-zones, each with a distinct populace, subsistence pattern and a divine form. They were:

- 1) *Mullai*, a collective term for the pastoral tracts, inhabited by the *maravars* (warriors) and the *itaiyar* (pastoralists) was the divine locale for *Mayon*.
- 2) *Kurinji*, a general term for the hilly eco-zone comprising of *vetar* and *kuravar* (the hunters) with shifting cultivation as the main occupation. The people here worshipped Murukan as the god.
- 3) *Marutam* was the wetland between the river valleys, and a focus of agrarian activities by the *ulavar* (agriculturists). *Ventan* was the god of *marutam*.
- 4) *Neytal* implied the area around the sea, populated by *paratavars* (the fishing community). *Varunan* was the god of the *neytal*.
- 5) *Palai* representing dry arid zones with the hunting-gathering tribes who worshipped the female divine form, *Korravai*.

Of all the Sangam deities, Murukan followed by Mayon have maximum textual references. Both Murukan and Mayon were associated with a specific form of worship, *veriyatu* and *kuravai* respectively, which were emotionally charged ritual dances involving the participation of all the men and women. Literally meaning the one who symbolizes youth and beauty, Murukan was worshipped in threshing grounds, forests, market places, trees, battle grounds and so on, indicating a strong degree of localization. Compared to Murukan, the divine form of Mayon registered elitist tendencies. By third century, Mayon was associated with northern Krishna Cult/ Vaishnavism, though adapted to the southern milieu. For instance, the texts equated Mayon with Krishna and river Yamuna, one of the important locales of Krishna episodes with Tolunai. Mayon was also the royal symbol of the two ruling lineages in this period, viz., the Pandyas of Madurai in the southern part and Tondaiman of Kanchi on the northern part of the ancient Tamil region. Further, the Sangam texts referred to a sophisticated place of worship of Mayon, which was the temple at Vehka in Kanchi.

However, after the fifth century, new religious ideas were expressed in the late Sangam (or post Sangam) texts, viz.; the *Cilappadikaram*, *Kalittokai*, *Paripatal* and *Tirumurukarruppatai*. These texts depicted the influence of the northern epic (i.e. the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*) and the *Puranic* ideas on the Sangam perception of the divine. The deities localized in the *tinai* framework were transformed into universal transcendental (i.e. abstract and not localized) godheads due to this influence. Murukan was fused with Skanda, the Aryan god of war. Mal/Mayon was identified with Vishnu. *Ventan* and *Varuna* of the *marutam* and *neytal tinai* were gradually marginalized and in the subsequent period do not find any mention. *Korravai*, the goddess of the *palai* was important but the process of her absorption in the Shaiva pantheon as *Durga*, the consort of *Shiva* already began. The interaction between the Sangam and *Puranic* elements introduced various themes from the *Puranic* myths. The various heroic deeds of Skanda now identified with Murukan. He was now described as possessing six faces and six arms in the late Sangam texts. The combination of northern and southern themes manifested in the various incarnation (*avatara*) myths of Mayon/Krishna. By the sixth century, Mayon with his incarnation myths was the god, cowherd hero and the lover of the *gopis* (cowherdresses) and once again emerged as the royal symbol of the Pandya and the Pallavas.

The *Paripatal* and the *Tirumurukarruppatai* articulated for the first time a new devotional milieu. The notion of a personal devotion, i.e. *bhakti* to the transcendental god appeared in the poems dedicated to Murukan and Mayon in these texts. The characteristics of the *bhakti* as expressed in these texts were:

- 1) The devotion to the god was expressed in Tamil, thus providing for the first time an alternative to Sanskrit as the religious language.
- 2) This idea of devotion was not yet a personalized experience that characterized the later *bhakti*. The references in the texts were objective and impersonal, as if concerning the second person.
- 3) The idea of *bhakti* became the basis for introducing the temple for the first time. The deity was situated in the temple symbolizing the presence of god on this earth amongst the people to remove their sorrows. However, the temple had not emerged as the institution of formal worship. Hence, the ideas about the temple evolved that became central to the various socio-religious movements from seventh century. The temple was now referred to as the *koyil*.
- 4) The temple situation also marked out a sacred geography for the first time. This sacred geography comprised of various places of worship of one god, in this case, Mayon and Murukan. This also provided a network for future religious interaction. For instance, the *Cilappadikaram* and the *Paripatal* referred to temples of Mayon worship at Vehka (Kanchi), Tirumaliruncholai (near Madurai), Atakamatam (the Golden Hall in the Cera region), Puhar (Manivannan), Turutti (future Srirangam) and Vengadam (future Tirupati). The *Tirumukuruppatai*, on the other hand, presented a sacred geography of the Murukan temples at Parankunram (Madurai), Tiruvavinankuti (Palani), Tiruverakam (Swamimalai), Palamutircholai (Tiruchchendur), Cenkotu and Erakam. However, a sense of pilgrimage was only in this text in the description of these places by a Murukan devotee, who directed others to go to the god's shrines and obtain his grace.

Therefore, this new religiosity of the fifth-sixth centuries adapted and integrated the Sanskritic culture to the Tamil one. Although the Sangam texts refer to other religious traditions, viz., Jainism and Buddhism flourishing in the urban centers with the merchants as the main followers, the *Puranic*-Tamil paradigm provided the basic structural framework for the development of the communities.

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## **22.2 POPULAR DEVOTIONAL MOVEMENTS: THE BHAKTI OF THE NAYANARS AND ALVARS (AD 600-1000)**

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From the seventh to ninth century, *bhakti* evolved as a personalized religious attitude that focused on intense devotion to a single god, Shiva or Vishnu. This theistic belief was expressed in the hymns of the early Shaiva and Vaishnava saints, the *Nayanaras* and *Alvars* respectively. According to respective community tradition, *Shaivite Nayanaras* also known as *Samayacharyas* are sixty three in number, including a woman saint Karaikkal Ammaiyar and the *Vaishnava Alvars* are twelve, including a woman saint, Andal. Collectively known as the *Tevaram* and the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, these hymnal corpuses inspired the philosophy of the Shaiva and Vaishnava religious communities in the medieval period. Several meanings are attributed to the *Tevaram*. It has been generally accepted that *tev* is from *devagrha*, i.e., house of the god and *varam* is a song addressed to a deity, hence *tevaram*. It also implies 'private ritual worship' and has significance for the hymns, which were associated primarily with the temple worship. (R.Champakalakshmi, 1996, "From Devotion and Dissent to Dominance: The *Bhakti* of the Tamil Alvars and Nayanars." In *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar*, ed. R. Champakalakshmi and S. Gopal. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 135-163. p.141). The *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* literally means 'a corpus of four thousand hymns' of the *Alvars*.

The idea of devotion or *bhakti* in these hymns was a product of the interaction and systematic synthesis of (a) Tamil religiosity as expressed in the Sangam texts, (b) simple *bhakti* and its temple environ as articulated in the *Paripatal* and the

*Tirumurukarruppatai* (as has been mentioned above) and (c) the pan-Indian *Puranic* myths and the brahmanical concept of a transcendental absolute. Thus, within the framework of their kind of *bhakti*, the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* reworked these ideas and projected their interpretations of the universal godhead. Although the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* were contemporaries, there were differences in the ways in which they conceptualized the sacred. This imparted a distinct identity to both that culminated in distinct religious communities of Shaivism and Vaishnavism by eighth- ninth centuries. Characterized by intense emotional devotion and strong desire of mystical union with the god, the hymns emerged as the first concrete expression of religious sectarianism in Tamil. In both sets of hymnal compositions, the *Nayanars* and the *Alvars* condemned each other and attempted to demonstrate through various accounts that their respective gods were superior to the other.

A systematic development of Vaishnava *bhakti* can be seen delineated in the Prabandhic corpus. Nammalvar, one of the *Alvars* (seventh century AD) developed the notion of *prapatti*, which is complete trust and surrender, to be developed in the Srivaisnava theology from twelfth century onwards. Some of the *Alvars* also used a variety of images from day-to-day life and connected it to the various Vaishnava myths. For instance, Periyalvar (ninth century AD) extensively used the mother and child images connecting it to Yashoda and Krishna. The *Nayanars* conceptualized Shiva as the warrior god, fighting battles and warding away evils. The local roots of Shiva were highlighted by associating his achievements with specific sites, in this case primarily the Kaveri valley, which was the centre of Chola power. Finally, by the seventh-eighth centuries, in the hymns of Tirujnanacampantar (a *Nayanar*), the local identity of Shiva merged with the cosmic transcendental one and institutionalized in the temple landscape and idea of a pilgrimage. Simultaneously, the context of Shaivism developed with the inclusion of Murukan as the son and Korravai (Durga) as the consort of Shiva.

### 22.2.1 Themes of *Bhakti* in the *Nayanar* and *Alvar Hymns*

The hymns elaborated upon certain ideas, which had never evolved earlier. These ideas became the basis for the future religious developments of both the communities. These ideas were:

- 1) A highly personalized religious attitude that focused on an individual's relationship with the god.
- 2) The hymns projected a *strong sense of community*. It is obvious that the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* were addressing primarily a group of devotees and attempting to impress upon them through ideas of devotion.
- 3) The image of a community was associated with the attitude of the hymnists towards the *caste hierarchy*. The hymns of these early saints reflected hostility towards the ritual dominance of the Vedic Brahmanas, i.e., the *Chaturvedins*. These *Chaturvedins*, by virtue of their high status in the caste hierarchy had monopolized the worship. The saints criticized this monopoly and strongly advocated that everybody, irrespective of their caste and economic status should have an equal access to the divine. The non- brahmanical background of the hymnists generated such a dissent against the notion of domination by the Brahmanas. For instance, some *Alvars* and *Nayanars* were Vellalas (primarily a peasant caste), low caste minstrels, the chieftains of the tribal clans and so on. However, some of these saints were Brahmanas and their dissent against caste hierarchy reflected the presence of a hierarchy amongst the Brahmanas themselves. The conversion of the local cult centers into Shaiva and Vaishnava faith was accompanied by the assimilation of the cultic priests. Since these priests derived their status from the forms of worship that were considered inferior to the Vedic forms, a low ritual rank was assigned to them within the Brahmana *varna*. Thus, the *Chaturvedins* (Vedic *Brahmanas*) and the *Smartas* and *Vadamas* (those who

performed Vedic sacrifices) were superior to the Adi Shaivas and the temple priests, the social categories to which the Brahmana Alvars and Nayanars belonged.

- 4) However, it was not a total rejection of the caste system. It is only in the hymns of Tirunavukkaracar, (popularly known as Appar) the Shaiva saint; one can read a direct rejection of caste. (Champakalakshmi, 1993, p.145). Rather an alternative to the caste hierarchy was provided in the concept of a community of *bhaktas*. In order to be a part of this community of the *bhaktas*, the most important criteria was devotion to god and caste was secondary. Therefore caste status was never given up. The hymns restated that the devotion to Shiva and Vishnu was much superior to the Vedic recitations and a Chaturvedin was inferior to a low caste devotee of Shiva or Vishnu. Further the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* stressed on “communion in the community.” Service to the devotee, whatever his caste status may be, was considered to have more salvific benefits than direct service to god. For instance, the Vaishnava saint Madhurakavi regarded Nammalvar, another Vaishnava saint who was a Vellala by birth as his teacher and lord. In the *Tevaram*, the notion of the community of *bhaktas* was expressed in the term, *nam* (we) for the fellow devotees. The *atiyar kuttam* (the community of devotees) included not only the Tamil Shaivas, but also the adherents of other Shaiva sects like the Kapalikas and Viratis who were otherwise hated.
- 5) The *notion of pilgrimage* further contributed to the sense of belonging to a community. The emergence of the local cult centres in the hymns charted out a sacred geography for the community and marked the beginning of the concept of pilgrimage, where each site was visited and sung into prominence. The hymns of the *Nayanars* referred to two hundred and seventy four Shaiva sites. All but six are located in the Tamil region. These six are, Srisailam in Andhra, Gokarna in Karnataka and Kedara, Indranila, Gaurikunda and Kailasha in the Himalayas in north India. The Alvars mapped more than ninety odd places, though the traditional Vaishnava holy places are one hundred and eight, which was a later development. In this case, the greater majority are in the Tamil region and the rest are in Kerala, southern Andhra, Karnataka and North India, in places like Mathura, Badrinath, Ayodhya, Naimisharanya, Dwarka and so on. This geography also formed a ‘circulatory region’ of the poet saints, who may not have visited all the sites but were aware of their association with Shiva and Vishnu. This spatial distribution of shrines became the basis for the development of a Tamil regional pilgrimage network and more elaborate South Indian and Pan-Indian sectarian linkages that developed significantly in the Vijayanagar period (that is fourteenth century).

### 22.2.2 Nature of the Shaiva and Vaishnava Devotionalism

The dissent against caste and a broad based idea of the community that included devotees from diverse background has led many scholars to conclude that the *bhakti* movement was a radical protest against the conservative social norms. Undoubtedly, the elements of protest were present, but they should not be over-stressed. In order to analyse the nature of *Shaiva* and *Nayanar bhakti*, it is important to examine the socio-political context in which the poet-saints were situated and their response to that milieu.

#### The Historical Context

The religion of the hymnists was influenced by the contemporary socio-political environment. From the sixth century onwards, the expansion and integration of various peasant settlements in the river valleys and the transformation of the tribal population into settled peasant communities provided a base for the emergence of new state systems. The Pallavas of Kanchi in northern Tamil region, with their resource base in the Palar-Cheyyar valley, Pandyas of Madurai in the south with their resource base



in the Vaigai-Tambraparani and Cheras in the southwest emerged as major states. Incidentally, the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* were located in these regions. The political processes culminated with the Cholas in the Kaveri valley by the ninth century AD. The royal dynasties made numerous land grants to the Brahmanas called *brahmadeyas* and sponsored large scale construction of temples. These two institutions were looked upon as having potential for restructuring and integrating the economy and society. Since the Brahmanas possessed knowledge of the agrarian calendar and better irrigation technology, the lands granted to them became a mechanism for the extension of agriculture into unsettled areas and extraction of the surplus from various peasant groups. The temples provided the ritual space for integrating the new social groups, especially the tribes in the caste system. The tribal divinities became a part of the brahmanical pantheon in the temples. Naturally, then the location of the royal centers coincided with the location of the temple and *brahmadeya* centers. Kanchipuram and Madurai, the capitals of Pallavas and Pandyas respectively were surrounded by prosperous *brahmadeyas* and had huge temple complexes.

### The Response of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* to the Context

- 1) The popular social base and the royal patronage to the temples were not missed by the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*. The sacred geography, which has the various sites of worship in the hymns, corresponded with the political centres. The saints sang about the sacred centres situated in the Tondainadu, the Pallava region, Panyanadu, the Pandya region with the maximum temples situated in the Cholanadu, the Chola region, where the focus was the Kaveri deltaic region. They applied the temple theme in several ways to popularize their religion. The mode of worship described in the hymns was through singing and dancing in praise of the god, represented in the image in the temple and finally seeking union with him. The temple service also became an ideal way of life for a true *bhakta*. For the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*, the institution of temple had a special theological importance. The temple and its deity was the symbol of the immanence (*saulabhya*) of the transcendental (*paratva*) god on the earth, not in one place but in several places. The poet-saints with their fellow devotees traveled (in the hymns) from one site to another, singing praises and worshipping the *arca* (deity) whose local identity fused with the transcendental Shiva or Vishnu. The multiple presence of the god was understood as his *lila /maya*, i.e. his desire to be close to the devotees. The temple worship further acquired complexities with the adoption of certain features from the royal ritual paraphernalia. The divinity was referred to as the *udaiyar* and *perumal*, both the terms symbolizing power and status. (Kesavan Veluthat, 1993. "Religious Symbols in Political Legitimation. The Case of Early Medieval South India." *Social Scientist* No. 21, 1-2: 23-33). The iconographic descriptions of the divine forms in the poems were full of political metaphors of chivalry and power, which highlighted the superiority of one god and subordinated the other. The medium of myths was widely used to highlight the cosmic superiority of the divine. The story of Vishnu and Brahma trying to grasp the beginning and the end of the *linga* projects the superiority of Shiva over these gods.

According to some scholars, the mode of temple service and the use of these terms point towards the replication of the feudal relationship between god and the devotee which further legitimized the landlord-tenant, king-subject and lord-servant relationships. (For such a view, see, Kesavan Veluthat, 1993, p.26-27 and M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, 'Bhakti Movement in South India', in D.N.Jha, ed., *Feudal Social Formation in Early India*, New Delhi, 1987, pp.347-375.) But according to R. Champakalakshmi, such a view ignores, 'the complex processes through which resource mobilization and redistribution were achieved in early medieval Tamilakam, in which the temple enabled royal and chiefly families to establish their political presence and social dominance by intruding into the peasant regions known as the *nadus*'. (R. Champakalakshmi, 1996, p.155.)

Thus, *bhakti* popularized the temple, its religion, its social hierarchy, and its forms of worship. By incorporating the temple theme, the saints expressed the desire for royal patronage. However, it appears that they were not successful as no temples of the Pallava and Pandya period existed in the centers sung by the hymnists with the exception of the Parameshvara Vinnagaram at Kanchi and a couple of Shaiva temples. The prominent temples were a part of the royal institutions with the Brahmanas exercising control over them. Thus, the rhetoric against caste often exaggerated as an outright rejection of it should be seen in connection with exclusive royal patronage to the Brahmanas. *Brahmadeyas* did not figure at all in the hymnal literature. As has been mentioned before, the protest was against the brahmanical exclusivism in the performance of the temple rituals. Nevertheless, some of the hymns inspired the temple iconography of the Pallavas. For instance, the three early Alvars (Poygai, Putam and Pey) inspired the rock-cut temples in the Pallava cities of Kanchipuram and Mamallapuram.

- 2) Further, the hymnists themselves applied brahmanical motifs to their *bhakti*. For instance, the saints often described themselves as the 'Kavuniyan' (a Tamil *Brahmana* of the Kaundiya *gotra*) or referred to themselves and their contemporaries as 'well versed in four *Vedas*', as the 'lord of the *Vedas*', 'is the lord spoken of in the *Vedas*', 'is praised by the *Vedas*,' and so on. Although Tamil received importance as a religious language, it was an alternative to the Sanskrit *Vedas*. The importance of the *Vedas* was never ignored; rather a Vedic status was attributed to the Tamil hymns, whereby they were looked upon as scriptures, i.e. *marai*, equal to *Vedas*. Shiva and Vishnu were supposed to be instrumental in revealing the *Vedas* to the whole world. Thus, the stress was on the accessibility of *Vedas* that cut across all caste barriers rather than limiting it to the *Brahmanas* only. Thus, the *bhakti* movement in early medieval South India representing the temple-based religion of the *Agamic-Puranic* Hinduism legitimized the social structure based on the brahmanical principles and became the channel for transmission of the royal authority.
- 3) The expectation and competition for the royal patronage influenced the sectarian criticism against the rival religious communities, Jainism and Buddhism, which were popular in the Tamil region since the early centuries of the Christian era. Jainism enjoyed considerable royal patronage especially under the Pallava ruler, Mahendravarman I, a Jaina himself. Kanchipuram and Madurai were the centres of sectarian rivalry. The *bhakti* hymns referred to the stories of conflict and persecution leading to the conversions of the rulers and consequent change in the patronage towards Shaivism and Vaishnavism. The story of Mahendravarman converting to Shaivism at the behest of Appar and many such narratives reflect tensions over royal patronage, which the heterodox sects enjoyed.

Further tensions arose due to the theological incompatibility between the hymnal and the heterodox religious beliefs, where the former had a materialistic orientation focused on the temple worship and the latter had an austere orientation based on the principles of self-denial. It is also likely that the aversion of the *bhakti* saints was regional as the Jaina and the Buddhist monks had recently arrived from the Kannada and Telugu region to the Tamil country. Hence, it was not social protest but the harsh criticism against Jainism and Buddhism that emphasized upon community solidarity, where both the poet-saints emphasized upon distinct identities.

Therefore, the hymnal tradition for the first time evolved various motifs of the community structure, viz., the philosophy, and notion of a community, sacred geography and pilgrimage that became theologically significant in the later period. The constant attempt to assert a distinct identity vis-à-vis the brahmanical religion and heterodox sects were evident in the protest in the hymnal literature. However, their conformism to the political structure marked the process of 'reaggregation' through which the

communities were consolidated in the Chola period. Despite the growth of a community, neither of the religious traditions of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* could evolve a systematic theology and textual tradition – a feature visible from the eleventh century onwards.

### Shankaracharya and Advaita Philosophy ( AD 788-820)

While the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* represented popular devotional movements with a broad socio-cultural base, there was a growth of another religious tradition called the *Smartas* in the eighth century, under Shankaracharya, the famous *advaita* philosopher. The *Smarta* tradition was primarily based upon inquiry and speculation of the philosophy of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* and was therefore, highly intellectual with a limited social base confined mostly to the Vedic Brahmanas. However, the ideas of *advaita* were influential in shaping the ideas of post-eleventh century philosophies of Shaiva Siddhantas and Vaishnava saints like Ramanuja and Madhvacharya. (To be discussed in the next section).

The various biographies of Shankaracharya illustrate that Shankara was a *Nambudri Brahmana* from Kaladi which is in North Travancore region of Kerala. He lost his father at an early age and became an ascetic or a *sanyasin*. Shankara travelled all over India, participating and winning in numerous debates on *Vedantic* philosophy and propagated his ideas. According to the biographies, he reorganized the ascetic order of the *sanyasins*, perhaps influenced by the Buddhist *Sangha* or the monastic orders and founded a number of *mathas* for the study and propagation of his doctrines. Some of the important *mathas* are located in Sringeri, Dwarka, Badrinatha, Puri and Kanchipuram. However, there is hardly any reference to the monastic orders in the epigraphic records till the fourteenth century, when, “a fresh wave of Sanskritisation took place in South India, including Tamil Nadu, which may well be associated with the expansion of the Vijayanagar authority.” (Champakalakshmi, 1993, p.154) Shankara wrote several works and commentaries on the *Vedanta-sutras*, *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*, all in Sanskrit. His major contribution was the commentary on Badrayana’s *Brahmasutra*, which was a significant attempt to systematize the various strands of the *Upanishadic* thoughts. He acquired numerous disciples who carried on the *Smarta* tradition. Thus, Shankara’s philosophy that was highly intellectual and religious organization was essentially ascetic. The role he assigned to his disciples brought a class of renouncers into active relationship with the larger society in South India for the first time.

In South India, the term *Smarta* means not only the worship of the five gods, but also following Shankara’s philosophy of the *Vedanta*. According to Nilakantha Shastri, the *Smarta* religion evolved a religious opinion and practice that reconciled the Shaiva and Vaishnava sectarianism as seen in the hymns of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*. The religious practice is based on the principle of *Panchayatana puja*, i.e. the worship of five shrines, viz., Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti (mother-goddess), Surya and Ganesha. This worship is done at home with the help of symbols representing the deities. (K.A.Nilakana Sastri, *Development of Religion in South India*. Madras: Orient Longmans, 1963, p.61). Some believe that Shankara introduced it and some ascribe it to Kumarila, who lived approximately hundred years before Shankara.

Shankara’s philosophy had its roots in *Vedanta* or *Upanishads* and represented a brahmanical/ Sanskritic alternative to Buddhism. According to him, both Shiva and Vishnu signified the supreme Brahman or the universal soul. He systematically developed the monistic tendency of the *Upanishads*, emphasizing that the unqualified Brahma is *Nirguna* Brahma. Brahma is one and eternal beyond the duality of subject and object. Shankara in his *Advaitic* philosophy of non-dualism explained that god (*ishvara*), the individual soul (*jiva*) and the world (*jagat*) are mere illusions due to the principle of *maya*. True liberation or *moksha* can only be attained through *jnana*, i.e. knowledge. Therefore, Shankara advocated renunciation of worldly life and adoption of ascetic mode of living. He also stated that the devotion to god and the observance

of the *varnashramdharma* (that is the rules of the caste system) as described in the scriptures were important for acquiring competency for the study of the *Vedanta*. As has been stated earlier, the philosophy of Shankara's *advaita* influenced later *Vaishnava* and *Shaiva Siddhanta* philosophy after the eleventh century and emerged as an important theological basis for the respective communities. (Konduri Sarojini Devi (1990), *Religion in Vijayanagar Empire*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, pp.58-59).

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## 22.3 CONSOLIDATION OF THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS: AD 1000-1300

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From the tenth to the thirteenth century, the religious trends were marked by community construction and consolidation. The expression of community consciousness was evident in two types of interaction: (a) within the community itself where attempts were made to broaden the social base and adopt a universalistic and integrative approach; (b) when the community interacted with other religious traditions.

In the Tamil region, the *Nayanars* and the *Alvars* were succeeded by the *acharyas*, who were theologian philosophers and expanded and consolidated the philosophical base of their individual communities. They collected the hymns of the early saints, created an institutional framework for the *bhakti* movement and harmonized regional ideas with the Pan-Indian Sanskritic texts such as the Upanishads. Simultaneously, there were socio-religious movements in Karnataka and Andhra region, the basis being an anti-caste ideology. These were the Virashaiva and Aradhya Shaiva movements in Karnataka and Andhra region.

### 22.3.1 The Historical Background

These socio-religious movements were evolving against the background of different historical processes. With the consolidation of the Cholas in the tenth century, the centre of political activities shifted from Tondainadu (with Kanchipuram as the capital) to Cholanadu with the capital at Tanjavur. The Pandyas continued to rule from Madurai and provided a formidable opposition to the Cholas. Both the Cholas and the Pandyas continued with the Pallava system of utilizing the *brahmadeyas*, and temples for political integration. Both the *brahmadeyas* and temples due to their overarching ideological framework of the *varna-jati* paradigm integrated various sections of the society. (This has already been discussed in the previous Section and in Block 5 Unit 18). However, it was the temple that emerged as an important institution of integration in three ways:

- 1) The ritual of gift giving to the deities in the temples created a network of political alliances. The kings gifted to the temples that in turn were recirculated and often sold in the society in the form of ritual goods, for instance the *prasadam* (food offering), generating economic transactions. The local chiefs also made gifts to the king or donated to the temples in the name of the king and received titles and honours that enabled them to become the members of the royal alliance network. Thus, this ritual of gift giving created loyalties and alliances for political purposes and imparted political stability to the medieval South Indian states. However, one cannot ignore the notion of religious merit, which was an important aspect of ritual gift giving.
- 2) The temple further provided the 'ideological apparatus' for the medieval south Indian states, bringing together the religion of various social groups. Already in the hymns of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*, a context for a dialogue was created between the autochthonous cults and *Puranic* religion, whereby the former was universalized within the brahmanical structural paradigm of the temple. The political dynasties realized that the *bhakti* cults of Shaivism and Vaishnavism with their broad-based ideologies would be effective in integrating the society

and consolidate the political network. Hence, the popular socio-religious movements with elements of protest now influenced the political ideology of power and dominance. (R. Chamapakalakshmi, 1996). Consequently, the hymns which were full of poetic descriptions of power and strength of various forms of Shiva and Vishnu became the source of inspiration for the construction of several canonical temples with elaborate iconography. The various cosmic and heroic representations of the *Puranic* deities in the temple iconography were related to the image of a monarch and his absolute power. The deities acquired royal characteristics. For the first time, political geography coincided with the sacred geography, as the Kaveri region, the core of Cholanadu, experienced hectic temple construction. Shrirangam and Chidambaram developed as major political as well as sacred cult centers, for Vaishnavism and Shaivism respectively.

- 3) The temples also provided the avenue for the rulers, especially the Cholas to 'divinise' themselves. The Cholas constructed images of their rulers and members of the royal family and consecrated them by situating the images in the temples. Apart from this, the construction of monumental temples became a part of the royal project. Several such imperial temples were named after the Chola rulers who sponsored them. The Brhadേശvara temple at Tanjore constructed by Rajaraja the Great (AD 985-1014) in AD 1003 illustrates this trend. Symbolizing the new royal power of Rajaraja, the 'political architecture' and iconography of the main deity Shiva was identified with the Chola king and was called Rajarajeshvara. (Kesavan Veluthat, 1993, p.30) Thus, the sacred and the temporal realm were present in the temple. Huge temple complexes with elaborate architecture, a pantheon with multiple divinities represented a continuous process of integration of different sections of the society in a hierarchical manner. At the top of the hierarchy was the royal family, followed by the ritually pure Brahmana priests performing, worship. Below them were the administrative elites, dominant agrarian and mercantile groups involved in temple administration and finally at the bottom were the lower categories of agricultural worker, craftsmen and menials in the temple service. (R. Champakalakshmi, 1995, p.309.)

By the end of the eleventh century, there was a gradual marginalization of the *brahmadeyas* due to their exhaustion as an institution of integration. Consequently, the temples further emerged as important organizations that had an impact on the religious communities. The Pandya and the Chola records of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries cite several instances of the *brahmadeyas* being converted into non-brahmana villages or being donated as *devadanam* to the temples. Either the Brahmanas migrated from the Tamil country to the northern regions or converged increasingly towards the temples, further highlighting the latter's significance. This coincided with continuing decline of the Chola administration, and the re-emergence of the local chiefs.

Simultaneously, various non-brahmana social groups were becoming prominent. These were the Vellalas, merchants and artisans. There was further expansion of agriculture and agrarian settlements, which highlighted the increasing prominence of the Vellalas as the dominant agricultural community vis-à-vis the lower agricultural groups, leading to tensions within the agrarian community. As powerful non-brahmana landowners, the Vellalas organized and managed the production and water resources. They also partook in the administration of the temples along with the brahmanas.

One of the direct consequences of the agrarian expansion was the acceleration of commercial activities from tenth century onwards that led to the growth of market centers, *nagarams* and a network between them. Due to commercial activities of overland and inland trade, new trade routes and urban centres came up linking the remote and newly conquered regions with the nuclear areas and the coast. There was a spread of guild activities and trading associations of both the indigenous and foreign merchants. Consequently, there emerged guilds with its diverse groups of

traders, merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and itinerant traders. One such prominent trading community in the ninth century was the *Nagarattar*, whose members applied the *chetti* suffix. Often the mercantile communities invested in agriculture, gifted to the temples, further strengthening the ties of integration, and inter dependence. One such weaver community, the *Kaikkolas* had significant links with the temples and became an important social group that the religious traditions attempted to incorporate in order to project a liberal outlook. By ninth century, clusters of *brahmadeyas* and temples had developed into centers of urban growth, thus connecting villages, urban centers and royal capital, diverse population and religion within the same complex.

Hence, the rising social importance of the various non-brahmana groups led to a movement towards a higher caste status, especially the claims of the artisans to a twice-born caste status with a respectable ritual space in the temples. In this altered social environment, undoubtedly temples forged links amongst chiefs, kings, merchants and the newly emergent groups.

### 22.3.2 Socio-Religious Movements: The Role of the *Acharyas*

The popular religion of the Shaivas and Vaishnava community responded to this social change by providing a broad social base with ideological sanction, which would accommodate the diverse ethnic groups, within a single community framework. In the absence of any challenge from the heterodox sects viz., the Jainas and the Buddhists, the religious communities focused on the expansion of their resource base by competing for patronage from the royalty and the local chieftains. The *acharyas* or the ideologues and theologians organized the ideas of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars*. This was done primarily in three ways:

- a) The *acharyas* evolved a textual tradition that comprised of certain kind of texts like the commentaries, the hagiographies and temple texts such as the *Agamas*. In all these texts, the ideology of the religious communities was articulated. A community tradition evolved in these texts that provided a sense of history and cultural continuity. This continuity reflected an antiquated past, ideas and beliefs, conventions and practices, which gave legitimacy to the community. The commentatorial literature while interpreting and commenting on the pre-existent texts, themselves became the subject of further commentaries and interpretations, thereby adding on to the religious exegesis. Similarly, the hagiographies and the temple texts provided a sense of continuity through the biographical narratives of saints and myths of the various deities and very often provided a link between the normative and the popular tradition. Therefore, these texts themselves became the focus of a collective community consciousness.
- b) The *acharyas* consolidated the community by creating an institutional framework. This comprised of strengthening their base in the temples by gaining access to various privileges, for instance, the right to performing the rituals. Another institutional innovation was the emergence of the *mathas*, which were probably an influence of the Smarta tradition. (This has been discussed in the previous section).
- c) The notion of pilgrimage expressed in various sites in the hymns of the *Nayanars* and *Alvars* was elaborated upon by fostering the local, regional and pan-Indian network. In this way, a collective consciousness of the community was highlighted.

### 22.3.3 Socio-Religious Movements: The New Trends

#### A) Shaivism:

In this context, Shaivism presented an integrative framework comprising of the Tamil *bhakti* of the *Nayanars*, brahmanical forms of worship and autochthonous (local)

cults. Such integration was articulated in the *Shaiva Agamas* which laid down new forms of worship, in which the emphasis was to incorporate the local cult centres into Shaiva shrines. The sacred geography as demarcated by the *Nayanars* provided the guide for the identification of these sites, with maximum concentration in the Kaveri region. Consequently, the local priests were initiated into Shaivism giving rise to a new class of temple priests called the *Shaiva* Brahmanas. These *Shaiva* Brahmanas were assigned ritually a lower rank to the *Smarta (Vadama)* Brahmanas hence creating a hierarchy in the Brahmana caste. Thus, the temple emerged as the focus of the entire Shaiva community, where various local sects, converged. The creation of a Shaiva pantheon with Shiva as the father, Durga as the mother and Murugan as the son represented a perfect divine family. This pantheon was popularly known as the Somaskanda image. The folk analogy of the *linga* worship and its 'aniconic' nature brought divergent socio-economic groups into Shaiva worship and broadened the social basis of Shaivism.

Therefore, Shaivism emerged as an effective ideology for the integration of the society and economy. For these reasons Shaivism was adopted as the royal cult, which further enabled the consolidation of the Shaiva community. In addition, the iconographic forms of Shiva as Yogi (popularly called Dakshinamurti), Nataraja, Bhiksatana and Ravananugraha (humbling of Ravana) – all symbolizing the notion of a successful *Puranic* hero, appealed the Chola ideology for establishing power over the Tamil region. From the middle of the tenth to the twelfth century A.D, Shaivism emerged as a 'state' cult under Rajaraja I (A.D 985-1045.), Rajendra I and Kulottunga II (A.D.1133-50.). The large-scale construction of the Shaiva temples, especially in the royal capital of Gangaichondacholapuram and Tanjavur projected the Chola policy of promoting Shaiva *bhakti*. The collection of the Shaiva hymns and the composition of the hagiographies were a part of the royal project that contributed to the evolution of a Shaiva scripture (*marai*). Nambi Andar Nambi, the compiler of the *Tirumurai* (the Shaiva scripture) and Cekkilar, the composer of the Shaiva hagiography, the *Periya Puranam*, were associated with the court of Rajaraja I and Kulottunga II respectively. In fact, the narratives from the hagiographies inspired some of the iconographic themes in the Chola temples. The royal patronage to the Shaiva temples expanded the liturgy by introducing the hymns of the four *Nayanars*, viz., Appar, Cuntarar, Campantar and Manikkavaccakar as a part of the ritual singing in the temples. Their deification took place in the temples around the same time that is the tenth century under the royal initiatives mainly of Rajaraja I (985-1014) and Kulottunga II (1133-50).

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Vaishnava tradition had already emerged with a well developed textual, institutional and pilgrimage tradition. This threatened the Shaiva community. The Shaivas also did not miss the crucial emergence of new social non-brahmana groups. The Shaiva canon, *Tirumurai*, the Shaiva hagiographies, the *Tiruttontar Tiruvantati* and the *Periya Puranam* fixed the number of saints to sixty three belonging to a wide social spectrum, from Brahmanas to *paraiya*. However, apart from Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar and Manikkavaccakar, whose devotional works comprised the scripture, the rest are of doubtful historicity. Therefore, the low caste background of the *Nayanars* was a deliberate projection of a popular social base. Interestingly, the compilers of the canon and composers of the hagiographies Nambi Andar Nambi and Cekkilar belonged to the upper castes- the *Brahmanas* and the Vellala ruling family respectively. (R. Champakalakshmi, 1996, pp.135-163). Further, other popular Shaiva traditions were incorporated, representing an integrative paradigm. For instance, the incorporation of Tamil *Siddha* tradition through the profile of the *Siddha* saint, Tirumular who emphasized on Shiva and Murukan worship, reflected an attempt in this direction.

Such an incorporative trend accommodated the non-brahmanas, especially the artisan and the weaver groups who had become economically powerful in the twelfth century

and were demanding greater ritual and administrative participation in the temples. The Shaiva temple rituals and pantheon included a series of popular folk elements, whose non-brahmanical adherents continued with their allegiance to the local deities, despite belonging to the Shaiva community. Thus, Shaivism provided an independent space for the folk cults and their expression. However, the construction of a broad-based community in the twelfth century was a conscious attempt with the help of the royal patronage that reflected the dominant/elite ideological characteristics of the Shaivas. The legend of recovering the *Tevaram* from the dusty storeroom of the temple in Chidambaram at the royal instance further attests the elitist attitude.

The establishment of Shaiva institutional organization specially the *mathas* with their non-brahmanical leadership further widened the catchment area of the Shaiva devotees. These leaders known as the Mudalyars Santana mostly belonged to the Vellala lineage of the twelfth-thirteenth century. Further, the instances of the *Nayanars* establishing the *mathas* further highlighted their importance. For example, Tirunavukkarasu, a *Nayanar* himself founded a *matha* in Tiruppundurutti in Tanjavur district. The *mathas* gained control over the temples and its landed property after the twelfth century AD, with the decline of the *brahmadeyas*. They also invested and participated in the long distance trade, and were mostly located in the trading and weaving centers, where they attracted the royal and mercantile patronage. Thus, they were the custodian of the religious canon, had a large following and emerged as powerful institutional bases for the Shaiva community.

The Shaiva tradition influenced several religious traditions. Virashaivas in Karnataka was one such important tradition. Shaivism also influenced the cult of Murukan, the most venerated god in South India. Projected as the son of Shiva, Murukan on one hand, represented the association of local, regional deities with the brahmanical religion and on the other, it bridged the gap between the tribal and agrarian settlements of the temple and royal court centres.

## B) Vaishnavism

### i) The Shrivaisnavas:

The heavy royal patronage to Shaivism during the Chola period, from tenth to eleventh century marginalized the development of Vaishnavism. Very often, the Shrivaisnavas became the target of royal persecution. Compared to the Shaiva temples, the construction of the Vaishnava temples was not on such a large scale. None of the *Alvars*, with the exception of Tirumangai were deified in the Chola temples. Unlike the Shaivas, the Vaishnavas were not a well-developed organized community with a comprehensive textual tradition. Attempts were made in the late ninth and early tenth centuries to evolve a text, the *Bhagavata Purana*. The text was written in Sanskrit and the *Alvar bhakti* was the main theme of the text. This 'Sanskritization of the Krishna tradition' adopted the popular *Puranic* style and drew heavily from the local Tamil myths. (R. Champakalakshmi, 1996, p.140-141). But the text had a heavy Sanskrit base and the ideological basis was primarily the intellectual philosophy of *advaita*. Therefore, the attempt of *Bhagavata Purana* to reconcile popular *bhakti* with brahmanical orthodoxy failed to make an impact on the local population, the Shrivaisnava philosophical system and the Chola sovereignty.

However, until the middle of the tenth century AD, Vaishnavism along with Shaivism received royal patronage under Parantaka-I (AD 907-955). Vishnu temples like the one at Shrirangam (Tiruchchirapalli district in Tamil Nadu) were elaborated upon. State support was further evident from the presence of the Krishna and Rama temples. Some attempts were consciously made to evolve a structure for the Vaishnava community when a part of the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* i.e. the *Tiruvaymoli* of Nammalvar was collected and put to music in the Ranganathasvami temple at Shrirangam and Uttaramerur during the period of Rajendra I in the eleventh century.



(K.A.Nilkantha Sastri, *The Cholas*, Vol.II, Madras, 1975, pp.479-480). Due to the lack of resources, it was not probably possible to develop the entire corpus of four thousand hymns into a full-fledged institution of ritual singing. Under these circumstances, the conscious choice of the *Tiruvaymoli* was a deliberate attempt to attract the non-brahmana devotees, especially of the important Vellala caste to which Nammalvar belonged. Hence, a channel for the dissemination of the Vaishnava ideas of *bhakti* to the people did not develop in the same manner as that of the Shaivas. Probably unlike Shaivism Vaishnavism did not have the integrative capacity that could be the basis of the political ideology and social philosophy of egalitarianism. As a result, the social base of Shrivishnavas could not develop. Poor networks of interaction and a weak institutional structure could not evolve a community. Consequently, the 'Shrivaishnavas' remained a scattered lot in South India. Although, the temple inscriptions refer to 'Shrivaishnavas', but it was an honorary prefix of the Vaishnava Brahmanas and did not imply a community.

However, by twelfth century, with the decline of the Cholas and the *brahmadeyas*, rising importance of the temples, and emergence of new social groups, Shrivaisnavism took several significant steps despite its heavy Sanskrit base. Already under Kulottunga I (AD 1070-1118) there was revival of royal patronage in some of the major Vaishnava centres, which started developing a considerable following. The efforts of Shrivaisnava *acharyas*, Nathamuni and Yamunacharya at creating a strong temple base strengthened the community institutions. Nathamuni introduced the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, i.e. the hymns of the *Alvars* as a part of the ritual singing in the temples. Yamunacharya's treatise called *Agamapramanyam* advocated the *Pancharatra Agama* in preference to the already existing *Vaikhansa Agama* for worship in the temples. This was an ideological shift from an exclusive, metaphysical approach as represented in *Vaikhansa Agama* to a more popular, ritualistic and incorporative approach as represented in *Pancharatra Agama* and elaborated the forms of worship. The *Agamas* were manuals that laid down the guidelines for construction of temples, iconography, and details about daily religious observances, magic, medicine and so on. (The *Shaiva Agamas* will be referred in the next Section).

However, it was under Kulottunga II, i.e. the second quarter of the twelfth century AD that the *Vishishtadvaita* philosophy of Ramanuja (AD 1100) evolved. It was the first school of thought that challenged Shankara's monistic (i.e. non-dualism) philosophy of *Advaita* and the concept of *Nirguna Brahma* and presented an alternative model for the perception of divinity. According to the Shrivaisnava hagiographies, Ramanuja received his early philosophical training in Kanchipuram from an *advaita* teacher, Yadava Prakasha. However, he differed from his teacher and developed the philosophy of 'qualified monism (i.e. *Vishishtadvaita*). Soon after he split with Yadava Prakasha and met a succession of teachers including Nathamuni and Yamunacharya who held similar theological views like Ramanuja's. Finally Ramanuja succeeded Yamunacharya as the head of the *matha* at Ranganathaswami temple at Shrirangam. He travelled to various places not only in South India but also in North India, where in some places, he introduced the Shrivaisnava tradition. He is credited with conversion of the Hoysala ruler of southern Karnataka, Vishnuvardhana from Jaina faith to the Shrivaisnava one. According to the tradition, he established various shrines and centres in southern Karnataka, especially the one at Yadavagiri, also known as Melukote. Ramanuja wrote several treatises and commentaries (*bhashya*) in Sanskrit and was also called the *bhashyakara*. The most famous amongst all his works is the *Shribhashya* which was the first sectarian *bhashya* and became a model for many others that followed.

Ramanuja's philosophy was based on the idea that the divine had attributes that were comprehensible to the less intellectual devotees. Therefore, this religious philosophy on the one hand imparted the much-needed theological orientation to the community and on the other hand, it was aimed at bringing the Tamil (local/folk) with Sanskritic,

where caste was secondary, thereby broadening the base of community. The concept of *Saguna Brahma*, i.e. the perception of divinity in concrete aesthetic terms made the god more accessible.

The Shrivaisnava tradition credits Ramanuja with the introduction of the non-brahmanical classes, especially the Kaikkolas, in the temple services and institutionalizing their presence through numerous duties allotted to them. The inscriptions of the Ranganathasvami temple at Shrirangam and Venkatesvarasvani temple at Tirupati refer several times to the Kaikkolas and their administrative duties. The *Koil Olugu*, the chronicle of the temple at Shrirangam also devotes considerable attention to the Kaikkolas and the role of Ramanuja in incorporating them in the temple services. Although epigraphical evidence does not mention Ramanuja's contribution, the claims made by the powerful Kaikkola weaver community for a higher ritual status was around the same time. The epigraphs point out that the Kaikkolas were a part of the expanding temple rituals and even participated in the gift-giving and administrative functions of the temple. Kaikkola *Mudalis* were important temple officials. Therefore, by the end of the twelfth century, the emergence of Shrivaisnavas as an organized group is evident from their control in the temple organizations.

In the post Ramanuja period, the development and consolidation of the textual tradition contributed significantly towards the evolution of the community identity. First, the philosophy of *ubhaya vedanta* i.e. dual *Vedas*, introduced for the first time the notion of a scripture in Tamil. The entire corpus of four thousand hymns acquired scriptural importance. Second, with the evolution of the scripture was the tradition of writing commentaries. The *Prabandham* and the works of Ramanuja became the subject of several commentaries. This led to the development of several interpretations, which gradually developed into distinct philosophies themselves. Third, was the hagiographic tradition that delineated a cult of saints projecting a distinction between the *Alvars* and *acharya*, and the hymnal and theological tradition represented by them. The composition of the *Divyasuricharitam* by Garudavahan Pandita is regarded by several scholars as the first hagiography. The hagiographic narratives also emphasized on the itinerary of the saints thus projecting a pilgrimage network.

## ii) Madhvacharya

An important religious tradition that developed within Vaishnavism was that of Madhvacharya in the thirteenth century. Madhvacharya founded a sect directly based on the *Bhagavat Purana*. He was born at Kalyanapur near Udipi in South Kanara district. Like Ramanuja, his early training was in Shankara's philosophy of *advaita*. However, he soon developed differences with the *advaitic* philosophy and became a *sanyasi* and was called *Purna Prajna* (fully enlightened). In his writings he referred to himself as Ananda Tirtha. According to the Madhva tradition, he was involved in a debate at Trivandrum with an *acharya* of Sringeri, which led to his persecution. Thereafter, he travelled to various places in north India, facing innumerable difficulties and finally reached the Himalayas and wrote a commentary on the *Vedanta-Sutras*. Subsequently, he returned to Udipi and built a temple of Krishna and spent the rest of his life there preaching. He wrote commentaries on the *Upanishads* and a companion volume to the *Mahabharata*, which is one of the important scriptures of the Madhva community.

Madhva's religion was complete *bhakti* to Krishna with Radha having no place in it. All other *avatars* (incarnations) of Vishnu are revered, Shiva is worshipped and the five gods of the *Smartas* are recognized. Madhva evolved the philosophy of *Dvaita Vedanta* (dualism) as against Shankara's *Advaita* (monism) and Ramanuja's *Vishistadvaita* (qualified monism). According to him five distinctions were eternal. These were the differences between (i) god and individual soul, (ii) god and matter, (iii) individual soul and matter, (iv) one individual soul and other, and finally (v) one material thing and another. World is real and not illusory. There are two kinds of

reality, *svatantra* or independent reality which is god, and *partantra* or dependant reality, which are the soul and the world.

### C) Virashaivism

The rise of the non-brahmanas also provided an impetus to the Virashaiva movement in Karnataka (also called Lingayats today). They developed a strong anti-caste, anti-brahmanical rhetoric and subsequently emerged as a cohesive community in the Vijayanagar period. Virashaivism, literally meaning heroic Shaivism was based on intense and unconditional devotion to Shiva. This socio-religious movement was influenced by the *bhakti* of the Tamil *Nayanars*, who were also regarded as the spiritual guides of the Virashaiva teachers. Virashaivism is also considered to be 'a reformist schism of the Kalamuka sect in Karnataka.' (Champakalakshmi, 1996, p.159).

The founder of the movement was supposed to be Basava, a minister in the court of the Kalachuri king, Bijjala of Kalyana in north Karnataka in the twelfth century (AD 1160). Bijjala and Basava were said to have had numerous differences. After the 'crisis of Kalyana', the Virashaivas faced opposition. Evidence regarding the persecution of the devotees is available in the inscriptions and literature. However, with the establishment of Yadava control in the Deccan, especially in northern Karnataka and the Hoysala regimes in southern Karnataka, Virashaivas received considerable royal patronage. The growth of trade in Karnataka provided the support from the merchants and the artisans communities, especially the Banajigas. This movement was hostile to Jainism and remained so after the twelfth century and was chiefly responsible for the decline of Jainism in Karnataka.

According to the Virshaiva tradition, the community had an ancient origin, when the five ascetics sprang up from the five heads of Shiva and founded the five mathas. They were Kedarnatha in the Himalayas, Srisailam in Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh, Balehalli in West Mysore, Ujjaini in Bellary and Benares. According to Nilakantha Sastri, (p. 64) evidences show that these ascetics are contemporaries of Basava in the twelfth century. In every Virashaiva village, there is a monastery affiliated to any one of the five ascetics.

Since they rejected most of the brahmanical practices and institutional organizations like the temples, they created its own priesthood, the *jangamas*. The *jangama* was the *guru* or spiritual guide and commanded veneration in the community. He was identified with Shiva himself. The *jangamas* were both householders and celibates and were based in the Virashaiva *mathas*. The celibate *jangamas* were of two types, the *Gurusthalas* who initiated the followers and performed domestic rites and the *Viraktas* who led a life of austerity. Each follower wears a lingam encased in a small container around his neck. It is called the *jangama linga* or the *ishtalinga* or the mobile *linga*. The Virashaivas rejected the worship of fixed large stone *lingas* (*Sthavara linga*) in the temples. Temple and temple building was condemned as an activity of the rich. It was a static symbol, as against the body, especially the moving body, wandering from place to place. Hence, it was a denunciation of the stable establishment. The saints came from diverse non-brahmanical background. The Virashaiva saints were considered as *Nirguna bhaktas*, relating personally to the infinite absolute, who may bear the name of Shiva, but did not have any attributes or mythology.

The scriptures of the Virashaivas comprised of the *vachanas*, which were exclusively in Kannada. A *vachana* is a religious lyric in Kannada, literally meaning, 'saying things said'. (A.K.Ramanujan, (1973). *Speaking of Siva*. Baltimore: Penguin Books). From the tenth to the twelfth century, there were prolific *vachana* compositions of the Virashaiva saints like, Dasimayya, Basav, Allama and Mahadeviyakka. None of them were brahmanas. The saints had an antipathy towards the Sanskrtric tradition and scriptures. This is reflected in the *vachanas* of Basava and other Virashaiva

saints. According to A.K.Ramanujan, although the *vachanas* were characterized by spontaneity and rejected the formal stylized brahmanical Sanskritic *Shruti* and *Smriti* literature, but they “did not exclude Sanskrit words or even common Sanskrit quotations; instead the *vachanakars* used Sanskrit with brilliant and complex effects of contrast, setting it off against the native dialectical Kannada.” (A.K.Ramanujan, 1993).

The Virashaivas right from the beginning had a broad social base, where the followers came from different castes and class. Their practices brought them into conflict with other Shaiva religious traditions. Their social practice advocated the remarriage of the widows, no restrictions on menstruating women, inter-caste dining, no ritual purification for the family of the deceased and they buried their dead. The community was divided into four categories, viz., Jangamas, Shilavantas, Banajigas and Panchamashalis. Though this division was not based on caste and occupation, it was based on spiritual superiority, whereby a *jangama* was at the top of this hierarchy. Subsequently, the Virashaivas crystallized into an endogamous community with strict boundaries.

Simultaneous with the development of Virashaivism was the growth and expansion of another movement of similar beliefs. This was the Aradhya Shaiva movement in Andhra (Cuddapah and Kurnool district mainly) and Kannada region (Mysore). It was started by Mallikarjuna Pandita Aradhya, who was a contemporary of Basava in the twelfth century. Aradhya is a Sanskrit word meaning adorable. The followers were mostly brahmanas. They wore the sacred thread along with the *linga* around their neck. They adopted the Virashaiva forms of worship but did not interdine with other Lingayats and intermarried with the Smartas.

Therefore, the twelfth century represented a crucial phase in the evolution and construction of the religious communities and their respective consciousness. A stiff competition for acquiring the devotees set in. The theological orientation of the communities was aimed at incorporating the non-brahmanical elements thereby broadening the social base of their respective community organization. The Shaiva and the Vaishnava traditions drew legitimacy from their respective hymnal tradition and projected a broad base, Amidst such an intense religious development, sectarian rivalries became common, especially in the context of competitive control over the patronage of economically and politically diverse powerful social groups. This was further reflected in the subsequent period, with the migration and the establishment of the Vijayanagara Empire in the fourteenth century.

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## 22.4 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS: THE CHANGING SOCIAL BASE AND COMMUNITY IDENTITIES AD 1300-1700

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The socio-economic and religious processes of the twelfth century continued in the thirteenth century. There was a gradual decline of the Chola power and the emergence of numerous dynasties. The Kakatiyas of Warangal in the interior Telugu country, the Hoysalas of Dvarasamudra in the Karnataka region and the Pandyas of Madurai in the Tamil country were the most formidable powers to reckon with. The political situation during this period was characterized by shifting alliances and uncertainties. The fertile river valleys of Kaveri, Pennar, Tamraparani and Krishna-Godavari with numerous agricultural settlements and important trading centres were a source of attraction to the Hoysala and Kakatiya kingdoms as they were located in the rocky areas of low rainfall and therefore possessed a narrow resource base. Subsequently, the Kakatiyas took over the area from Telangana to the rich agricultural land and ports of the Krishna-Godavari delta and the Hoysalas occupied the western coast from the Konkan to Goa and Malabar. The Hoysalas also shifted their capital from Dvarasamudra to Kannanur near the Kaveri delta in the Tamil region, where the Pandyas were already making inroads. The tension between the two powers manifested

in their competitive patronage extended to the Vaishnava temple of Ranganathasvami and the Shaiva temple of Jambukeshvaram, situated on either side of the Kaveri at Srirangam.

The invasions of the Delhi Sultanate under Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad bin Tughluq in the fourteenth century disturbed the political configurations in South India, especially of the Hoysalas, Kakatiyas and Pandyas and culminated in the establishment of the Sultanate at Madurai. By AD 1370, the Vijayanagar Empire with its capital at Hampi in northern Karnataka emerged as a consolidated ruling power. Finally, the defeat of the Madurai Sultan at the hands of Kumara Kampana of Vijayanagar pushed the frontiers to the southernmost point.

The establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire integrated the three cultural zones of Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka. Consequently, wetland agricultural settlements and dry upland zones were linked to each other. The fertile Kaveri delta attracted the dominant agricultural community of the Velamas from the arid northern zones of the Deccan plateau. The settlement of the migratory Telugu or the Vaduga groups in the central Deccan and the Tamil wet regions often displaced the older Tamil peasants and landholders, and created a new class of landed magnates. By fifteenth century, agrarian expansion not only took place in the wet areas, but also in the dry zones particularly in the black soil region through artificial irrigation technology. Unsettled forested areas and hilly tracts situated on the peripheries of agricultural settlements were also the focus of the cultivation. In these areas, the agriculturists came into conflict with the hunters and pastoralists that often led to the incorporation of the latter into the agricultural community as lower caste groups. These hunting tribes also possessed a martial tradition which became the basis of their recruitment in the Vijayanagar armies. These changes provided the context for the emergence of a warrior peasant class, primarily non-brahmana and Telugu in composition. Some of them were the Reddis, Vellalas, Gavundas, and Manradis. The already existing dominant agricultural community of the Vellalas emerged as big landowners with titles like *nadudaiyan* or *nadalvan*. These powerful agricultural communities by incorporating and involving various peasant and non-peasant groups in the agricultural activities linked the local village societies to the political authorities.

By fourteenth century political groups, referred to as the *nayakas* representing the Vijayanagar Empire in various regions of the Peninsula emerged prominently. These *nayakas* primarily belonged to the Telugu warrior class. They emerged as the major benefactors of the temples and *mathas*, especially those of the ShriVaishnava community. Over a period, these *nayakas* became influential in the temple administration and the local assemblies. Subsequently, by seventeenth century, independent *nayaka* states emerged in Tiruchchirapalli, Madurai and Tanjavur.

Migration also brought into prominence a new class of itinerant merchants and traders, several of whom gradually settled down and emerged as powerful landowners. The inscriptional references to the Kaikkola, Vaniya, Sikku Vaniya Vyapari, Mayilatti, Kanmala, and Komatti traders, Pattanulkar (silk weavers) from Saurashtra point to the development of a brisk trade and increased craft production which found a thriving market in the Vijayanagar and post-Vijayanagar kingdoms. The emergent mercantile communities comprising of merchants, artisans and weavers were the followers of different religious traditions - Shaiva, Vaishnava and Islam. However, primarily Vaishnavism was the faith of the migrant merchants and traders. Their lavish sponsorship of ShriVaishnava temples helped to spread ShriVaishnavism. The Venkateshvara temple at Tirupati and the Narayanasvami temple at Melkote emerged as significant institutions due to the patronage of the *nayakas* and merchants. Thus, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, temple and polity were inextricably linked with each other and emerged as the basis of a new social formation.

### 22.4.1 Mechanisms of Integration: Consolidation of Community Consciousness

Amidst such politico-economic and social changes, religion emerged as a major stabilizing influence. Such a scenario provided many opportunities to the religious communities to consolidate their social base. Integration of the diverse social groups, primarily the non-brahmanas, within the larger community framework became a major agenda of the community-building programme. The attempts to reconcile and accommodate the Brahmana and the non-brahmana elements by the *acharyas* often led to debates and conflicts within the communities. Some of the mechanisms adopted for integrating the different social groups and expanding social base are given below.

- 1) The religious canvas during this period was not just dominated by the religion of the Vellalas and Brahmanas. Against this backdrop of migration of various social groups and the growing power of the martial communities in both wet and dry areas, the worship of the warrior goddesses became popular. This period registered a dramatic increase in the Amman shrines. Several of these Amman shrines were linked to the brahmanical temples of Shiva and Vishnu, which at a larger level linked the rural societies to the urban settlements. The mechanism through which such integration was affected was primarily the concept of divine marriage that linked the two lineages – brahmanical and non-brahmanical. Thus, both Shiva and Vishnu had numerous consorts during this period. Hence, a large pantheon was created comprising of the local warrior gods, goddesses and the brahmanical divinity of Shiva and Vishnu. This represented a vast cross section of the society that was linked through temple rituals in a hierarchical manner. Further, the non-brahmanical Vellala village priest also participated in the ritual activities of the large temples along with the *Brahmana* priests. In this way, the brahmanical temples were linked through a priestly network with the village deities. The religious scenario became more complex as some of the migratory groups carried their own gods and goddesses and constructed new temples.
- 2) In such a situation, the role of the temple assumed importance. As already mentioned the temples were the mechanism for generating agricultural developments. The numerous endowments made by the diverse social groups generated resources that were managed and invested by the temples for tank irrigation. Along with the temples the institution of the *mathas* assumed further importance in this period. As a powerful institution within the larger structure of the temple, the *mathas* were either a competitive unit *vis-à-vis* the temple authorities or participated along with them in various transactions. Very often, they came into conflict with other groups in the temple over the control of resources. The social base of a *matha* was determined by it being attached to a temple in some form or the other. Some *mathas* were associated with a single temple and hence were localized and became the controllers of the administration of that temple. During the Vijayanagar period, the *matha* leaders received heavy patronage.

Both the temples and the *mathas* provided a space for the convergence of groups within the communities. The religious leaders or the *acharyas* and the *mathadhipatis* were the vital link between the local population and the new class of rulers, thereby enabling the establishment of political authority over the newly conquered areas. From the fourteenth century onwards, a large number of non-brahmanas had important administrative roles within the temples and the *mathas*. They also had access to the performance of some of the rituals. As a centre of community activity and interaction, temples and *mathas* emerged as important institutions. It is for these reasons that the *rayas* made heavy endowments to both the institutions. The gifts were made to the deities and the sectarian leaders or the *acharyas* and the head of the *mathas* were the instruments through which the gift was made. In return, they were the recipients

of privileges from the ruling class and also gained greater control over temple organization and administration. Thus, these sectarian leaders established religious, political and economic control over the society and legitimized themselves as central figures of the community.

In this connection, the relation between the gifts made by the Vijayanagar rulers and chiefs and the sectarian leaders requires a brief discussion. A two-way relationship developed between the sectarian leaders and the Vijayanagar rulers (where both needed each other). Arjun Appadorai points out an 'asymmetrical' relationship between the rulers and the sectarian groups. (Arjun Appadorai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule*, Cambridge, 1981, pp.63-104.) While the rulers conferred honour as well as resources in the form of gifts to the sectarian leaders, the latter only rendered honour and not material resources. Despite such an 'asymmetrical' relation, the state preferred to give gift to the temples for two reasons. First, the state was not interested in investing directly in the irrigation activities, for that required additional responsibility of labour and financial management. The sectarian leaders with their social influence could harness the labour potential and control them. Two, gifting to the temple and its functionaries was an act of merit that was inevitably recorded in the inscriptions. However, the underlying motive was to gain access to the temple and be a part of the ritual set-up that included other social groups, over which the *rayas* and the chiefs wanted to assert their control. Therefore, the temple and the *mathas*, and their functionaries were instrumental in legitimizing the political authority, which otherwise would have been difficult.

The generation of resources at such a large level created tensions between the various sectarian groups. The control over temple store-houses became one of the major issues of competitive control and contestation. The leaders through the control of the temple base accumulated power and resources. The sectarian leaders imitated the royal paraphernalia and behaved as little kings themselves. Thus, the temple, the king and the religious leader were linked together through the deity as the paradigmatic sovereign.

- 3) The concept of pilgrimage contributed significantly towards the consolidation of the various communities from fourteenth century onwards. On the one hand, pilgrimage provided an arena for group/community interaction and presented a collective consciousness. On the other hand it provided a single context for the assertion of multiple identities within the overarching community paradigm that is pilgrimage brought together different social groups and sectarian leaders. The sacred geography in the hymns of the *Nayanaras* and *Alvars* as discussed in Section two formed the basis on which the pilgrimage complex was elaborated upon during this period. The pilgrimage sites were not only confined to the southern boundaries, but were present in the northern region also, thereby attributing a pan-Indian status to the religious traditions. The notion of pilgrimage was focused on the composite nature of the sacred centres and the network between them. The journey to the scared shrines within a well-defined area strengthened the spatial identities. This implied not only movement and interaction of the people, but also transmission, exchange and circulation of ideas and beliefs, which influenced and enriched the community ideology. In this context, the pilgrimage sites became the meeting ground for the *acharyas*, the *mathadhipatis*, and their respective followers, where the former could symbolically assert their claims as the spiritual mediator between man and god.

Pilgrimages to holy places became common in the Vijayanagar Empire. The *rayas* themselves and following them the *nayakas* made frequent pilgrimages to various sacred centres. One copper plate grant mentions a list of holy sites which were both Shaiva and Vaishnava. These sites are, Chidambaram, Shrikakulam, Kalahasti, Tirupati, Kanchipuram, Shrisailam,, Harihar, Ahobilam,

Shrirangam, Kumbhakonam, Gokarna, Anantashayanam, Rameshvaram and so on. (Nilakantha Sastri, 1963,p.132).

A special type of text came into being from fifteenth century onwards in the Shaiva and Vaishnava religious literature with the consolidation of institutional network. These texts were known as the *Sthalapuranas*. The concept of pilgrimage received exclusive treatment in the *Sthalapuranas*. They represented the pilgrimage literature attracting pilgrims by glorifying a particular centre and its temple. Starting from the mythical/legendary origins of a temple, its history, the spiritual leaders associated with that particular centre, these *Sthalapuranas* provided the legendary cum historical account in order to establish the primacy of a *sthala* (centre) in the Vaishnava and Shaiva tradition. In developing or contributing to the community consciousness, these *Puranas* had a more popular role than the religious canonical literature which was intended mainly as the basic text of doctrine, theology, philosophy and ritual. Festivals were incorporated directly into the *Sthalapuranas* for festivals attracted pilgrims, worshippers and patrons to a centre.

The singular treatment of a particular site and a shrine in these texts was with the intention of highlighting the importance of the place. The milieu emerged as a space for the performance of the divine feasts, its flora and fauna being identical with the heavenly abode and its potential of salvation from the sins was parallel to the divine intervention. The shrine then became the centre that initiated and connected the devotee with the other world. In this sense, the concept of pilgrimage they were promoting did not in any way aim to integrate the entire community. It represented the interests of the priestly class and other temple functionaries of that particular place, who wished to attract patronage to the temple.

In general, the *Sthalapuranas* with the *Puranic* and the local legends glorifying the concerned site were meant to attract royal patronage as well as the religious community. The contents of the *Sthalapuranas* reveal a strong tendency of mythicization of the place, deity, rituals and shrine. Though the local legends were presented in their original form, often their mythicization took place whereby creating an element of credibility which appealed to the psyche of the pilgrims. Apart from the epic-*Puranic* framework, the texts also borrowed legends from the Sangam literature, the hymnal corpus, especially regarding the shrine/site, and the biographical accounts of the *Alvars* and the *Nayanars* and *acharyas*. Therefore, they emerged as the representative texts of the sites and the particular temple. With the decline of the Vijaynagar Empire and the emergence of several power groups, the *Sthalapuranas* widened their scope.

- 4) With the development and consolidation of the temples and *mathas* as important institutions of the various religious communities, the concept of a *guru* became significant. The *guru* was usually an *acharya* or *mathadhipati* (head of the *matha*). The emergence of these *acharyas* can be seen from the thirteenth century when various political and social changes took place. A *guru* (often *guru* and *acharyas* are used interchangeably) commanded a large group of followers, thereby linking the different groups in the society into the mainstream of the community.

The importance of the *gurus* lay in their role as disseminators of the canon and the *guru-shishya parampara*, i.e. the preceptor-disciple relationship was the transmitter of tradition. The *guru-shishya parampara* not only ensured continuity but also legitimized the validity of the teacher as the preceptor of the tradition which gave him the authority to interpret. The *guru* was indispensable to the devotees as he helped them in attaining salvation. Hence, he was the *upakaraka* and *uddharaka*, i.e. 'he who gave knowledge and showed the way to salvation and he who took the disciples as it were by hand and led him to salvation.'



The *guru* initiated the disciple into the community and was instrumental in the dissemination of the theology. The discourses of the *acharyas* that explained the theological meaning of the texts became a part of the community philosophy. The two roles of the *guru*, the initiatory and expository, got institutionalized into the hagiographies which narrated several accounts of the intellectual superiority of the *guru*. Hagiographical texts refer to the *acharyas* participating in various theological debates and emerging victorious and being rewarded by the rulers. Hence, a *guru* emerged as the focus for the community.

The powerful sectarian leaders who were usually the *gurus* were often the intermediaries through whom the warrior class made gifts and in return obtained 'honours' and 'authority'. In return they received privileges from the ruling class and gained greater control over temple organization and administration. Thus, the *acharyas* and the heads of *mathas*, as *gurus*, established religious, political and economic control over the society and legitimized themselves as central figures of the community.

#### 22.4.2 Socio-Religious Movements: Developments and Trends

From fourteenth century onwards especially with the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire, a well developed nexus between religion and polity had emerged. The role of the *Smarta matha* at Shringeri for the establishment of Vijayanagar Empire in Karnataka in the fourteenth century has been discussed by various scholars. Vidyatirtha or Vidyashankara, (fourteenth century) a famous *advaita* teacher based in the Shringeri *matha* was held in great reverence by the Sangama rulers of the Vijayanagar Empire. He is supposed to have been the temporal and the spiritual guide of Bukka I. The Inam Office copper plate grant of Harihara II describes Bukka as the worshipper at the lotus feet of Vidyatirtha. This has led some writers to conclude that it was Vidyatirtha who laid the foundation of the Vijayanagar Empire. Vidyaranya the disciple of Vidyatirtha was a powerful *advaita* of the Shringeri *matha* and is supposed to have guided Harihara and Bukka in establishing and consolidating the Empire in Karnataka. Although the *Smarta* tradition was not a part of the socio-cultural movement, it intellectually and theologically influenced the philosophy of some of the socio-religious communities. The case of the *Vishishtadvaita* and the *Dvaita* philosophy of Ramunuja and Madhavacharya already discussed in the last Section illustrates this point. The *Smarta* influence continued in the subsequent period, when the various *advaita* philosophers and the *Smarta mathas* were not only important theologically, they were also playing a significant role in Vijayanagar politics. Appaya Dikshitar in the early seventeenth century was an influential *Smarta* scholar.

##### A) Shaivism

Tamil Shaivism flourished during this period due to the rising power and influence of the Shaiva *mathas* and *atinams*. The sectarian leaders attached to these *mathas* were both *Brahmanas* and *Vellalas* who composed hagiographies and theological treatises. In fact, the collective title *Tevaram* to the *Nayanar*'s hymns was given probably in the sixteenth century.

Between thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, the leaders and teachers of the *mathas* evolved a new philosophical system of the Tamil Shaivas called the *Shaiva Siddhanta*. The founder of this movement was one Meyakandadeva who lived in the thirteenth century in the Tamil region, south of Chennai. His work, the *Shivajnanabodam* contains the principles and ideas of this faith. He emphasized the importance of Shiva and is said to have popularized Shaivism amongst the masses. He had several disciples and followers, some of whom were well known as Shaiva Siddhanta philosophers. The important disciples were, Arulnandi, Marai-jnanasambandar and Umapati Shivam. These three disciples along with Meyakandar constituted the four *Santana-acharyas* (i.e., teachers in continuous series) of Tamil Shaivism.

The story of the recovery and canonization of the *Tevaram* was described in fourteenth century by Umapati Shivam in his work, *Tirumuraikanta Puranam*. This work is important for the Tamil Shaiva identity as the story of recovery narrated here established the authenticity of the *Tevaram* as the revealed scripture. The recovery story also attested the patronage of the eleventh century Chola ruler at whose behest the *Tevaram* was recovered from a dusty room in the Shiva temple at Chidambaram by Nampi Antar Nampi who was guided by none other than Shiva and Lord Ganesha themselves.

The Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy is based on the Shaiva Agamas which are twenty eight in number. The Siddhanta philosophy was also influenced by other Shaiva sects like the Pashupatas and Kashmir Shaivas. According to this philosophy, there are three ultimate reals: (a) *pashu*, i.e. the individual soul; (b) *pati*, i.e. the lord or Shiva; (c) *pacam* or *pasham*, i.e. the bondage of *karma*. The soul can be liberated by following the fourfold path of devotion, which were, service, worship, spiritual discipline and ultimate knowledge, activated at every stage by god's grace, *arul*. The system stresses the importance of *bhakti* in preference to rituals and ceremonies. As the Shaiva Siddhanta philosophy got consolidated numerous schools of thought emerged.

Another religious tradition developed within Shaivism, which flourished in the fifteenth century. This was Shivadvaita, whose chief exponent was one Shivacharya. He is supposed to have lived in the beginning of the fifteenth century and wrote the *Shaivabhashya*. According to this school, Brahman was identified with *Para Shiva* who was superior to the *Trimurtis* that is, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a monotheistic movement, mystical in nature, developed within Shaivism in the Tamil region. This was known as the Sittars or Siddhas. The term *siddha* literally means one who has attained perfection as distinct from a *bhakta* who is attempting to perceive god. According to some scholars the teachings of the Siddhas were influenced by Islam and Christianity. However, this needs to be substantiated. The history of the Siddhas is obscure. Some of the Siddhas had curious names like Ahappey (inner demon), Pambatti (snake charmer) indicating their ambiguous social background. Shivaprakasha was well known Siddha who lived in the seventeenth century. According to the Siddha tradition, he debated with a Christian missionary and wrote *Eshumada Nirakaranam*, which refuted the Christian ideas. This work is however, no longer extant. (T.V.Mahalingam, (1975), *Social and Economic Life in Vijayanagar*, Madras, p.195)

#### B) Virashaivism

During the Vijayanagar period, the Virashaivas shifted from northern Karnataka to central and southern Karnataka, where they eventually based themselves. They received patronage from the Vijayanagar rulers, and Wodeyars of Mysore (eighteenth century), *nayakas* and merchants. *Agrahara* villages were granted to the *jangamas*, who were influential during this period. However, it was in the post-Vijayanagar period that the Virashaivas received heavy patronage and acquired a popular social base. Temples and *mathas* played a crucial role in expanding and consolidating the Virashaiva tradition and identity. Numerous works, composed during this period were associated with these *mathas* and temples which had also emerged as the prime instruments of political process.

The Virashaiva identity was articulated in its literature which can be divided into two phases. First phase was from the twelfth and fifteenth century marked by the prolific compositions of the Virashaiva poets. New literary forms were introduced. This period therefore has been also called the age of Virashaivas or Basava Yuga. The second phase was from the fifteenth century onwards, when the Virashaiva literature had three main concerns:

- 1) The works of the *vachanakars* were collected and edited. For this exercise, evidences from the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Puranas* were provided. Some editors also interpreted the *vachanas* giving rise to a new form called *vachanagamas*. Apart from collection, edition and interpretation, hagiographies on the lives of the Virashaiva *vachanakars* were composed. These texts also focused on stories taken from different Shaiva sources such as *Shiva Purana*, Tamil Shaivism and so on.
- 2) Attempts were made to appropriate different Shaiva traditions. Apart from the influence of Basavanna and his followers, the Tamil Shaiva tradition, the Kapalikas, Kalamukhas, Nathpanthis and Aradhyas influenced the community literature and played an important role in constructing the Virashaiva identity. These developments were taking place while the Kapalika and Kalamukha monasteries were getting incorporated into Virashaiva institutions during this period.
- 3) There were compositions of texts related to theology.

All these three concerns of the literature were reflected in the *Shunyasampadane* composed in the fifteenth century. This work is a collection of *vachanas* with a narrative, the real objective is to record the debates and arguments about matters of theory and practice and therefore represented a collective consciousness of the community.

Simultaneous with these attempts at broadening the social base and creating a composite identity for the community, there also seems to be a conscious attempt to broaden the exclusive notion of the *sharanas*, i.e. the Virashaiva saints. Mechanisms for disseminating the theology for the lay devotees was sought to be done through animate and inanimate intermediaries of the faith. The objective aids to faith evolved by the Virashaivas themselves, *guru*, *lingam*, *jangama* were now gaining importance as aspects of the divine and were in turn related to Basava, Chenna Basava and Allam Prabhu. There were shifts in the perception of saints from being human to having divine origins. This would not only provide respectability and social acceptability but also coherence, dignity and justifiability to the community.

On one hand efforts were made to expand and broaden the community outlook, on the other hand, the exercise of incorporating the very brahmanical literature they had protested against was taking place. For instance, Shripati Pandita's *Shrikara Bhashya* (fifteenth century) was based on the *Brahma Purana*. Nandikeshvara defended the practice of wearing the *linga* and burial of the dead on the basis of *Shruti* and *Smriti* literature in his *Lingadharan Chandrika* composed in the seventeenth century.

Contradictions could also be seen in the Virashaiva attitude towards impure and polluting occupations. Those who followed these occupations were not denied entry into the Virashaiva fold, but they had to renounce these occupations to 'be born again' through devotion to Shiva in order to be a part of the Virashaiva fold. Therefore, the Virashaivas did not challenge the brahmanical standards of occupational purity, though they rejected caste discriminations based on heredity. The hierarchy between the *jangamas* and the lay person remained.

### C) The Madhavas

During the Vijayanagar period the Madhavas consolidated their philosophy and wrote several hagiographies and commentaries and developed their institutions of the *matha*. They received royal patronage and were influential. Madhva was succeeded by several disciples. The most eminent amongst them was Vyasarayya Tirtha, a contemporary of Krishnadevaraya. According to the Madhva hagiographies, Vyasarayya was a favourite of Krishnadevaraya. The emperor abdicated the throne for a short time in favour of Vyasarayya to avert a serious calamity that was predicted for the empire, should the emperor occupy the throne at a particular hour. Since a calamity

was averted when Vyasarayya occupied the throne, he is said to have been honoured with the title of *Karnataka-simhasadhishvara*. (T.V.Mahalingam,1975, p.201) A large number of villages were also granted to him. This story shows the nexus between religion and political power and the emphasis on royal patronage that would accord an exalted position to the community.

#### D) Vallabhacharya(AD 1479-1531)

Vallabhacharya was a Telugu *Brahmana* and a contemporary of Chaitanya. He was a founder of a system called *Shuddhadvaita* as against Shankara's *advaita*. According to Vallabhacharya Vishnu was the highest god and he was to be worshipped in the form of young Krishna associated with Radha. Further, *bhakti* was most important and since every soul was a part of the supreme soul, there should be no restriction on the devotees who worship him. The ultimate aim of a Vallabha devotee was to become a *gopi* (cowherdess associated with Krishna legend) and spend life eternally with Krishna in his heaven, the Vyapi-Vaikuntha which had a heavenly Vrindavana and Yamuna.

According to the Vallabha tradition, Vallabhacharya was invited to participate in a debate at the court of Krishnadevaraya, where he is supposed to have defeated the famous Madhava teacher, Vyasarayya Tirtha and was elected the chief *acharya* amongst the Vaishnavas. This story was clearly an attempt on the part of the Vallabhas to assert themselves vis-à-vis other Vaishnava communities present during this period.

The followers of the Vallabha tradition were concentrated in the Andhra, Tamil and Maharashtra region and were mostly merchants. The *acharyas* of this sect called themselves the Maharajas and were Telugu Brahmanas.

#### E) Shrivaisnavism

By the end of the thirteenth century AD, Shrivaisnavism emerged as an organized religious community. As has been stated earlier, during the Vijayanagar period the Shrivaisnava community drew maximum political support. The Shrivaisnava temples, *mathas* and the *acharyas* or the sectarian leaders had a favoured status during this period. It is said that the Vijayanagar ruler, Krishnadevaraya was a Shrivaisnava and since Lord Venkateshwara of Tirupati was his tutelary deity, the temple at Tirupati was especially patronized by him. Subsequently, a large number of *nayakas* also made endowments here as a part of the allegiance to the ruler. Therefore, from sixteenth century onwards, the Venkateshwara temple at Tirupati emerged as one of the prominent Shrivaisnava institutions.

The large scale incorporation of the various non-brahmana groups in the temple and *matha* administration, a broad based theology and the emphasis on the use of Tamil as the language of devotion are cited as some of the reasons for immense popularity of the faith during this period. The philosophy of *ubhaya-vedanta* i.e. dual *Vedas*, introduced for the first time the notion of a scripture in Tamil providing sanctity to the vernacular as a scriptural language. A status of the *Vedas* was accorded to the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*. However, the Sanskrit *Vedas* were not ignored and were incorporated in the scriptural framework. This was a significant development for it broadened the scope of the community ideology and tradition, making it relevant for a larger section of the society. Such popularity drew the attention of the rulers and other political groups towards it as they found Shrivaisnavism effective in developing the link between the polity and society and spread the political network.

However, a closer examination of the community theology and social practice reveals that there were ongoing tensions within the community over caste, language and modes of devotion. The *acharyas* were conscious of the fact that the *Tamil Veda*

was neither a translation nor a parallel rendering of the *Vedas* and they needed legitimacy from the Vedic tradition to justify the appellation of *Dravida Veda*. This legitimacy was attempted through constant comparisons between the Sanskrit *Vedas* and the *Prabandham*. The low caste authorship of some of the hymns incorporated in the *Dravida Veda* posed a problem of legitimacy to the subsequent theologians of the community. The question arose as to whether the composition by low caste authors could be accorded the status of a *Veda*. Several commentaries discussed this issue and asserted that caste was ascriptive and a person had no control over it. What made him great was his devotion to god.

The tensions within the community were further highlighted when the numerous commentaries and theological texts advocated different interpretations on the philosophy and teachings of the *Alvars* and Ramanuja. The contradictory interpretations created a situation of conflict that led to a split within the community into two sects, the Vatakalai (northern) and Tenkalai (southern). Temples and *mathas* were also affiliated to a distinct Vatakalai or Tenkalai tradition. Vatakalai means north, i.e. northern part of the Tamil country with Kanchipuram as its religious centre. The Vatakalais are projected as adhering to the *Vedic* tradition, emphasizing on the sacredness of Sanskrit as the scriptural language. The Tenkalai means south of Tamil country with Shrirangam and Kaveri delta as the religious centre. They are projected as adhering to the *Prabandhic* tradition and emphasizing on Tamil as the scriptural language.

The basic difference between the Vatakalai and the Tenkalai sects lie in their respective acharyic lineage immediately after Ramanuja. For the Vatakalai, Vedanta Desika (AD1268-1369) was their acharyic head. For the Tenkalais Manavala Mamuni (AD1370-1443) was their *acharyic* head. The importance of these two *acharyic* heads for their respective sects lie in the fact that they were in direct line of descent from Ramanuja onwards and hence claimed to be his legitimate successors. Therefore, it followed that, the interpretations of Ramanuja's teachings by *Vedanta Desika* and *Manavala Mamuni* were a logical continuation to Ramanuja's teachings and were valid.

There were theological differences that became the bases of numerous debates between the two sects. They were:

- 1) The first issue was the nature of god and soul. According to Vatakalais, the soul has to make the effort to attain god's grace, just as the calf of the monkey clutched the mother with its own efforts i.e. *markata-nyaya*. According to the Tenkalai philosophy, the soul did not need to make any effort like the kitten who was carried by the cat in its mouth; hence *marjala nyaya*. These two similes are popular till this day.
- 2) Second issue was that of *bhakti* and *prapatti* (complete surrender to god). To the Vatakalais, *bhakti* and *parapatti* were two different goals. Status by birth, knowledge and capability were pre-requisites for *bhakti Prapatti* and did not require any qualifications and could be attained by any ordinary human being. According to the Tenkalais, since *bhakti* required individual effort, it was inferior to *prapatti*, which was effortless and depended on total surrender to god.
- 3) Third issue was that of the life pattern of *prapanna* and the notion of *kainkarya* (or service to the god). According to the Vatakalais, *kainkarya* was to be performed according to the *shastric* rules. To obtain forgiveness *prapanna* (i.e. the devotee) should follow certain *prayschitta* (atonement) rules. The Tenkalais did not give importance to the *shastric* injunctions for performing the *kainkarya*. In fact, *prayschitta* was not required at all and it was assumed that god would forgive and protect his devotee from all his sins, even those committed after *prapatti* and *kainkarya*.

- 4) Both the sects agreed on the importance of Shri as Vishnu's consort who acted as a mediator between the soul and god. According to Vatakalais, the status of Shri was equal to that of god. The devotees could rely on her totally, and she would take care of their emancipation. However, according to the Tenkalais, Shri was finite *jiva* and did not have such powers. She was not equal to god, but was rather subservient to him. Her role as a mediatrix was no doubt important, but she did not have the power to grant liberation.

The 'schism' as understood by the historians involved a series of disputes between the Vatakalais and Tenkalais over the temple administration. Although direct evidence is not available, it can be inferred from the epigraphical as well as textual sources that tensions between various sects and religious leaders existed. The purpose of these lineages was to assert a sectarian identity for the appropriation of resources in the temples and create spheres of control in them.

Today, the Vatakalai-Tenkalai notion of Shrivaisnavism has altered the identity pattern of the community. The daily practices of both the sects have too many specific rules. For instance, the external sect marks on the forehead (like the *namam*) and other rituals of the respective sects reiterate the differences that strengthen the sectarian affiliations for the Srivaishnava devotee.

Apart from the numerous commentaries and hagiographies that provided a collective identity to the community, it was the notion of pilgrimage that emerged as an effective binding factor for the Shrivaisnavas. In a literal sense the history of pilgrimage for Shrivaisnavism commenced around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when in the hagiographies, for the first time, the notion of pilgrimage emerged as a norm enjoining the devotees to physically visit the one hundred and eight shrines in order to attain merit and salvation. The element of obligation implied that pilgrimage was equivalent to and even more efficacious than the exclusive brahmanical rituals and sacrifices. Such a religious ideology emerged as the motivating factor for the evolution of a pilgrimage network, which not only included the shrines of the southern region, but also included the north Indian Vaishnava sites. Linking the regional centres to the various centres of the north imparted a pan-Indian spectrum to the religious geographical space. This legitimized the pilgrimage network, as the northern sites had greater antiquity and longer history because of their early epic, and *Puranic* (Bhagavata) associations. Such an exercise in constructing a cohesive sacred geography became crucial as it created a religious and social context for bringing together various traditions, different social groups and regions as a Vaishnava *divyadesam*.

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## 22.5 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN NORTH INDIA

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The beginning of our period in north India coincides with the emergence of a number of socio-religious movements in north India. Emphasis on *bhakti* was key to all these movements. It is important to note that the seeds of all the socio-religious movements can be traced from Vaishnava movements of South India. The doyen of *bhakti* ideology in north India, Kabir, as per the belief, was Ramananda's disciple, who in turn was the disciple of Ramanuja. Similarly, Chaitanya's association with Madhava is emphasised. The monotheistic movements in north-India were also influenced by the *nath panthi* and *Sahejia* (in Bengal) traditions. The major exponents of the monotheistic movements in north India were Kabir (c. 1440-1518), Dadu, Nanak (1469-1539), Namdev (14<sup>th</sup> century), Dhanna, Pipa, Raidas. These movements were popular among the common masses as they directly touched upon the sentiments of common people against the socio-economic oppression. Ramananda, the most prominent exponent of Vaishnava *bhakti*, though derived his ideological framework from South Indian tradition, made Rama and not Vishnu as object of *bhakti*. This way he was the founder of the Rama cult in north India. However, Kabir emerged

as the most popular and prominent figure among the *bhakti* saints of north India. All later *bhakti* saints associate themselves with Kabir and his teachings. The Sikh scripture *Adi Granth* also contains number of verses by Kabir.

The chief characteristic feature of all these *bhakti* saints was that they largely belonged to lower castes. Kabir was a weaver, Raidas (Ravidas) was a tanner, Sena was a barber; Namdev was a tailor. They believed in the existence of only 'one' god and were called 'monotheists'. Their god was formless (*nirankar*), eternal (*akal*) and ineffable (*alakh*). They had the *nirguna* orientation. Their Ram was formless. They emphasised on the recitation of *satnam*. They all emphasised upon the importance of *guru*, community singing of devotional songs (*kirtan*) and keeping the company of saints (*satsang*). They denounced both Hinduism and Islam equally. They were also critical of the 'caste' barriers and caste system as such. They denounced all distinctions based on caste, creed or sex. All superstitions and symbols of orthodoxy were despised with. They rejected the supremacy of the Brahmanical ideas and criticised the Brahmanic dominance. All these movements used the language of the masses which appealed to the commoners. They did not emphasised upon asceticism rather they themselves lived a worldly life. Though they themselves never organised into a formal organisation, their followers organised themselves into sectarian orders (*panth*) as – Kabirpanthi (followers of Kabir) Nanak Panthi (followers of Nanak) and Dadu Panthi (followers of Dadu) on narrow sectarian base.

Vaishnava *bhakti* movement spread towards Bengal, Maharashtra, Kashmir and Gujarat. Jnaneswar (1275-1296) was the pioneer *bhakti* saints in Maharashtra. The other famous *bhakti* saints of Maharashtra were Namdev (1270-1350), Eknath (1533-99) and Tukaram (1598-1650). They largely drew their inspiration from *Bhagavata Purana*. In Bengal Vaishnavite *bhakti* saints propagated the *Krishna bhakti* tradition as against the *Rama bhakti* tradition of Kabir and others. Jaideva (12<sup>th</sup> century) in his *Gita Govind* emphasised upon the love of Krishna and Radha. They were also influenced by non-Vaishnava sects like Sahajiya. Their famous exponents were Chandidas (14<sup>th</sup> century), Vidyapati (14-15 centuries) and Chaitanya (1486-1533). The most popular *bhakti* saint in Kashmir was a woman, Lal Ded (14<sup>th</sup> century). In Gujarat *bhakti* doctrine gained currency under Narsimha Mehta (1414-1481). In Assam Sankardeva (1449-1568) spread the message of *bhakti* in the Brahmaputra region. It is a matter of debate among historians whether emergence of *bhakti* was result of Islamic influence, particularly *sufi* or it had its indigenous origin. As we have seen in previous sections that the idea of *bhakti* developed in South India much before the advent of Islam in India. But nonetheless it cannot be denied that there existed remarkable similarity between the *sufi* and *bhakti* saints and their practices. Kabir is believed to have maintained contacts with Chishti *sufi* saints.

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## 22.6 SUMMARY

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This unit deals with the socio-religious movements based on the ideology of *bhakti* mainly from the ninth to the seventeenth century. It is divided into two parts. Part one deals with the emergence of *bhakti* in South India; while part two focusses on the spread of *bhakti* ideology in north India. In both the Sections various historical processes that influenced the different religious communities and their respective consciousness are studied. The changing socio-political base and the religious developments were mutually interactive, each shaping the other. This can be seen in the textual traditions with different types of texts, some of whom assumed a scriptural status. These texts also reflected the various mechanisms for expanding the social base and hence represented the collective consciousness of a community. Further, changing social base and the rising influence of the sectarian leaders that coincided with the increasing importance of the temples and *mathas* as institutional organizations

created a network of pilgrimage that further fostered the community consciousness. The growth of these institutions and the religious structures were largely sponsored by the state and different social groups through numerous endowments made during the festivals and other ritual occasions. Therefore, religious developments represented an interaction between different social groups and their respective traditions integrating them within a single community framework.

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## 22.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss the historical context to the rise of socio-religious movements based on *bhakti* from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries in peninsular India.
- 2) Discuss the developments within the various religious communities from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century in peninsular India? How did they respond to the changing context?
- 3) To what extent were the socio-religious movements a protest against the contemporary social structure?



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## UNIT 23 THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

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### Structure

- 23.0 Introduction
- 23.1 Century of Decline
- 23.2 Century of Growth and Continuity
- 23.3 Decline of Cities as Cultural Centres and Large Scale Migration of the City Populace
- 23.4 Growing Power of the Intermediate Classes
- 23.5 Caste, Class and Community
- 23.6 Summary
- 23.7 Exercises

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### 23.0 INTRODUCTION

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The eighteenth century is marked by the transition from the Mughal state to the establishment of the British colonial state. This process of the disintegration was not limited to India. This period also heralds the weakening of the four prominent Asian empires - the Safavids, the Turkish, the Mughals and the Manchus. While this transition marked the continuation of the old 'order', new features also crept in. At political level heydays of the Mughal power started fading away providing space to the emergence of the regional states. While Bengal, Awadh, and Hyderabad attempted to carve out their space 'within' the parameters of the 'Mughal' state structure, Jats, Afghans, Sikhs and the Marathas formed their principalities with the show of their muscle power. Mughal empire practically shrank to the confines of Delhi and Agra by the mid-eighteenth century. Constant raids and attacks of the Jats, Sikhs and the Marathas created an atmosphere of complete chaos and confusion in the political arena. Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali's invasions further exposed the weakness of the 'crumbling' Mughal State. On a characterization of the eighteenth century, there is a sharp divide among the historians. Some would paint it as 'the dark century'; while others view it as century of 'growth and continuity'. (for details on this issue see Block 5, Unit 25 of our Course MHI-05).

In the present Unit our focus will be on the social formations and change in the eighteenth century. We have already discussed in detail the political and economic formations in the eighteenth century in our Courses MHI-04 and MHI-05.

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### 23.1 CENTURY OF DECLINE

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The eighteenth century is characterised by some historians as 'dark age', century of 'chaos and confusion'. They strongly believe that the decline of the glory of the Mughal power in the first half of the eighteenth century brought socio-economic and cultural decline in general. While K. M. Ashraf applauds the Turkish and Mughal empires as symbols of 'unity' that had succeeded in uniting the whole country under a centralised government, in the eighteenth century all 'gradually turned into symptoms of social parasitism and decay'.

Irfan Habib calls it a period of 'reckless rapine, anarchy, and foreign conquest'. Athar Ali argues that, 'it would be hard to argue that the mutually conflicting small political units into which India was divided in the eighteenth century were individually stronger than the Empire they had supplanted...many of the compromises that the Mughal

satrapies made with the *zamindars* were signs of weakness, and not of strength... It did not mean that the sum of *zamindar* based powers that now arose could be stronger than the unified Empire they had supplanted'. Athar Ali also points out the cultural failure of the ruling class in not responding to European science and technology with the exceptions of Haider Ali and Mahadji Sindhia's efforts to modernise their armies and Tipu Sultan's limited efforts to develop commerce on those lines.

Irfan Habib sees the conversion of *jagirs* into hereditary possessions and revenue-farming (*ijara*) during the eighteenth century as a sign of decline and not of growth and consolidation. He mentions that Khafi Khan (1731) sounds alarm over the sale of 'tax-farms (*ijara*) becoming more and more of common practice.' In 1724 when Nizam-ul-Mulk abolished *ijara* he saw it as 'source of the ruin and devastation of the country'. (Habib, 2002) He further argues that increasing tendency to resort to *ijara*, which became 'marked' in the 1730s and 'all pervasive' in the second half of the eighteenth century points towards the instability of the taxation system. R. P. Rana (2006) believes that a disturbed peasant economy was at the root of the political crisis of the Mughal empire. This declining trend in the agrarian economy continued uninterrupted in the first half of the eighteenth century. Basing on *Taqsim Dahsala* documents of *pargana* Antela Bhabra (1649-1708) and Ponkhar (1730-40) *sarkar* Alwar, *suba* Agra he points out that there appears to be a distinct decline in the extent of cultivation by about 25 per cent in the second half of Aurangzeb's reign and 10 per cent in the first half of the eighteenth century.

As a result of the decline of the Mughal empire long distance trade also declined. Ashin Das Gupta's study on Surat clearly points out that its decline was the result of the weakness of the Empire and Bombay, with a different hinterland, hardly possessed the potential to compensate for Surat.

Irfan Habib points out that second half of the eighteenth century is marked by extraction of tribute by the British colonial power which drained out India's resources and put burden on the cultivators and the artisans. As per his estimate between 1780s and 1790s the annual tribute to Britain from India amounted to approximately £4 million or Rs. 4 crores. Cornwallis (1790) himself acknowledged that, 'the langour' that the tribute had thrown 'upon the cultivation and the general commerce of the country'. (Habib, 2002)

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## 23.2 CENTURY OF GROWTH AND CONTINUITY

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C. A. Bayly in his *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansions 1770-1870* (Cambridge 1983) challenged the thesis of the decline of the Mughal power at the centre and argued that it did not necessarily lead to the 'anarchy and chaos' in the eighteenth century. There appears to be continuity in the economic life and the battles of Plassey (1757) or Buxar (1764) do not constitute a break. Largely Mughal institutions continued to survive in the regions with certain modifications.

In 1985 Frank Perlin, focussing his study on Maharashtra region published 'State Formation Re-Considered' (*Modern Asian Studies*), followed by three other works of Muzaffar Alam, Satish Chandra, and Andre Wink (Satish Chandra, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Century in India: Its Economy and the Role of the Marathas, the Jats, the Sikhs and the Afghans*, Calcutta; Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth Century Maratha Sorajya*, Cambridge; and Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707-1748*, OUP, Delhi). These writings were also a departure from the old view and highlight the continuity aspect. Muzaffar Alam argues that, Both – the Punjab and Awadh – registered unmistakable economic growth in the seventeenth century. In the early eighteenth century in both provinces; politics and administration

appear to have moved along similar lines'. Frank Perlin, however, completely dismisses the Mughals, or Marathas of 'central significance' and thus their decline would not bring disaster in the event of their disintegration either. Andre Wink views Marathas as 'intermediary gentry or *zamindari* stratum' and thus the eighteenth century for him was 'the century of the gentrification of the Muslim Empire'.

Evidences of growth of urban centres and agrarian expansion are very much evident. The textile industry expanded, new trade routes emerged. B. R. Grover's study shows that there was presence of 'integrated marketing system' in the eighteenth century. Revenue farming (*ijara*) in no way reflected the decline instead it helped in consolidation. Richard Barnett's study on Awadh clearly points out that the 'so-called' anarchy in the kingdom was actually an attempt to hide the 'resources' from the colonial power. Steward Gordon has also highlighted that Maratha system was 'efficient'. Rajasthan equally showed no signs of decline before 1760s. Punjab also recovered by the turn of the eighteenth century. Though Surat declined but Baruch flourished at the same time and emerged to be a major centre of cotton exports. Signs of 'universal economic decline' are not visible, rather it benefited in the sense that 'drain of wealth' (of revenue) to the centre stopped as a result of decline. Practice of revenue farming only shifted the state power into the hands of the 'local interests'. There is hardly any evidence that constant conflicts, which marred the century, brought any disruption or destructions to the agriculture. We do not find any significant decline in the revenue figures (*jamadami*) of the empire either. Rajat Datta's findings of Bengal show significant increase in the revenue returns in Bengal province during the eighteenth century. Wendel's *Memoir* even shows that the Jat territories near Agra and Delhi under Badan Singh yielded the revenue twice the amount that was extracted earlier. Instead the administration of the new *riyasats* were more effective locally. Sraffton comments, 'what greater proof need we of the goodness of the government than the immense revenue their country yields, many of the Gentoo provinces yield a revenue in proportion of extent of territory equal to our richest countries in Europe'. Satish Chandra also rejects the view that during the eighteenth century, as a result of constant warfare and disruption, Indian rulers were instrumental in disrupting the long-distance trade. He argues that the impact of their warfares and confrontations has generally been exaggerated. He emphasises that no state for long could afford to loose profits in the form of custom dues. This fact is attested to by Orme, 'some years ago the province of Oude, laying on the north west of Bengal, became quite impoverished by the excess of the customs and the severity of the collections, the trade went round the province, instead going through it. When Munsurully Cawn, the present Vizir of the empire, obtained that Nabobship, he instantly rectified the errors of his predecessor. He lowered the customs exceedingly, and subjected the collection of them to better regulations. This province being the shortest thoroughfare, immediately received its lost trade, and flourished under his administration beyond what it ever was known to do'. Satish Chandra, (2005) agrues that, 'The biggest threat to trade were not the new states but a section of the *zamindars* who plundered the traders sometimes in conjunction with robbers'. As a result of Jat raids around Delhi-Agra region Wendel remarks that the trade on this route got badly affected. But soon an alternative route from Malwa to Indore and Banaras developed. Similarly, when Sikhs disrupted the regular north-western trade route connecting Central Asia, the trade got diverted towards Rohilkhand and Kashmir to Kashghar. Chandra remarks that Surat did not decline as a result of decline of Delhi, Agra and Gujrat, instead its decline occurred mainly as a result of 'local difficulties' (Maratha raids and Dutch blockade) and on account of the 'downfall of the Safavid empire and the growing crisis in Turkish empire.' There also existed 'regional variations'. The *riyasats* under Awadh and Bengal Nawabs were 'more stable'; the decline of Surat got counter balanced by the rise of Cochin and Pulicat. Satish Chandra is in agreement with C. A. Bayly and others that 'the eighteenth century in India was *not* a period of all-round decline following the collapse of the Mughal empire.'

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### 23.3 DECLINE OF CITIES AS CULTURAL CENTRES AND LARGE SCALE MIGRATION OF THE CITY POPULACE

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Muhammad Umar's study on urban culture in north-India in the eighteenth century shows that the eighteenth century is marked by the decline of 'urban centres', particularly the Imperial cities like Delhi, Agra and Lahore. The architecture of newly founded cities was no match to the Mughal imperial cities (Agra, Delhi, Lahore) in scale or grandeur. Though he acknowledges that there arose some new towns as a result of shift in 'political centres of powers'. The new centres thus emerged were – Murshidabad in Bengal (1704); Faizabad in Awadh (founded by Sa'adat Khan Burhan-ul Mulk (1722-39); Farrukhabad founded in 1723 by Nawab Muhammad Khan Bangash (1713-93); Najibabad by Najib-ud Daula, the Rohilla chief. Aonla emerged when, around 1730 Ali Muhammad Khan Rohilla made the town his capital. Town populace – merchants and artisans – migrated to provincial capitals in search of markets. Muhammad Faiz Bakhsh (18<sup>th</sup> century) comments that at Faizabad, 'as such people here saw wealth, rank and lavish diffusion of money in every street and market, artisans, and scholars flocked there from Deccan, Bengal, Gujarat, Malwa, Hyderabad, Shahjahanabad, Lahore, Peshawar, Kabul, Kashmir and Multan'. Har Charan Das referring about Shuja-ud Daula's period (1754-75) highlights the presence of Persian, Turani, Chinese and European merchants at Faizabad with their wares. Emphasising upon the importance of Lucknow as an important cultural centre Insha Allah Khan mentions that by the turn of the century Lucknow replaced Shahjahanabad which by then became a 'ruined city'. 'Men of eloquence and good manners, who were regarded as the very soul and nourishers of the culture of Shahjahanabad, had come and settled in Lucknow'. (Umar, 2001). Even Mughal princes, like Prince Jahandar Shah, Mirza Jawan Bakht, son of Shah Alam II migrated to Lucknow in 1786. According to Insha Allah Khan the real founders of Muslim culture in Lucknow were immigrants from Delhi. 'The same people who had contributed much to new inventions in Lucknow, had demonstrated similar skill in Delhi, where they enjoyed the same prosperity, as they were enjoying in Lucknow'. (Umar, 2001). When Farrukhabad was founded in 1723 by Muhammad Khan Bangash (1713-93) he brought in and got settled the skilled artisans and craftsmen from Delhi and other parts of the Mughal empire and encouraged commercial activities in his newly established town. Najib-ud Daula also invited masons from far off places and they constructed the houses and bazars in his newly founded town – Najibabad. As a result of the chaos the awestricken masses started fleeing particularly from Delhi. Mirza Jan-i Jahan wrote to Sahibzada Ghulam Askari Khan Muhammadi that, 'the people of Delhi are accustomed to run away and make a good escape'. Poets, scholars, handicraftsmen, merchants, soldiers were leaving Delhi in band after band in search of livelihood. The new towns were emerging and the old towns declined.

Umar (2001) argues that, 'the evidence suggests that the decline of the Imperial cities like Agra and Delhi was not really compensated for by the rise of other towns. The military operations and plundering expeditions of the Abdali Afghans, the Marathas, the Jats, and the Sikhs were not conducive to urban growth; and the emergence of the English East India Company's power and decline of the Indian ruling houses adversely affected the economic condition of the inhabitants of towns'. The cities that emerged were generally administrative headquarters (Faizabad, Murshidabad, Lucknow) and depended heavily upon the state patronage. 'Once the patronage was withdrawn and the administrative headquarters shifted, it began to decline. When the administrative headquarter shifted from Faizabad to Lucknow by Asaf-ud Daula (d.1797) all the merchants, bankers and *sarrafs* were asked by the Nawab to move to the new capital Lucknow. Thus, all the commercial activities shifted to Lucknow once Faizabad ceased to be the capital. Lucknow acquired the prestige of chief cultural centre. These newly founded cities, which were administrative headquarters, once

shifted, declined. The rise and fall of the towns depended on the support of the founder. By the turn of the century Lucknow faced further set back as a result of English East India Company's commercial policies, drain of wealth and import of English goods and the impoverishment of the ruling class, who were the main patrons of arts and crafts. Muslim elite specially faced poverty, they were forced to migrate from place to place for their survival depended mostly upon the state patronage. 'With the decline of the state, their fortunes were eclipsed'. (Umar 2001). Bengal was known for its prosperity and manufactures during the Mughal period. William Bolts, writing in 1772, acknowledges this fact and attributes the decline of the city to British colonial policies, 'That in former times it was customary for merchants from all the inland parts of Asia, and even Tartary, to resort to Bengal with little else than money or bills to purchase the commodities of those provinces. Thus, by the bad practices of the Company's agents and gamesters in the interior parts ... all those foreign merchants have been deterred from approaching the Bengal provinces; and things have come to such a pass, that the whole of that advantageous trade is now turned into other channels, and probably lost to those countries forever...' Murshidabad founded in 1704 faced decline as early as 1784 when William Hodges found the buildings dilapidated. Maratha raids added to the miseries of the life and property of the city dwellers. Twining, writing in 1794 comments that, though the city was (earlier) richer than the metropolis of the British empire, now 'lowered to a secondary provincial city, deprived of much of its importance and all its splendeur...was even losing its true name'.

However, Satish Chandra argues that there was no marked decline in the urban population. Hamida Khatoon Naqvi's study shows that the decline of Lahore, Delhi and Agra soon compensated by the growth of new towns such as Faizabad, Lucknow, Banaras, Patna and Calcutta. Even the so-called decline of Agra, Delhi and Lahore is 'overestimated'. The new, dispersed ruling elites required the luxury goods produced by cities such as Delhi and Agra. The new elites, continued to live in the cities and towns, and tried to ape, the life-style of the Mughal nobles. According to Satish Chandra, (2005) 'sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1740 was not as big a setback'. By 1772 Delhi showed remarkable signs of recovery. Shah Nawaz Khan, writing in 1780 remarks, 'Nadir Shah's occupation resulted in a setback to the prosperity of Delhi, but in a short while it returned to normal and in fact in everything it is now better and shows progress. A description of its decoration is not possible for the pen: its industries and manufactures are flourishing and music and convivial parties are common feature of the life of the people'. (Satish Chandra, 2005)

### ***Shahr-i-Ashob* (Ruined Cities)**

As a result of the decline of the Mughal power and consequent withdrawal of the state-patronage to the literati, there emerged, in the eighteenth century, a distinct genre in literature *shahr i ashob* (ruined cities). There is hardly any poetic work of the eighteenth century that does not contain some reflections and observations on the ruined state of affairs of the city of Delhi. This also reflects the deep attachment and sense of belonging of the people with the city and its culture. The poets no longer enjoyed the patronage of the kings and nobles as a result of Mughal decline. One positive aspect was since they were no more patronised by the 'nobles' or 'kings' their writings reflect more critical assessment of the contemporary state of affairs. They have more critically examined the malaise and causes of socio-religious degeneration. Their poetry highlights the sorry state of cities, towns and villages of northern India, particularly Delhi. *Dil* (heart) and *dilli* (Delhi) formed twin recurring themes and symbols of Urdu poetry (*ghazals*) composed during this period. Their writings are full of shock, awe, apprehensions and dismay over the ruin of Delhi. The famous Urdu poets of the eighteenth century Mir Taqi Mir (1723-1810), Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda (1713-1781), Qalander Bakhsh Jurat and Jafar Zatalli they all composed *shahr-i-ashob* (ruined cities). They have given heartbroken accounts of their sufferings, miseries and dismay in the prevailing distressful conditions, the

overall deterioration in the society, collapse of the social order, hardship faced by the nobility, their destitution. They lamented the authority, supremacy, respect, prosperity and affluence once enjoyed by them under the patronage of kings and nobles. Their depictions of Delhi as a result of the rapid changes reflect the mental trauma faced by the Muslim elite, particularly the literati and men of arts. This pessimism and despair is very much reflected in the writings of the contemporary poets. Mirza Mazhar Jan-i Jahani's letter to Nawab Faizullah Khan conveys the agony and despair he was passing through, 'I am tired of the daily recurring troubles of Delhi, since Shahjahanpur is far away from Delhi, I have come here (to Sambhal)'.

Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda lamented:

'Oh: Jahanabad how did you deserve this kind of cruelty;  
perhaps at some time this city was the heart of some lover;  
that it was ruined in such a way as if it was a false painting.

Mir Taqi Mir mourns:

Now Jahanabad is in ruins otherwise,  
there had been a house at every step.

Jafar Zatalli remarks

These are peculiar times where there is no friendship,  
and where everyone is afraid of the oppressor.  
These are peculiar times where there is no friendship  
between friends, no love or truth. People have become shameless,  
competent and gifted people wander from pillar to post,  
only the low caste prosper.

However, Satish Chandra argues that it was the *umara* and *shurfa* (elites), who provided patronage to the poets, artists and artisans (*hunarmandan*), faced the brunt. 'Their eclipse coincided with the rise of the low castes (*razal quam*) – the butchers, the vegetable sellers, the weavers – something which could hardly have been possible if the population of the city had declined as drastically as they imply, or had the industries been totally ruined'. Rejecting *shahr-i ashob* of Sauda, Satish Chandra (2005) argues that 'poets are not true guides to the state of commerce and manufacture in the cities..'. He believes that it would be misleading to compare the eighteenth century with the 6-10<sup>th</sup> centuries when town life declined. Thus, according to him to call the process 'refeudalization' would be a misnomer.

Though on account of lack of patronage Mughal nobles and men of letters and religious grantees felt dejected, one does not find overall desecration in the field of art and culture. As a result of Aurangzeb's orthodox attitude and later impoverishment of his successor 'popular culture' found 'patronage' of the urban elites at the regions. Regional kingdoms became the hub of literary and cultural activities. Lucknow and Hyderabad Nawabs patronised the men of arts and letters. In Bengal Nadia emerged centre of Sanskrit learning and Tanjore of performing arts - dance music and religion. *Khyal* forms and *kathak* achieved new heights in the north. In the cities emerged *marsia khwani* and *kothas* where city elites used to assemble for poetry, music and dance. Even Indo-Mughal school of painting continued to flourish at regional states of Rajasthan and Hilly regions (Kangra, Basoli style of painting). Hermann Goetz emphasises that the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were a period of the 'highest refinement of Indian culture'. It was the 'golden age' of Urdu, Bengali and Marathi literature.

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## 23.4 GROWING POWER OF THE INTERMEDIATE CLASSES

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To analyse the issue pertaining to the question of 'growth' or 'stagnation' in the eighteenth century, C. A. Bayly points out that at first it is important to see, 'Which

type of landed or commercial interest survived, benefited from, or indeed suffered from the decline of the Mughals'. Bayly highlights that during the eighteenth century there emerged the prominence of the, intermediary classes – the merchants, moneylenders, and revenue farmers (*ijaradars*; portfolio capitalists ). They served as 'mediators between the state and the agrarian society. There occurred the 'gentrification' of the 'service' class 'administrators, warriors and jurists '. Bayly argues that 'the intermediate classes of society – townsmen, traders, service gentry – who commanded the skills of the market and the pen' benefited and consolidated during the eighteenth century. It is generally argued that the *zamindars* rose to prominence at the expense of the state. But for Bayly 'the disappearance of the Mughal imperial check actually allowed ruling groups to establish a closer hold over the peasantry, artisans and inferior trading groups'. He believes that the process of growth of this class began as early as late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The most powerful *zamindaris* (Rajputs of Amber, Bhumihars of Banaras, Rohillas of Rohilkhand and Farrukhabad, Bais of Awadh) emerged in the eighteenth century were the 'beneficiaries of the seventeenth century'. Largely they were the carriers of Mughal legacy and assumed prominence under the Mughals. Even those who rebelled against the Mughals (Jats, Sikhs, Marathas) strengthened their base in the seventeenth century itself. They were in control of the means of production (plough, seed, oxen) as well as the best lands. These privileged classes further consolidated their position in the eighteenth century. Even some were successful in carving out their own kingdoms. They agreed to pay revenue and supply troops in return of absolute freedom. This 'service gentry' other than enjoying 'service grants' (*jagirs*, *syurghal*, *madad-i maash*), also possessed 'primary' holdings once the Mughal official machinery became defunct and states' control over them 'slackened'. You may recall that under the Mughals all these above mentioned grants were neither hereditary nor permanent. These powerful groups got the opportunity to carve out their own 'privileged holdings' where 'revenue and miscellaneous payments were lighter' and 'in turn (they) afforded closer control of agricultural resources, labour and trade'. (Bayly, 1992)

With the decline of the Mughal power at the centre 'leading families' of the regions extended their patronage to this 'service gentry'; while the merchants managed the revenue extraction. The Bhumihars of Bihar and Banaras and the Agarwals and Khattri trading communities of the Gangetic plains maintained close ties with the state. In Rajasthan Poddars and *mutasaddis* played an important role in the agrarian policies of the state. Even the 'resources' of the service gentry were redirected to finance revenue farms (*ijaras*) or into trade and moneylending. Ruling families also patronised and made grants to religious personnel (Shaikhzadas of Bilgram, Brahmanas), etc. This 'service gentry' made inroads into the villages and succeeded *in converting their service grants into their personal land-holdings*. Under the Mughals these grants were transferable and *jagirdars* held only the right over the share of the revenue and they did not enjoy the 'proprietary' right over the land thus assigned. The merchants-cum-moneylenders had close association with the state by directly funding them in the form of loans. At the same time they also maintained their trading network in the towns.

This service gentry and the merchants were closely linked with the 'great entrepreneurial capitalists' (revenue farmers, portfolio capitalists). These revenue farmers (*ijaradars*) operated as states agents and were made responsible for the collection of revenue for the state tried to shirk the risk of revenue collection upon them. They, in turn, relied upon the 'service gentry' and the 'merchants'. Bayly argues that while these revenue farmers hardly survived 'a generation, the landholdings and family capitals of their inferior coadjutors among gentry and merchant families had a better chance of survival'.

Satish Chandra argues that the big *zamindars* were the main beneficiaries. In Bengal smaller intermediary *zamindars* were squeezed by incorporating their *ilaqas* into the bigger *zamindari* areas. In Awadh, the setting up of *talluqedars* at the *tappa* land had the same effect.' (Satish Chandra, 2005) In Bengal and Maharashtra the number of *pahis* (non-resident cultivators) and *khwud-kashta* (self cultivated; resident cultivators) holdings tended to decline. Service grants (*jagirs*, *mokasa*) turned hereditary. *Mamlatdars* (revenue collectors) turned into *ijaradars* (revenue farmers). There increased the tendency on the part of the *ijaradars* to grab more and more administrative powers. The grant of *ijaradars* to outsiders, particularly merchants could have led to greater oppression of the peasantry and sign of a deep crisis. Emergence of the *mahajans*, *sahukars* and merchants as *ijaradars* was a new trend.

But *mahajans* (money lenders) and *sahukars*' (*bankers*) role in revenue collection largely confined to as guarantors (*mal zamin* to the *ijaradars*). Satish Chandra argues that, 'the acquisition of a *zamindari* was more often the final ambition of a successful merchant since it implied social prestige. But it could hardly be the objective of a merchant eager for profit, for the return on *zamindaris* was often extremely low'. In Bengal and Awadh there are references of merchants and bankers turning into *ijaradars* and occupied *zamindaris*. But according to Satish Chandra this was happening only with that class which was already associated 'with agricultural operations either as bankers and *mal zamins*'. But there are hardly any instances of city merchants turning *ijaradars*. This process of the feudalization of the merchants community does not, in any real sense, belong to the eighteenth century. (Satish Chandra, 2005) Many old families were ruined but those who were 'bold, adventurous emerged prominent irrespective of their status - Marathas (Shivaji) and Sindhias were Kunbis, while Holkars belonged to the caste of goat-herders (Satish Chandra, 2005). This openness of the Maratha society is fully noted by Mir Ibrahim Khan, 'Most of the men in the Maratha armies are not endowed with the excellence of noble and illustrious birth, and husbandsmen, carpenters and shopkeepers abound among their soldiers'. (Satish Chandra, 2005)

There was scope of *khwudkashta* occupying the *muqaddami* rights (official position) and 'petty gentry' *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil* rising in social scale by adding to their *jamaat* (military following)'. However, in Rajasthan the stratification was more marked on caste lines Rajputs were the *zamindars* while Jats and Meenas were the owner-cultivators. However, Meenas, 'unable to defend their position by arms, lost their right to ownership of land, and also sank in the social order. (Satish Chandra, 2005)

The eighteenth century successor states needed 'legitimacy' for which they liberally gave patronage to the 'religious classes'. At the same time, to ensure revenue returns special favours were granted to the merchant class. Bayly points out that certain changes did occur in their position after 1760 as a result of unstable political condition coupled with series of famines. Nonetheless, it did not alter their position sharply. Rajat Datta's findings for Bengal and Dilbagh Singh's study on eastern Rajasthan clearly show that the hold of merchants and financiers continued, rather it got strengthened further. However, with gradual tightening-up of the British hold after 1780 it did bring certain changes in the power and position of these intermediary groups. British compromised with the Bhumihars, Bais, (Brahman landed classes of Awadh, Bihar and Banaras) and utilised their base for recruits in the army. We do find that merchant families involved themselves in cash-crop trade and continued to 'finance colonial armies and revenue settlements'. (Bayly, 1992 ) But 'service gentry' got disrupted. They were sacked out from the administrative positions. 'But, in general local judges, office superintendents, and babus of the early Victorian era were drawn from the later seventeenth century onwards'. Muzaffar Alam's study highlights that as early as early eighteenth century state started discriminating against the non-



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## 23.5 CASTE, CLASS AND COMMUNITY

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C. A. Bayly finds that generally caste and class are 'exclusive' categories. However, 'in India class formation was inextricably linked with caste and community formation'. Even people of status identified themselves with caste and class ties. He elaborates that, 'the consolidation of Bhumihar 'gentry' tended to benefit Bhumihar tenants, ploughman, and dependents in particular'. Similarly, Muslim 'gentry' identified themselves as 'carriers of Islamic community'. The positive aspect of this trend was, it 'could provide communities defence in shifting political circumstance'. This process is referred to by Bayly as 'cultural fragmentation'. In his view, 'the gulf between the non-Muslim mercantile communities of the Punjab and the old Mughal elite widened'. Rohillas and Banaras Raj tried to assert their 'Hindu or Muslim identities'.

In the context of the Indian Business Community David Rudner's Study shows that the 'caste' was the vital organising force. But Bayly (1992) argues that cross-caste mercantile organisations played an important role. He believes that the role of caste in social life is actually exaggerated. He argues that there existed 'many subtle forms of inter-relationship across the boundaries of caste'. Mercantile elites of the eighteenth century not only hailed from traditional mercantile castes (Agarwals, Oswals) but Khattris (merchant-cum-administrators) and Brahmans were equal partners in the trade. Even among the Marwari merchants regional (belonging to Marwar region) and sect (Vaishnavite, Jains) identities were more marked than their caste affiliations. Thus, 'while caste was *one* form of social identity which shaped their outlook and social lives, its projection into the sphere of economic organization seems, indeed, at many points to reflect an underlying rationality rather than the perpetuation of the traditional'. (Bayly 1992)

The seventeenth century *karkhanas* which were largely controlled by the state and the Mughal nobles, now during the eighteenth century were run by big merchants and revenue farmers. At Banaras under the protection of merchants and notables were organised skilled Gujarati artisans who fled to the territory from Ahmedabad and Surat as a result of political flux. Merchants employed them as artisans or labours, as their 'personal dependants'. In the Rohilla territory as well artisans also served under Rohilla 'military elite' and 'financiers'. Big merchants and revenue farmers maintained artisanal workshops (*karkhanas*) which were earlier run and maintained by the Mughal nobles.

During the eighteenth century various social groups and communities were trying to redefine themselves in the changing circumstances. The declining influence of the Mughal ruling groups is evident in the prominence of other groups. In Banaras, Bhumihar's dominance over the Ramlila festivals depict the same trend. Similarly, the association of kings, Brahmans and ascetics with the Gosains suggests the emergence of the Gosains as powerful group.

Bayly argues that during the eighteenth century *qasbahs* (small-towns) emerged as 'bearers of Muslim tradition' as centres of '*Mughali* culture'. The petty landlords and *ulama* emerged as spokespersons of *qasbah* society. During this period began the 'decline of social communication and shared interest between the Brahmin-mercantile elites of the great towns and the Muslim *qasbahs*, and in turn – and very unevenly between the Muslim literati and gentry of the *qasbahs* and their Hindu peasantries.

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## **23.6 SUMMARY**

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After Aurangzeb's death in 1707 the glory of the Mughal grandeur and power started declining. The century is full of happenings at a fast pace. It faced two major Afghan attacks of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali. But British success at Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764) shifted the balance in favour of the British colonial power. Historians are sharply divided on the nature of socio-economic developments during the eighteenth century. One group of historians view it as a century of chaos and decline; while others argue that it was the century of continuity and growth.

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## **23.7 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Critically examine the nature of the eighteenth century society.
- 2) The 'eighteenth century was a century of chaos and decline.' Comment.
- 3) Do you agree with a view that the eighteenth century was a century a growth and prosperity?

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## **UNIT 24 PERCEPTIONS OF THE INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE BY THE NATIONALISTS AND SOCIAL REFORMERS**

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### **Structure**

- 24.0 Introduction
- 24.1 Social Background
- 24.2 The Ideological Roots of Nationalist Perception
- 24.3 Nationalist's Perception of Internal Social-Divisions
- 24.4 Reformers
- 24.5 Some Reform Movements
- 24.6 Summary
- 24.7 Glossary
- 24.8 Exercises

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### **24.0 INTRODUCTION**

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This unit concerns with the perception of reformists and nationalists. The perception of a group is always context-specific and is filled with remembrance and anticipation. It opens us to past as well as to future, within the lived, ongoing present. The social-structure is multi-layered and our perceptions order the multiple realities into a coherent whole. The reformists and nationalists in India is nineteenth and twentieth century witnessed a cultural encounter between their indigenous society and culture with the colonial modernity. The colonial modernity brought to India the perceptions and imaginations of the Western bourgeoisie through its print-culture. The printed page whose technology was imported from the west, accustomed the eye to the presentation of messages in a formal, visual space. Along with this innovation, the colonial modernity also introduced the indigenous educated classes to the epistemic presupposition of development-in-time. Yet the indigenous oral culture and notion of cyclical time survived along with other cultural and historical legacies of indigenous social institutions and structures. These twin legacies ordered the universe of indigenous intelligentsia and this is the subject of this unit.

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### **24.1 SOCIAL BACKGROUND**

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The social background of a group plays a very significant role in shaping its perception. Although, there cannot be one-to-one correspondence between social and class background and perception of a group, (perception is an independent, autonomous individual activity that involves intentionality of the perceiving subject and this accounts for variations even within a group) the class background of nationalists imparted some general characteristics to their perception of prevalent social-structure. Generally speaking, as most of the nationalists were of a liberal democratic persuasion, they believed in the sanctity and security of private property and also upheld the virtues of social-hierarchy. According to Prof, Bipan Chandra, diverse political and ideological trends co-existed and simultaneously contended for hegemony within the wide spectrum of

nationalist ideology, however, most of them tended to ignore and downplay the internal contradictions of Indian society in terms of class, caste and religious divisions.

The Nationalist leadership came mainly from the upper caste and class, western educated urban middle class professionals. There was not much urbanization during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in India. The percentage of population residing in towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants remained stationary between 10-11 percent. However, the picture was not so static as the nature and character of urban centres changed significantly under the colonial rule. Some old towns linked with administrative and military functions of indigenous ruling houses declined and some new towns especially those functioning as major warehouses for distant markets emerged, stimulated by commercial colonial economy. One peculiar urban form associated with colonialism was 'port-city'. We can take up the example of Calcutta to show impact of such urban centres on the indigenous socio-cultural life. The European or White town, constructed as per the English urban models, was confined to a small part around Fort William. It was the headquarter of the East India company in India. About 3000 Europeans stayed there in vast houses surrounded by wide avenues and green spaces. But the majority of 2,30,000 Indians in 1837 who made up the Block-city, stayed in a number of localities (*paras*). Each para had developed around the domain of a merchant family, each having its own market and other services necessary for its functioning. Such cities were to become the centres of social and cultural life for the indigenous elite. All zamindar families of Bengal had a residence in Calcutta and members of intelligentsia initially either came from this group or were dependent on this group. However, new opportunities, associated with western education, new printing technology and capitalist enterprise gradually replaced this dependence.

The indigenous elite wished to acquire western knowledge and proficiency in English language, but did not always seek to imitate the English or Europeans in all aspects of life. The initiative to learn English and Western science came from the upper caste and upper class Hindus as early as 1817 who established the Hindu College in Calcutta. The print-culture also came with colonialism. The first modern press established by William Carey (The Baptist Missionary) in 1801 at Serampore, published, along with the translations of Bible, the first works of modern Bengali prose, and a *Darpan* (1818). A new class of indigenous intellectuals emerged in this process of importing western knowledge and technology of print, though it still came from the upper castes who enjoyed the privilege of literacy in the pre-colonial times. Soon, it became independent of the local zamindars and landed magnates. The Macaulay's Minute (1835) accelerated the process, although his own aim was to produce Indians who would serve the British in subordinate positions. The Wood's dispatch (1854) adopted a more coherent plan to develop education in India. Universities were established at the Presidency capitals of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857 and between 1865-85, about 50,000 candidates passed the entrance examination to the university and about 18,000 earned a University degree. In addition to it, some others were enrolled in specialized professional courses and institutions such as Medical Colleges and engineering schools. These colonial-educational institutions were sources of both employment and intellectual influences. The legal profession was the main source of both employment and intellectual influences. The legal profession was the main source of employment and at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, nearly 14,000 person were employed in this in the three Presidencies. The Vernacular Press and teaching offered other prospects. Some scholars even



relate the emergence of Indian nationalism to the absence of satisfactory job opportunities among the indigenous elite sections. This sounds too simplistic but there is little doubt that the colonial state followed a strategy to cultivate the urban professional classes, whose skills were essential to the business of administration. Social groups such as the Bengali bhadralok ('the respectable folk') and the Parsis of Bombay were drawn to the standard of the Raj not simply by financial and status rewards of public service but also by the heady allurements of western thought and culture. As early as 1877, Keshab Chandra Sen had expressed faith in the providential hand of the Raj. Gradually this faith in the providential aspect of the colonial state was shaken and moderate nationalists, whatever the weaknesses of their strategy, made a brilliant and thorough critique of the economic aspects of colonialism.

The colonial social milieu had not only produced student clubs like the Society for Acquisition of General Knowledge (Calcutta, 1838), it also became a cradle for the development of political associations such as British Indian Association (Calcutta, 1851), Bombay Association (1852) and Native Association in Madras. The colonial public space initially affected only an infinitesimal elite, not even the urban middle classes. When Indian National Congress was created in 1885 under the guidance of A.O. Hume, most of its delegates hailed from bourgeois big city professionals with a sprinkling of merchants and landowners. Eleven of the first sixteen Congress Presidents were barristers. Badruddin Tyabji earned Rs. 122,000 from his legal practice in 1890, an amount that was four times the salary of a highly paid Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer. Justice M.G. Ranade, was attended by some 21 coolies. Motilal Nehru, a highly successful lawyer of High Court, lived in a big mansion lit by electricity and drove a motor car when there were only a handful in the entire country. In short, they came from wealthy sections of the society and enjoyed high social status in the hierarchy of traditional society. (Many were Brahmins actually). This social background naturally placed limitations on their form of patriotism and their imaginations. They were wedded to the system of property and apprehensive of sponsoring anything that might upset the social harmony and the hierarchical arrangement of society.

The foundational goal of the Indian National Congress reflected this. The principal demands of Indian National Congress were: reform of central and Provincial Legislative Councils (with greater powers and with acceptance of elective principle in representation), the Indianization of top-level administration by simultaneous organization of entrance examination to Indian Civil Service, both in England and India, judicial reform and access of Indians to the high ranks of the army. Other demands were economic in nature such as reduction of Home charges and military expenditure, the need to encourage technical education with a view to facilitate the industrial development of the country, the abolition of duty on alcohol and the extension of permanent settlement. These issues were of interest only to a small section of privileged individuals within the indigenous society. The nationalist paradigm of development reflected the aspirations of the propertied sections to take India onto an independent course of capitalistic development, although some broader issues such as reduction of salt tax, betterment of conditions of Indian migrant labour working in colonial plantations and revocation of Forest Acts were included to give the programme a semblance of general public concern. As most of the members of Indian National Congress, especially in Bengal belonged to zamindars, the scope of agrarian programme remained very limited. In fact, the nationalist intelligentsia was operating in a context characterized by predominance of landed property over movable property and could hardly overcome the constraints imposed

by these conditions. According to Cambridge historians, C.A. Bayly (1975) and R.A. Washbrook (1976), the intelligentsia intervened into the public space, not as the representative of their own class but as the agents of rural magnates or of the powerful banker traders of the cities. Such simplistic correlation leaves out the complex ideological strands that coloured the perceptions of the nationalist leadership. Still, it appears that they are limiting at the roots of question as to why the congress ultimately favoured a bureaucratic rather than mobilizational form of carrying out the “passive revolution” or a gradual conservative social transformation in 1947 and, thus, retained the power of agrarian magnates in the countryside.

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## 24.2 THE IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF NATIONALIST PERCEPTION

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The colonial modernity that shaped many public institutions and policy measures entailed the notion of legal rights, sanctity and security of private property and capitalistic enterprise, modern printing and state regulated education. The nationalist leadership, while seeking to challenge the colonial state and its hegemony used an ideological amalgam or hybrid of ‘modern’ ideologies and ‘invented’ indigenous cultural resources. Therefore, the ‘nationalism’ was a multi-faceted phenomenon. The Congress leaders, who had imbibed the liberal consciousness and who were also guided by a modernistic credo, wished to create a civil society in India on the model of European society, a society of individuals that would be implicitly counter to descent groups. The extension of print culture and the colonial education with a standardized school curriculum stimulated the growth of such a civil society in India and the nationalist leaders only wanted to accelerate this process. However, as Rajat Kanta Ray (2003) has shown that “The pre-history of every national movement lies in emotions, identities and notions” (p.5) The idea of a ‘nation-in-the-making’ might have been new, but popular mentality and emotions were rooted in the past cultural-historical legacies. In other words, identities in the colonial milieu were not created all of a sudden they were rooted in “the raw, unfashioned feeling of the multitude” (Ray, 2003, p. 34). One way to avoid being caught in the trap of multiple and competing religious and cultural identities was to refuse to make social reform an objective of political action. Therefore, the social issues were not tackled directly during the annual sessions of the Congress, rather they were discussed in an Indian Social Conference, outside the framework of the Congress under the guidance of M.G. Ranade.

The colonial state also provided encouragement to the redefinition of social identities by its own initiative. The decennial censuses started enumerating people according to the caste-status and there was a competition among many sub-castes to claim a high varna-status. This expanded the axis of ‘horizontal solidarities’ through a number of caste-associations that fostered supra-local identities especially in towns where it was difficult to observe ritualistic prescriptions. Similarly, the Cow Protection Agitation (1893) in North India, a movement against the slaughter of cows, also consolidated a Pan-Hindu identity. Earlier, the Hindus were a disparate collection of castes, sects and local cults that followed a congeries of religious practices. The new Hindu ‘collectivity’ also brought merchant and artisans into the public arena. The educated nationalist intelligentsia, nevertheless, hardly seemed preoccupied at this juncture with the questions of religious and communal identity. Many of them seemed to concur with the criticism of Christian missionaries directed against the ‘evils of Indian Society’. The consolidation of caste-solidarities did not bother them as they were wedded to the notion of social-hierarchy and caste was the best

representation of the principle of hierarchy. What some of them, especially the Extremist faction led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal, questioned was the right of colonializers to interfere in the beliefs and faith of the indigenous people. While some people like M.G. Ranade agreed to the criticism of social evils on the basis of Western Conception of rationality, the revivalistic strand in nationalist politics perceived the Indian Social structure from a contrary point of view. Lala Lajpat Rai wrote in 1904 in an article entitled 'Reform Revival': "cannot a revivalist arguing in the same strain, ask the reformers into what they wish to reform us? Whether they want us to be reformed on the pattern of the English or the French? Whether they want us to accept the divorce laws of Christian society or temporary marriages that are now so much in favour in France or America? Whether they want to make men of our women by putting them into those avocations for which nature never meant them?"

In short, whether they want to revolutionize our society by an outlandish imitation of European customs and manners and a diminished adoption of European vice?"

However, a simplistic demarcation between tradition and modernity is not possible and the hybrid that evolved due to interaction between modernity of the west and the indigenous traditions involved many ambiguities and ambivalences. The issue was addressed again and again in the nationalist discourse. The colonial milieu produced intellectuals who adopted different routes to seek a transcendence from the oppressive present. Nehru had hinted at the basic ambivalence involved in this cultural encounter and described the Indian middle class dilemma to choose between modernism and a search for the cultural roots in the past. Aurobindo Ghosh had wished for a synthesis of oriental values and occidental ideas in the following words in an essay 'New Lamps for Old', published on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1893: "No one will deny — that for us, and even for those of us who have a strong affection for original oriental things and believe that there is in them a great deal that is beautiful, a great deal that is serviceable, a great deal that is worth keeping, the most important objective is and must inevitably be the admission into India of occidental ideas, methods and culture".

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### 24.3 NATIONALISTS' PERCEPTION OF INTERNAL SOCIAL-DIVISIONS

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The main agenda of nationalist leadership, with all its multi-faceted composition and ideological variations was to put together a civil society. However, the creation of a civil society and nation is always a part of ideologically engineered modern world. The nationalist faced no problem in opposing the bureaucratic intrusions of Indian society by the colonial state, even if some of them were, on the surface, at least guided by altruistic motives (such as famine relief and free vaccination against diseases). They could be easily depicted as the agenda of an alien government to wean away the Indians from their ancestral beliefs and customs, thus, requiring resistance from indigenous society. In a similar fashion, the economic penetration and imposition of land-revenue policies, forest Acts through an alien bureaucracy could be held responsible for the moral and material degradation of indigenous society. The economic backwardness and primitiveness of Indian social institutions was linked to lack of sufficient modernization and transfer of resources from India to England due to preponderance of vested colonial interests. However, a more vexatious question was how to deal with some of pre-colonial social cleavages of caste, class, gender and religious nature. Contrary to what some scholars believe,

not all of them were 'invented' by the colonial rulers. Some of them were modified, distorted and used by the colonial rulers. For instance, religious division was used selectively to patronize a particular religious community in the system of separate electorate. In some cases, the religious divisions were enmeshed into an intricate web of property-relations at local level. These were also other irreconcilable contradictions such as between landowning dominant farmers and the landless agricultural labour, and capital and labour in the new urban centres. There were also contestations between the dominant, upper castes and lower caste groups. The system of agrestic serfdom or bonded labour had existed even in the pre-colonial periods due to a peculiar caste-class configuration that maintained landlessness among the lower castes.

The nationalists, even when they were aware of many of these contradictions, tended to ignore them. They had no intention of challenging the existing pattern of social prestige and hierarchy. They gave primacy to the contradiction between colonialism and the entire Indian society. Poona Sarvjanik Sabha (1870), in its manifesto had declared that its members were to be "men of respectability, inamdars or proprietors of land, savkars or money lenders, merchants, government officers, pleaders, professors and most of the ruling chiefs of the Southern Maratha country." It is, therefore, not surprising that the Indian educated classes were divided even over the support to a mild reform like Behram Malabari's campaign against early marriage and a need to raise the legal minimum age of marriage from 10 to 12 for girls. [The Age of Consent Bill Controversy (1891)]. Although aware of the inherent social contradictions in the indigenous social structure, the social conference under the leadership of M.G. Ranade did not want "to kick the old ladder" yet talked about "re-casting family, village, tribe and nation in new moulds". Ranade also lamented that the colonial state had done away with the traditional protection of person and property. He, therefore, wished to achieve a harmonious integration of hierarchically ordered village society with a paternalistic hand. Ranade emphasized the credit functions of sahkars (money lenders) in the wake of the Deccan Peasant Revolt (1875) and established Poona *lavad* (arbitration) court on the model of traditional village Panchyat, which would function to achieve an informal but effective compromise in both public and private conflicts (beyond the contractual British model). This was like an attempt to restore an old institution that had decayed because of violent innovation under the destructive impact of colonialism.

The Gandhian imagination of a 'Ram-rajya' with its 'idyllic village communities and his idealization of small scale village cottage industries, even while making some qualified exception to the use of labour saving modern machines, became a symbol of nationalist challenge to the colonial penetration of Indian society and its institutions. However, Gandhi selectively ignored the class questions and wished to resolve them through the policy of adjustment of class-interests and harmony. Mahatama Gandhi had organized the textile workers of Ahmedabad in the form of Ahmedabad Textile labour Association and under-took a fast of 21 days to get bonus from the capitalist employers in 1918. Subsequently, Gandhi stayed away from the militant actions of industrial labour. The Gandhian Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association promoted the ideology of class-harmony between labour and capital. Gandhi employed the notion of Trusteeship for the capitalists and perceived the employers as the trustees of the society who would work for the benefit of the workers. The other prominent nationalist leaders who were associated with labour organization such as B.P. Wadia, V.V. Giri, C.R. Das and even Jawaher Lal Nehru also favoured a constitutionalist and reformist line of action in labour-struggle. Similarly on the agrarian front, although

some congress leaders especially those belonging to the Congress Socialist camp organized peasants and tenants against the semi-feudal oppression, the general approach was to ignore internal differentiation within peasantry. The Right wing conservatives within congress, on the other hand, directly sided with the feudal landlords. The most marginalized section dependent on agriculture, the agricultural labour was not on the agenda at all. M.G. Ranade had favoured transfer of land from inefficient poor peasants to resourceful, rich and inefficient poor peasants to resourceful, rich and efficient farmers on the ground of economic rationality. R.C. Dutt had defended the Zamindari or Permanent Settlement as a rational and just act of the British in India. Similarly, while perception of caste (see unit on caste in this block) differed and while some regarded it as the essence of Indian social structure, others were aware of the harmful effects of caste, no systematic anti-Caste ideology was worked out. Even the radical wing of Congress thought that the institution of caste will wither away with industrialization and modernization of society.

Gandhi repeatedly addressed women in his political discourse and regarded them as a regenerative force. He permitted and encouraged their active participation in the public and political life, especially after 1930. On the other hand, the roles he expected for them were as mothers and supporters of men and as examples of self-sacrifice and non-violence, as spinners of *Khadi*. Gandhi considered women most worthy in their traditional place and avocation i.e. concerned with household tasks and upbringing of children. Thus, the vision and imagination of Gandhi was coloured with patriarchal values.

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## 24.4 REFORMERS

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Concepts of socio religious movements and its theme dimensions: The term ‘socio’ implies an attempt to reorder society in the areas of social behaviour, custom, structure or control. A movement or its reformers may have sought to reshape any one of these components or a combination of them. All socio-religious movements demanded changes, ranging from a relatively limited approach of defensive and self consciously orthodox groups to radicals who articulated a sweeping condemnation of status quo.

The term ‘religious’ refers to the type of authority used to legitimize a given ideology and its accompanying programmes. This authority was based on scriptures that were no longer considered to be properly observed or a reinterpretation of doctrine or on scriptural sources arising from the codification of a new religious leader’s message. At times different types of authority were combined to legitimize a particular programme. The teachings of an individual once adopted by his disciples were standardized, codified and transformed into an ideology that is a structured explanation of the present in terms of the past events. Such formulae also outlined a path towards the purified future, either for an individual or for society at large. The leader initially and later the ideology furnished the vehicle for an individual’s participation in a particular movement. Here the term movement refers to an aggregate of individuals united by the message of charismatic leader or the ideology derived from that message. Such a movement might be loosely organized especially during the life time of its founder, but if it was to last beyond his death his disciples needed to create and sustain a formal organizational structure. In short a socio-religious movement advocated modifications in social behaviour and justified such advocacy by one or another form of religious authority and then built an organizational structure it maintained over time.

The ultimate object of the reform movement as a whole, was the attainment of social happiness the well being of the people and national progress. For social salvation the intellectuals emphasized truth, equity and justice to be the governing values of future Indian society. M.G. Ranade wrote:

“The evolution that we seek is a change from constraint to freedom, from credulity to faith, from status to contract, from authority to reason, from unorganized to organized life, from bigotry to toleration, from blind fatalism to a source of human dignity.”

The intellectuals placed a very high premium on knowledge. Ignorance was viewed as a curse and attributed to as the root cause of the prevalence and doggedness of superstition and obscurantism in Indian society. Literacy in general and among women in particular was held responsible for national degeneration and backwardness. The spread of education was therefore accorded a primary position in the scheme of reform. Nearly all the intellectuals held education to be a panacea for all problems. The conviction in the instrumentality of knowledge as the most effective agent of social transformation and national regeneration was a significant feature of the (19<sup>th</sup> thought.

In contrast to the British educational policy which was not geared to the needs of material advancement of our country the educational programme of the intellectuals on the contrary aimed at the material development of the country. They stood for the extinction of the privileges of the higher castes in the existing educational arrangements. They were opposed to the monopoly of learning by certain upper castes and classes, and proposed the spread of knowledge to all segments of society. Their constant concern was how to make popular education an activity. To realize the objective of mass education Parmanand advocated free compulsory education upto the primary level.

Nearly all the reformers laid stress on the growth of Indian vernaculars. It was deemed necessary to realize the goal of popular education. They held that English as a medium of instruction could not be an effective instrument of any meaningful advance. The role of English education was to be confined to aiding and enriching the indigenous languages. In other words, it was to be an aid and never an instrument of social change. Ranade took the colonial policy to task for its neglect of Indian vernaculars.

Another significant concern of the intellectuals was female education. It was emphasized as the ‘root of all reform’ and social advancement. Illiteracy among women was viewed as one of the major causes of their pitiable plight and the general backwardness of the society. They advocated not only primary education among the (19<sup>th</sup> intellectuals who first conceived of educating women for employment and professions, and stressed the expanding of women’s role outside the home.

The targets of the severest intellectual attack were the existing socio-cultural evils and malpractices such as obscurantism, superstition and irrationality embedded in the society. The intellectuals did not however attack the social system as a whole; their attack centred only on the perversions and distortions that had crept into it. They did not advocate a sharp rupture in the existing social structure of the country. They did not stand for structural transformation; changes were sought within the framework of the very structure. They were advocates of reform and not revolution.

The upliftment of the position of women, late marriage, monogamy, widow-marriage, elimination of caste distinctions, monotheism etc. did not signify any revolutionary change in the society. Even they themselves were not aware of the reformist nature of their ideas and endeavours. The course they delineated for transformation was to be evolutionary and not revolutionary. Nearly all believed in the gradual transformation of society.

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## 24.5 SOME REFORM MOVEMENTS

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Here we briefly introduce to you some of the reform movements.

### *The Swami Narayan Sect of Gujarat:*

Sahajanand Swami (1781-1830), a disciple of Ramananda Swami (1739-1802) popularized a puritanical ideology in Gujarat region. Swami Narayan sect's dissent from the established Hindu traditions, was limited to a few aspects of customs, particularly with regard to the marriage customs, infanticide and the Van-Margist form of sectarian Hinduism. It attacked *Vani-Margas* who worshipped female power (or *Shakti*) and practiced animal sacrifices, meat-eating, drinking and sexual rituals. Although women were also given a place as female religious mendicants or *Sankhyayoginis* and Swami Sahjanand challenged restrictions on widow-remarriage, the institution of *sati* and the custom of female infanticide yet the sect also upheld the basic values of the traditional patriarchal set-up. Swami Sahjanand preached that a woman should obey her husband and worship him as a god. The Swami Narayana movement developed a hierarchical structure. At the apex was the acharya. Religious mendicants were recruited from all castes, but the future *acharyas* had to be Brahmin. The mendicants were divided into three hierarchical orders, the brahmcharis, sadhus and patas. The brahmcharis had no caste marks but sadhus maintained caste restrictions and were limited to non-Brahmans of the second and third *Varnas*. The third category of patas were mainly from sudra varna or peasant castes and acted as temple servants and attendants. Untouchables were excluded from Swami Narayana's institutions except for the two specifically built for their use. Thus, the sect accepted hierarchical social structure as well as patriarchal social values and reinforced Brahmanical domination.

### *The Satnamis:*

The Satnamis, under the leadership of Ghasi Das, Balak Das and others, on the contrary, emerged from the untouchable castes mainly chamars of Chattisgarh and advocated a sort of equalitarianism. Ghasi Das maintained that all men were equal and thus, challenged caste as a social hierarchy. Ghasi Das wanted to change the dietary habits of his followers. Meat, liquor and anything that resembled flesh or blood was forbidden (e.g. tomatoes, lentils and red chillies). The Satnamis were thus confirming the upper-caste customs primarily to improve their social status. Balak Das, the son of Ghasi Das was more radical in his opposition of caste-discrimination. He adopted the sacred thread worn by the upper castes and the satnami movement acquired dimensions of social protest and rebellion against the upper castes. It also developed its own hierarchical system of priests and religious centres and a calendar of ritual events. It became confined to the chamars of Chattisgarh region. Briefly it challenged caste-system but finally returned to an existence within that very social set-up.

*The Satya Mahima Dharma:*

Mukund Das or Mahima Gosain, Govinda Baba and Bhima Bhoi (an illiterate blind cow herd) were — figures of Satya Mahima Dharma who organized an opposition to orthodox Brahmanical domination in the field of religious rituals. Because of rejection of Brahmanical rituals and idol-worship, the movement had a wide appeal among lower caste people, tribals and untouchables. Women could join the movement as devotees but they were forbidden to enter the monastic order of the movement. The Mahima sanyasis underlined their rejection of traditional social structure by refusing to take food from brahmans, princes, and some of the professional classes on the grounds that such food may not have been acquired in a righteous manner.

In an annual feast at Joranda (a sacred place for Mahima Dhamis because Mahima Gosain was buried there), all devotees joined together transcending caste restrictions. Under Bhima Bhoi, Vaishnavism and worship of Lord Jagannath were to become the main theme of their attacks. Because of this opposition of the traditional religious practices and Brahmanical form of worship, Satya Mahima Dharma drew support from the lower castes and tribal people who had little status and power within the traditional social structure.

*The Satyasodhaks of Maharashtra:*

The social structure of Maharashtra was divided into Brahmans, non-Brahmans and untouchables. The Brahmans were generally the priests, landowners, estate managers and government servants, and thus concentrated the entire power within themselves. Jotirao Phule (1827-90) challenged the power of Brahmans. Realizing that even lower castes were also divided, Phule tried to use a strategy in which he depicted all the *shudras* and *Ati-shudras* (untouchables) as the forgotten descendents of the heroic race of Kshatriyas of ancient India, led by the mythical daitya king Bali. Phule represented Bali as a popular peasant king signifying the utopias of beneficence, castelessness and prosperity. Phule suggested that there was a permanent and irreconcilable hostility between Brahmans and all other castes. In his attempt to unite all lower-caste people, Phule accepted the ‘Aryan race theory’ as the basis of the Indian caste system but inverted it to serve his own radical aims. The Satya Sodhaks under leadership of Mahatma Phule challenged the cultural and religious domination of Brahmans. In the Junnar campaign (1884) of the Satya sodhaks, the service castes refused to visit Brahmans, peasant cultivators (or *Kunbis*) refused to plough the lands of Brahmin landlords and Brahmans were not invited to conduct marriage ceremonies. But while radically rejecting Brahmanical social structure, the satyasodhaks organized separate caste association and conferences between 1907-1933 of Marathas, Bhandaris, Malis, Shimpis, Agris, Parits, Salis, Mahars and Mangs for promoting educational activities among these castes, thus, implicitly legitimizing the separate caste-identity among them.

*Perceptions of Islamic Reformers:*

Like ‘Hindu’ social reformers, the Islamic reformers also perceived indigenous social structure in diverse ways. Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-98), fascinated with western science, and knowledge felt depressed with the state of decadence of Muslim society in particular and India in general. To overcome this state of indigenous society, he felt that some of the innovative features of English society—its discipline, orders efficiency and high level of literacy along with science and technology—must be adopted by the Muslim community. Sayyid Ahmed addressed himself to the members of ashraf (respectful descendents of past rulers) and stressed the importance of ancestry and social status. He believed that western education and knowledge through institutions like the Mahammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh (1875)



would create a generation of leaders who would unite the depressed Muslims into a single *quam*, a community no longer divided by sectarian strife, class tensions and issues of language. Although Ahmad wanted to introduce some changes in behaviour and customs, he upheld the structure of social –hierarchy and class. Contrary to this, the Barelwi ulama led by Ahmad Riza Khan (1856-1921) defended contemporary customary practices and religion of Islam. The Barelwis accepted a wide variety of customary practice, defended the established religious elite and showed no interest in western science. However, the Islamic movements of return like Deobandis linked the Ulama class-interests with the fortunes of the Muslim community. Although they did not ignore the ascendancy of English power, they looked for a new vision of purified religion and a resurgence of ulama. The Deobandi curriculum was designed to prepare students for their role as members of the *ulama* and thereby strengthen the link between Islamic religion and culture and the Muslim community. Although, they used English techniques and methods for erecting their educational institutions and raising funds, the structure of Islamic society, especially the *ashraf* classes provided broad support and financial resources for their endeavours.

The Fara'izis under the leadership of Shariat' Ullah (1781-1840) and his son Dadu Miyan also represented a return to a more puritanical Islam. In fact the term fara'iz meant the obligatory duties of Islam. They wanted to purge Islam of polytheistic beliefs and other customs that prevailed among the uneducated, Muslim peasants of Bengal and which the Fairazis believed were because of influence of Hindu community on them. They challenged the beliefs of orthodox Muslims as well as Hinduism which was seen as the fountain of polytheism and all evil innovations. As the majority of landlords in East Bengal region were Hindus, their ideological campaign got embroiled in the agrarian conflicts. They challenged the power of local landlords and indigo planters. Shariat 'Ullah asked his followers to reject the illegal demands of landlords such as collection of money for *Durga Puja*. His son, Dudu Miyan took a more radical stance and proclaimed that all land belonged to God and that land tax was both illegal and immoral. Such a perception of landed property was a direct attack on the power of landlords and popularized the fairazis among the Muslim peasantry.

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## 24.6 SUMMARY

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Thus we see that the perceptions of social reformers and nationalists of the Indian social structure cannot be viewed as a monolith. There were several strands to these perceptions. This was because each strand was grappling with the nature of society in its own specific context and time. The richness of the diversity of the perceptions then makes for the variations in the movements of social change.

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## 24.7 GLOSSARY

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**Horizontal solidarities:** Groupings of caste or other local loyalties meeting up across regions and localities to form larger gatherings for definite ends.

**Hegemony:** meant here in the sense of ideological dominance

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## 24.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) How did the social background shape the perceptions of the nationalists about the Indian society?
- 2) Compare and contrast the Swamy Narayan sect and the Islamic reformers.

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## UNIT 25 STUDYING CASTES IN THE NEW HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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### Structure

- 25.0 Introduction
- 25.1 Caste as the Invention of Colonial Modernity or A Legacy of Brahmanical Traditions
- 25.2 Orientalists Perception of Caste
- 25.3 Colonial Anthropology and Caste: Caste as Viewed by the Ethnographers
- 25.4 Enumerating Castes Under the Colonial Rule
- 25.5 Caste in the Making of Nation
  - 25.5.1 Social Reformers Perception of Caste
  - 25.5.2 Early Nationalists and Caste
  - 25.5.3 Caste Conferences and Upliftment of ‘Community’
  - 25.5.4 Hindu Nationalists Defense of Caste
- 25.6 Recasting the Castes in the Political Domain of Politics
  - 25.6.1 The Modernity of Non-Brahmanism
  - 25.6.2 The Nationalist Ideal and the Gandhian Critique of Untouchability
  - 25.6.3 Ambedkar’s Idea of the ‘Annihilation of Caste’
- 25.7 Summary
- 25.8 Glossary
- 25.9 Exercises

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### 25.0 INTRODUCTION

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Caste is the most contentious issue that has fascinated and divided scholars who have wished to study this system of stratified social-hierarchy in India. There is an enormous body of academic writing and political polemic on the issue. These are basically the part of debate on the transformation of Indian society under the impact of colonialism and its administrative mechanisms. Some argue for the continuities of pre-colonial social-structures including caste. Others stress the basic qualitative changes introduced by the colonial rulers.

Louis Dumont, the French scholar and writer of a famous book on caste, *Homo-Hierarchicus*, constructed an image of caste based on certain texts. In this image, two opposing conceptual categories of purity and pollution are the core elements of caste- structure. These unique core principles of caste-hierarchy, according to Dumont, are observed in scriptural formulation as well as the every-day life of all Hindus. In other words, these values separate Indians culturally from the Western civilization, making India a land of static, unchangeable, ‘oriental’ Brahmanical values. Nicholas Dirks and others have challenged this notion of caste. They cite ethnographic and textual evidence to demonstrate that Brahmans and their texts were not so central to the social fabric of Indian life. According to this view power-relations and command over men and resources were more important. Brahmans were merely ritual specialists, often subordinate to powerful ruling families. The caste-based scriptural or Brahmanical model of traditional India was an invention of the British Orientalists and ethnographers, according to this view. However, caste played a very critical role in the Indian social-reformers and nationalists’ perception of caste. It was certainly not a mere product of British imagination.

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## 25.1 CASTE AS THE INVENTION OF COLONIAL MODERNITY OR A LEGACY OF BRAHMANICAL TRADITIONS

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As we hinted above, two opposing viewpoints see caste differently. Some view it as an unchanged survival of Brahmanical traditions of India. According to this view, Brahmanism represents a core civilizational value and caste is the central symbol of this value. It is the basic expression of the pre-colonial traditions of India. Contrary to this view, Nicolas Dirks, in his *Castes of Mind* (2001), argues that caste is a product of colonial modernity. By this he does not mean that caste did not exist before the advent of British. He is simply suggesting that caste became a single, unique category under the British rule that expressed and provided the sole index of understanding India. Earlier there were diverse forms of social-identity and community in India. The British reduced everything to a single explanatory category of caste. It was the colonial state and its administrators who made caste into a uniform, all-encompassing and ideologically consistent organism. They made caste as a measure of all things and the most important emblem of traditions. Colonialism reconstructed cultural forms and social-institutions like caste to create a line of difference and demarcation between themselves as European modern and the colonized Asian traditional subjects. In other words, British colonialism played a critical role in both the identification and production of Indian 'tradition'. The colonial modernity devalued the so-called Indian traditions. Simultaneously, it also transformed them. Caste was recast as the spiritual essence of India that regulated and mediated the private domain. Caste-ridden Indian society was different from the European civil society because caste was opposed to the basic premises of individualism as well as the collective identity of a nation. The salience of this pre-colonial identity and sense of loyalty could easily be used to justify the rule by the colonial modern administrators. So, according to Dirks, it was the colonial rule of India that organized the 'social difference and deference' solely in terms of caste.

The attempts to downplay or dismiss the significance of Brahmans and Brahmanical order is not in accordance with much familiar historical records and persistence of caste-identities even in contemporary Indian social life. Caste-terms and principles were certainly not in universal use in pre-colonial periods. Caste in its various manifestations and forms was also not an immutable entity. However, starting from the *Vedas* and the Great Epics, from Manu and other *dharamsastras*, from *puranas* texts, from ritual practices, the penal system of Peshwa rulers who punished culprits according to caste-principles, to the denunciations of anti-Brahmanical 'reformers' of all ages; everything points towards the legacy of pre-colonial times. It is true that there were also non-caste affiliations and identities such as networks of settlements connected by matrimonial alliances, trade, commerce and state service in the pre-colonial times. However, caste was also a characteristic marker of identity and a prevailing social-metaphor. Caste was not merely a fabrication of British rulers designed to demean and subjugate Indians. It did serve the colonial interests as by condemning the 'Brahmanical tyranny' colonial administration could easily justify their codes to 'civilize' and 'improve' the 'fallen people'. Moreover, strengthening of caste-hierarchy could also act as a bulwark against anarchy.

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## 25.2 ORIENTALISTS PERCEPTION OF CASTE

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The colonial construction of India began by the early Orientalists with their own cognitive maps and with texts explained by *pandits*. Their social model was *varna*-based Brahmanism of Manu. The early admiration of a golden age gave way to a condemnation of Brahmanical tyranny. William Jones translated and published *Manu Dharma Sastras* or *The Laws of Manu* (1794). Manu was concerned with such topics as the social obligations and duties of various castes (*varnas*), the proper form of kingship as upholder of *varna*, the nature of sexual relations between males and females of different castes and ritual practices related to domestic affairs. It became the main authority in imagining of Indian tradition as based on *varnasrama-dharma* (social and religious code of conduct according to caste and stage of life). Scholars have questioned the attempt to codify Indian social relations according to this single, orthodox Brahmanical text. The text, compiled by Brahman scholars, depicted a caste society under the exclusive domination of Brahmanas who reserved for themselves pride of place in the caste hierarchy. The prescriptive text also became the basis of actual description of Indian social order. James Mill, in his *History of India* viewed caste as a prime example of an Indian social institution based on priesthood and adapted to oriental despotism. Mill borrowed from Jones' work despite his attack on the Orientalists.

Max Muller also based his interpretation of caste on textual sources. He suggested that the caste in Vedic period was different from caste in the later degraded periods. For Muller, the soul of Indian civilization was that of the Vedic age, while the later distortions began in the time of Manu. Orientalists saw the Hindus as victims of an unchangeable, hierarchical and Brahmanical value system. Their insistence on this played a crucial role in the making of a more caste-conscious social order. The basic objective of the colonial state was to procure data about Indian social life so as to tax and police its subjects. From the early nineteenth century, the company officials turned increasingly to literate Brahmanas or to scribal and commercial populations to obtain such information. The Orientalists treated *shastra* texts as the authoritative sources on 'native' law and custom. Such informants had an incentive to argue that India was a land of age-old Brahmanical values. They insisted that effective social-control and cohesion could be achieved only if hierarchical *jati* and *varna* principles were retained. Many nineteenth century Orientalists saw priestly Brahmanas as an important but also pernicious force in the society. They doubted the veracity of claims of these indigenous literate specialists.

The image of India as a Brahman-revering caste society in some instances suited both the colonial rulers and local landed elites. For example, the landed- aristocracy in the early colonial era in Tamilnad found it advantageous to play up claims of superior *varna* and *jati* origins in their dealing with the colonial judiciary and revenue officials. The colonial judges and revenue officials had come to see the use of prestigious Brahman and Vellala caste titles as evidence of authentic lordly origins, even though they were aware that families of humble birth had acquired rights and property under recently subdued warrior dynasties through purchase or endowment. The colonial establishment looked for social-stability and emphasized on age-old *jati*-statuses and divinely mandated traditions rather than individualistic principles of achievement and personal gain. The local landed magnates used these caste-principles in order to get preferential treatment from the colonial state.

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### 25.3 COLONIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND CASTE: CASTES AS VIEWED BY THE ETHNOGRAPHERS

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By mid-nineteenth century, especially after 1857, anthropology supplanted history as the principal colonial modality of knowledge and rule. The taste for ethnographic inquiry was stimulated by new trends in the intellectual world. New formal schools of social and scientific thought were taking shape in the academic institutions. These influenced the colonial ethnographic curiosity about caste as the primary object of social classification and understanding. The colonial ethnographers compiled new kind of compendia about castes, tribes and their customs. W.W. Hunter, who was appointed director general of statistics to the government of India in 1869, produced and supervised a series of gazetteers that sought to systematize official colonial knowledge about India. These contained descriptions of the local castes and tribes including their manners and customs. More specifically, they described marriage system, kinship patterns, funeral rituals, clothing, geographical distribution of different caste groups and adherence to Brahmanical priesthood and values. M.A. Shering's *Hindu tribes and castes* (1872) was part of a new kind of empirical quest. Manu and his *varna* categories and *dharmic* explanation for multiplicity of caste because of inter-marriage were retained in his description. Caste, thus, became the site for detailing a record of people, the locus of all-important information about Indian society.

H.H. Risley, in his multi-volume work, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891) stressed the racial basis of caste. His work, *The People of India* (1901), resulted directly from his work as Census Commissioner for the census of 1901. Risley emphasized anthropometric measurements for origin and classification of Indian races or castes. Another colonial ethnographer William Crooke (1848-1923) questioned subsuming of caste-categories into biologically determined racial essences. He suggested that occupational criteria provided much more comprehensive and accurate indices for understanding caste as a system. Risley had proposed that anthropometry would provide good results in India because caste system as the organizer of social- relations was based on the principle of absolute endogamy. India, thus, became the testing ground for speculative theories of races and human species propounded in Europe. The ethnographic surveys were also useful as easy reference works for the colonial administrators, for police as well as revenue authorities, district magistrates and army recruiters.

However, the colonial ethnographers and data-collectors' viewpoints regarding castes were not part of a uniform 'colonial' discourse that worked to invent the ideology and social-experience of caste in India. Sometimes, race and racial categories played a more significant role in their thinking rather than a monolithic consensus on caste. Denzil Ibbetson's picture of castes in his *Punjab Castes*, demonstrate marginal importance of Brahmans and their standards of rank and hierarchy. Ibbetson stressed that castes like Rajput and Jats in Punjab were based on the concepts of occupation and accessibility to political power and resources. Here, the caste-like affinities and ranking schemes were not based on four fixed *varnas*. Other colonial ethnographers such as W.W. Hunter, the author of famous *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868), and Walter Elliot also depicted caste as a feature of life for some Indians, but not all Indians. In their analysis caste is often a subsidiary to racial categories.

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## 25.4 ENUMERATING CASTES UNDER THE COLONIAL RULE

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Census took over the task of producing empirical data and information on caste from 1871-72 onwards. Census consolidated the imperial ideology of caste by meticulously gathering data about castes. There was a general consensus among most of the enumerators that caste should be the basic category to classify diverse population of India. There were, however, differences about the manner and procedure regarding organization of information about castes. Risley adopted a procedure to organize castes on the basis of 'social precedence' in 1901 census. As a result of this, a number of caste associations emerged to contest their assigned position in the official hierarchy, each demanding a higher position and organizing their fellow caste members in the colonial public space. After 1931, the colonial state found it difficult to ignore the political implications of the caste-oriented census. It abandoned the use of caste for census counting altogether.

The idea of an all-India census was first seriously contemplated in the mid-1850s. It had a number of precedents. There were regional household counts, an attempt in 1846 to test population estimates that had been derived from land settlement records, and presidency-wide census of Madras before 1851. The first all-India census took place in 1871-72, although it was flawed in that it did not cover all the regions and was not very systematic. The primary principle of classification used in 1872 and in the next decennial census of 1881 was that of *varna*. The statistical project was enmeshed with the Orientalist categories for the classification of social-hierarchy. The minute and endless ramification of castes was classified according to the fourfold *varna*-system. In this mode of classification, Brahmans held the first rank. Majority of Hindus were indiscriminately thrown together into the category of *Sudra* or servile classes. The regional enumerators often ignored regional variability. In actual practice, the *varna* or ritual markers were used to differentiate and order the higher castes, and occupational markers to classify the lower caste groups.

The British enumerators associated with census operations recognized the problem of using *varna* as a single classificatory category. The regional position of Brahmans varied. Aside from Brahman and Rajputs, few actual castes could be easily correlated with *varna* distinctions. The caste configuration varied from one place to another. Dominant caste groups in most regions were confined to those regions and did not have an all-India presence. The use of occupational criterion for differentiating castes was also based on shaky and unsound foundations as formal caste titles only rarely indicated true occupations. Even there was difficulty of ascertaining caste status within a particular locality because caste titles, names and other markers of caste identity were used in numerous and apparently conflicting ways.

In the census of 1881, enumerators were asked to classify only caste groups whose size was more than one lakh. The total population was sub-divided into Brahman, Rajputs and other castes. The number of other castes, who crossed the requisite number of 100,000, was 207. They were listed in an alphabetical order, as classification of castes according to their social position was an explosive issue. The Census Commissioner, W. C. Plowden, further aggregated census data to create caste blocs such as major agricultural castes, major groups of artisans and village servants and so on. Large caste blocs were seen as amenable to administrative concerns of the colonial state regarding recruitment to the colonial army, maintenance of social order, agrarian policy and legal adjudications. Although enumerators were

enjoined to find where different caste titles or names could be merged into single groups, they, in fact, found a huge proliferation of actual caste groups.

The 1891 census formally abandoned *varna* criterion for enumeration in favour of occupational criteria. J.C. Nesfield in his *Brief view of the caste system of NWP and Oudh* (1885) and Sir Denzil Ibbetson as the Census Commissioner for Punjab in 1881 census advocated a functional approach to caste enumeration. The adoption of occupational criteria in 1891 census was based on the proposal of Nesfield and Ibbetson. Nesfield suggested that tribal groups based on descent became amalgamated into larger tribal groups that were organized around occupations and specific functional affiliations. The census of 1891, thus, broke sixty sub-groups into six broad occupational categories of castes: agricultural and pastoral, professional, commercial, artisans and village menials and vagrants.

H.H. Risley, as the leading proponent of colonial ethnology from the late 1890s until his death in 1914, criticised Nesfield. He divided Indians into seven main racial types on the basis of physical measurements of various bodily traits. In his anthropometry, these physical measurements and colour of skin became the basic principle of caste ranking—“the social status of a particular group varying in inverse ratio to the mean relative width of their noses”. As census commissioner for the 1901 census and honorary director of Ethnological Survey of the Indian Empire, Risley conceived a grand scheme for the mapping and measurement of every racial ‘type’ and ‘specimen’ in India. His basic assumption was that although there were frequent cultural borrowing and exchange between different caste groups, but due to the practice of endogamous marriages, there was hardly any racial-mixing. Risley’s sociology of caste, however, was based on Brahmanical indices such as the acceptance of food and water, the use of Brahmans in rituals, ritual proximity to Brahmans. The question of social precedence and hierarchy assumed greater force in the census of 1901. Caste as subject of social analysis not only organized many administrative concerns from famine relief to criminality, but also constituted the Brahmanical ritual system. The attempt of census of 1901 to rank castes by status induced a number of petitions from caste-associations clamouring for higher status for their own caste. Therefore, although the census of 1911 continued to gather caste-information, it abandoned the scheme of ranking them according to status. In 1931, the colonial state completely stopped the use of caste data in census.

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## 25.5 CASTE IN THE MAKING OF NATION

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There was an indigenous side to the perception of caste that was reformulated by nationalists and social-religious reformers. The Indian thinkers identified caste as a topic of vital concern for the making of modern nation. They debated at length whether caste was good or bad for the Indian society or whether the collective identities of castes could be reshaped and function as a new kind of bond of unifying nationalist visions. Broadly two viewpoints emerged in these debates.

- a) Those viewing caste as a divisive and harmful institution negating nationhood.
- b) Those who saw caste as *varna* or an ideology of spiritual and moral order, a source of national strength and the ‘essence’ of Indian civilization.

The following sub-sections will deal with some aspects of these debates and their implications.

### 25.5.1 Social Reformers Perception of Caste

In the nineteenth century, the traditional learned scholars defended Brahmanism. They insisted on the knowledge of *Vedas* as a prerequisite of salvation and saw the *varna* based social-hierarchy as the essence of Indian civilization, a hierarchy that debarred those of non-twice born status from access to *Vedas* or the source of salvation-knowledge. However, they were also critical of certain aspects of these traditions. Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) insisted on a critical examination of *shastric* texts. He attacked many forms of polytheistic Hindu worship advocated by the traditional and mythological texts or *puranas*. He indirectly challenged the legitimacy of caste. The Brahmo Samaj (1828) saw itself as an advocate of a new, universal, casteless religion. Paradoxically, however, Brahmos themselves became an exclusive endogamous community within Hinduism.

In the late nineteenth century, controversies about whether caste was a degenerate social evil or an embodiment of progressive spirituality were articulated in the *Indian Social Reformer* (a journal founded in 1890). Even religious revivalist reformers like Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj (1875) and Swami Vivekananda, the founder of Ram Krishna Mission (1897) were united in depicting India where universal standards of reason and morality were to be applied. In their indirect critique of caste, various social issues cropped up. These included the claims of Brahmins to possess unique sacred knowledge, the age of marriage and other matters of corporate honour and sexual propriety; and the origin and meaning of untouchability. All these indigenous intellectuals exalted the values of purity, hierarchy and moral community, the virtuous cornerstone of caste ideology. As a result, the new spiritually regenerated India which they envisioned was an India in which the forms and values of so called traditional *varna* were to remain salient and active, even if in a modified form.

### 25.5.2 Early Nationalists and Caste

Among the early nationalists, M.G. Ranade (1842-1901) floated a reformist organization, National Social Conference. The organization, founded in 1887, aimed to persuade Indians to modernize their values and behaviour. One of the chief aims of this western-educated intelligentsia was to campaign against the 'evils' of caste. It helped to define an ideal of enlightened social upliftment. They did not regard every aspect of caste as an 'evil', to be annihilated. Nevertheless, Conference adherents were expected to endorse so called uplift for the untouchables and reform the high caste Hindus especially with regard to the position of women. Contemporary western ethnology and eugenics shaped their ideas to some extent. A leading activist of Conference, T. V. Vasvani, justified a stance against the 'evils' of caste on the basis of Aryan 'race genius'. The bond of race was extolled as the force, which could eliminate divisions and unify people into a single nation. In the resolutions of National Social Conference, caste was seen as a 'national' problem for the freedom-loving people of India to be solved through their own free will and initiative. Its evil practices were to be challenged primarily in the field of faith and social morality. It attacked caste as 'an alien and slavish institution', a relatively recent creation that shackled Indians within a prison house of superstition and oppression. The reformers attacked the 'fetters' of caste as pernicious and shameful obstacle to the moral and political regeneration of the nation.

The radical congressmen of 'Extremist' stream, especially B.G. Tilak (1856-1920) led a militant public agitation for immediate home-rule and saw nationhood as an



expression of collective moral, spiritual and racial essence. Tilak and his followers were deeply conservative in social and spiritual matters. They viewed the reformist challenge to the so-called caste evils as an attack on the national faith, and a challenge to divinely mandated standards of decency and biological purity. They did not want these divisive issues to be raised from the congress platform.

### 25.5.3 Caste Conferences and Upliftment of ‘Community’

A score of caste conferences and associations sprung up between 1880 and 1930s in response to census operations. These regional-based associations claimed to act as moral exemplars for their *jati* members. Most of them belonged to castes of scribes, trading communities and cultivating agricultural castes. However, some like Tamilian Nadars or Shanars were low in caste-hierarchy. Their educated and prosperous leading men raised vocal opposition to stigmatization of their castes as ‘unclean’ and ‘backward’. Many of these associations were anxious that public recording of *jati* and *varna* status might be used by the colonial state in such important matters as military recruitment and the creation of electoral constituencies. Western moral convention and *dharmic varna* norms of purity both were utilized by such associations to achieve a creditable reputation for their community in the public arena. Many of them advocated temperance, remarriage of widows, the raising of age of consent for marriage, the abolition of temple prostitution and sympathized with campaigns such as against ‘lewd’ female dance performances, in order to achieve social-purity.

National social conference’s scheme for upliftment of India’s ‘depressed castes’, or untouchables, and Arya Samaj project of *Shudhi* or purification of low-caste converted groups were also part of similar concerns. They were means of restoring both the numerical strength and the ethnological vigour of the ‘Aryan community.’ Their ideal of a transcendent pious community was far from being hostile to caste. Their ‘modernizing’ critique of caste challenged the idea that the highest forms of knowledge and ritual expertise should be the preserve of a closed caste of Brahmans. They advocated a purified form of caste based on a bond of idealized moral affinity of followers rather than blood or birth. Many of the caste associations drew inspiration from the ideology of such reforms. Such purified *varna* or *jati* social order did not challenge the caste-hierarchy although it was based on collective moral identity of its members. However, such idioms and ideologies furnished the themes and strategies for the uplift of ‘community’.

### 25.5.4 Hindu Nationalists Defense of Caste

The Hindu nationalists emphasized racial pride, ties of blood and nationality. They resisted modernization of the Indian social order. While they sometimes deplored certain features of caste in contemporary Indian social life such as untouchability, they insisted that caste in its true form was essential to the spirit of Hinduism. It represented a legacy of higher moral values from the national past. Vivekananda condemned the oppressive treatment of untouchables and other subordinate castes. Yet, he defended caste and *varna* hierarchy as a natural order and matter of national pride. G. K. Gokhale (1866-1915) was particularly concerned about the declining number of Hindus and saw the success of Muslim, Sikh and Christian proselytizers in attracting low castes as a sign of Hindu weakness and racial decline. When Ambedkar bid for separate electorates for the untouchables at the second Round Table Conference (1931), this ploy aroused deep anxieties about Hindu representation and electoral arithmetic especially in Punjab and Bengal. Therefore,

Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu revivalist organizations intensified their 'purification' drives among untouchables and tribals by vesting such people with markers of Hindu identity such as sacred thread and a recognized set of *jati* and *varna* titles.

In Bengal, the Hindu zamindars and other followers of Hindu Mahasabha took lead in promoting programmes of Hinduization of tribals and untouchables who were induced to declare their allegiance to the Hindu 'community'. The Hindu nationalists campaigned actively among groups such as Rajbanshis and Namsudras to identify themselves to the census officials as Hindus of thread-bearing Kshatriya varna so as to swell the number of Hindus in the provincial census returns.

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## 25.6 RECASTING THE CASTES IN THE DOMAIN OF POLITICS

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As we have already noted, caste came to preoccupy the minds of Indian intelligentsia. Their responses were diverse. Some used to explain it as an exotic institution to the alien British administrators and defended it as the very essence of Indian civilization. However, most of them decried caste oppression and saw it as a symbol of backwardness of Indian society, a force that was impeding its progress and was responsible for the subjugation of women in the society. It was condemned for its divisiveness and as a barrier in the way of formation of national identity. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this critique of traditional social-cultural order also influenced the ways caste was treated in the emerging political space under colonial rule. In the next sub-sections, we describe these major political responses.

### 25.6.1 The Modernity of Non-Brahmanism

In the late nineteenth century, the educated and politically active intelligentsia utilized new avenues of 'public space'. They expressed themselves in a language of universal rights and citizenship. This modern discourse was at odds with a caste-fettered India, which acted as an impediment to the attainment of nationhood. The social background of newly western educated as revealed by census enumerators for the Western India and the Gangetic North, shows that they were mostly from Brahmans and other service groups with a tradition of literacy and occupational mobility. The lower-rung bureaucracies came to be dominated by persons of similar castes. When municipalities were established under the so-called Ripon Reforms in 1880s, they also dominated them. This was the context in which non-Brahmanism emerged as a political force uniting a mixed array of service, commercial and agricultural castes with artisans and other lower-caste educated activists.

Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra wrote against Brahman privilege and domination in 1850s. Rejecting emulation of Brahmic customs and manners and breaking himself free from the usual pattern of caste movements for upward mobility, he directly attacked Brahmanism. He represented Brahmans as Aryan invaders who conquered local indigeneous people by force and concealed their act of usurpation by inventing 'caste system'. In 1873, Phule established the Satyashodhak Samaj, an organization for challenging Brahmanic supremacy. Phule and his fellow radicals projected a new collective identity for all the lower castes. He used the existing symbols from Maratha warrior and agriculture traditions for discovery of this identity. He underplayed the social-differences that divided mali-kunbi, mang-mahar or

Shudra-Ati-Shudra. In his *Ballad of Raja chatrapati Shivaji Bhonsale* (1869), Phule depicted all lower-caste people as the forgotten descendents of the heroic race of Kshatriyas. The King Bali was refigured as representing the utopias of beneficence, prosperity and casteless order. By claiming Kshtariya status for all the lower castes, Phule was trying to harness the existing trend of upward social mobility to a radical end but it also contained the possibility of slip back into caste-based claim for higher status. The Satyasodhaks failed to evolve a unified and homogeneous sense of identity over a longer period.

Sometimes, the development of ‘Non-Brahmanism’ is seen as the product of colonial ‘modernity’ and official encouragement to ‘un-shackle’ Hindu minds by challenging ‘Brahman tyranny’. Anil Seal, for example, sees non-Brahmanism as a reaction to the monopolization of opportunities in bureaucracy and professions by Brahmans. However, Phule’s critique reveals a wider consciousness of caste inequalities and their correlation with social subordination and material and cultural oppression of the Shudra castes.

The Justice Party articulated the non-Brahman resentment in Madras. The founders of this organization were leaders’ like. T. N.Nair, P.Tyagaraja Chetti and C.N. Mudaliar. They demanded reserved seats in the Provincial Legislative council and other concessions in education, public appointments and nomination on local boards for the non-Brahman professional middle classes. In 1926, E.V.Ramaswami Naicker, popularly known as Periyar (meaning ‘Great Man’) established the ‘Self-Respect Movement’ which took a different political trajectory than the Justice Party even though it inherited rhetoric of non-Brahmanism. This new radical political stance advocated the overthrow of caste and instituted new forms of marriage and other ritual practices designed to promote inter-caste social intercourse. The movement further engaged in a radical critique of religious belief and practice. It attacked the Brahmans and the whole Brahmanical ideology of privilege and sacred authority in general. Periyar advocated outright atheism as the only true rational worldview. Periodically, the movement organized dramatic assaults on religions and priestly symbols like beating of priest and idols with shoes, and burned ‘sacred’ texts like *Manusmriti*.

The term Non-Brahmanism might have been an invention of the colonial political arena. However, their political strategies involved use of slogans and symbols reflecting satirical and hostile views of Brahmans which were common in many regional folk cultures as well as ‘modern’ Hindu reformist teachings. In South India, growing literacy in the vernaculars also helped in spread of awareness of regional identities conceived in term of resistance to the traditional authority of Brahmans. The ideology of such resistance was often an amalgam of traditional devotional *bhakti* faith and appropriated theory of Aryan race that distanced indigenous Dravidian people from outsider Brahmins.

### **25.6.2 The Nationalist Ideal and the Gandhian Critique of Untouchability**

The Indian National Congress issued its first guarded declaration on the amelioration of caste disabilities through a resolution in 1917. The provisions of the resolution were reaffirmed in the Congress 1920 resolution on Non-Cooperation. It committed the Congress to make the removal of ‘Depressed Classes’ disabilities a major nationalist priority. It, however, favoured voluntary ‘religious’ solutions and urged the Hindu religious heads and other leading Hindus to make sustained efforts to reform Hinduism. There was no emphasis on legislation or any other sort of action

by state. In 1920s, Gandhi and other prominent leaders pursued a variety of religious solutions. They took the fight against the 'evil' aspects of caste to the Hindu temples. They organized a temple-entry campaign at Vaikam in Travancore (1924-25). Gandhi soon lost faith in such agitations as they went against Satyagraha's morality of non-violence. Gandhi, however, continued to make passionate appeal against 'satanic' practice of untouchability, which he described as a stain on Hindu faith.

Gandhian 'reform' minimized caste differences and underplayed caste-identity. It stressed organic unity and harmony of varna-system rather than hierarchy. Gandhi continued to exalt the principle of *varna* until the 1940s as an ideal and natural order of things (around caste, stage of life and the performance of duty or *dharma*), an egalitarian law of life. In 1940s Gandhi called for full repudiation of caste, abandoning his earlier goal of a purified caste order purged of 'sinful' belief in untouchability. The goal of Harijan Sevak Sangh (1932), established by Gandhi and his close associates, was to instill habits of cleanliness and social propriety in their untouchable beneficiaries and to wean them away from toddy-drinking, meat-eating and unseemly sexual indulgences. The idealized and reformed *bhangi* (domestic sweeper), with his meek posture and emblematic basket and brushes was supposed to an exemplar of the virtues, which the Harijan Sevak Sangh wished to spread among the 'depressed classes'.

Throughout 1930s and 1940s, Nehru and Congress Socialists expressed their concept of the Indian nation in casteless and egalitarian term. The Karachi Resolution of Congress (1931) was formulated around ideal of a democratic polity and industrial modernization, although there was no mention of caste in of resolution. They believed that caste would wither away with industrialization or with state legislation. They did not formulate any political programme or strategy for abolition of caste. The radical Congressmen Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose equally insisted on abolition of caste in a new India. In 1930, Bose declared that no Indian should be denied of bearing arms for his nation on grounds of his caste origin. He also called for inter-communal and inter-caste dining in his Indian National Army. This commitment to casteless egalitarianism was enshrined in 1950 constitution of India.

### 25.6.3 Ambedkar's Idea of the 'Annihilation of Caste'

B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) made a scathing attack on caste from the standpoint a modern democratic thinker. He saw caste as an impediment to attainment of social justice, equality and reform in the Indian society. Initially, Ambedkar stood for the cause of educational access for the untouchables. He voiced his views against performances of traditional labour services and 'village duties' by the *mahars*. He also advocated forced temple-entry and use of 'clean-caste' markers of *varna* status. He took lead in the Kalaram temple-entry campaign (1930) at Nasik and in the satyagraha for drawing of water by untouchables from the Mahad tank in Maharashtra. He burnt Manusmrti in public in 1927 as the work defined the codes of Brahmanism. This radical gesture challenged the values of those for whom such sacred writings were embodiment of divinely sanctioned order. Ambedkar's notion of caste rejected colonial ethnographers' criteria of understanding caste as well as the idealized depiction of certain indigenous thinkers' visualization of caste as a natural order. He rejected Nesfield's criterion of occupational differentiation to identify castes and Risley's racial categorization of

different castes. Ambedkar's *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936) made the most potent attack on caste.

Ambedkar utilized the opportunities offered by the colonial public space and constitutional politics. However, his political options were determined by his own living experience and his links within newly constituted lower-caste identities. He was apprehensive of political implications of colonial constitutional arrangements as well as future democratic institutions for the fate of untouchables. He referred to India's untouchables as 'slaves of slaves' undergoing double oppression of colonial state and Hinduism at Nagpur in 1930. His mistrust of Gandhi and colonial rulers led him to articulate demand for the separate electorates for the untouchables at the second Round Table Conference (1931). The compromise formulae of Poona Pact gave a new constitutional package of higher proportion special reserved seats in the provincial assemblies for depressed caste candidates than promised in the original plan of the colonial state. This was an acceptance of electoral representation for 'communities'. It gave the colonial state a new task of 'scheduling' caste-based constituencies. After the brief attempt to unify non-Brahman tenants and labourers by Independent Labour Party (1936-39), Ambedkar returned to the champion the common cause of all those who suffered the disabilities on account of *dharmic* impurities under the umbrella of All-India Scheduled Caste Federation (1942).

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## 25.7 SUMMARY

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Caste, though sometimes depicted as the essence of the Indian civilization, has always been a fluid phenomenon. Both the moral normative side of caste or *varna* and *jati* as small-scale endogamous groups have been refashioned and remade throughout Indian history. The fluidity of caste phenomenon was also reflected in the criticisms and reformulations of the conventions of rank and corporate essence under colonialism. Both the colonial state and the indigenous agency were involved in this process of invention and reformulation. Under the colonial rule, the Brahmanical normative codes became more deferential as the colonial state legal codes and administrative practice sanctified them, thus, intensifying a trend towards ritualization of social life. Although, these trends were not merely a creation of colonialism and but also represented a survival of pre-colonial legacy. The colonial public arena offered ideological and political mobilization space in which various indigenous players and activists; reformers, nationalists and anti-caste radicals articulated their identities and remoulded caste in the process.

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## 25.8 GLOSSARY

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**Anthropometry:** The measurement of physical types in different human populations.

**Brahmanical Order:** A ranking or hierarchical system in which Brahmans or priestly caste and its rituals and life-style gets unsurpassed position.

**Dharmic:** Pertaining to religiously sanctified moral and normative order.

**Ethnography:** a category of anthropological research, characterized by empirical, first-hand study of a community or ethnic group.

**Invention:** Use of pre-existing customs, traditions in a reformulated way in a changed context.

**Varna:** Fourfold text-based division of society in India.

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## 25.9 EXERCISES

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- 1) Which of the following statements are correct? (Mark v or ×)
  - a) Risley emphasized occupational criterion for identifying castes.
  - b) Nesfield favoured *varna* criterion for enumerating castes.
  - c) The question of caste ranking and social-precedence assumed greater force in the census of 1901.
  - d) For Max Muller, the soul of Indian civilization lays in the Vedic age.
- 2) Analyze whether caste was an 'invention' of colonialism or a legacy of Brahmanical traditions.
- 3) What was the purpose of enumerating castes in censuses?
- 4) Explain the context of emergence of non-Brahmanism and its perception of caste.
- 5) Compare Gandhi and Ambedkar's views on caste-oppression.

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## **UNIT 26 PATTERN OF RURAL-URBAN MOBILITY: OVERSEAS MIGRATION**

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**Pattern of Rural-Urban  
Mobility: Overseas  
Migration**

### **Structure**

- 26.0 Introduction
- 26.1 Pull and Push Factors
- 26.2 Historiography
- 26.3 Patterns of Recruitment
  - 26.3.1 International Migration
  - 26.3.2 Major Channels of Internal Migration
- 26.4 Social Composition of Migrants
- 26.5 Working Conditions
- 26.6 Lived Experiences
- 26.7 Protests and Consciousness
- 26.8 Summary
- 26.9 Glossary
- 26.10 Exercises

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### **26.0 INTRODUCTION**

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During colonial rule in India, inter-regional mobility during nineteenth century initiated the process of transformation of rural population into labouring classes. There was migration from villages to urban centres, plantations and military cantonments. Thousands went to different parts of world in search of work. The present unit explores the genesis of this migration. While looking at the methodological approaches in the emergent historiography on migration, it studies the structure of recruitment, working conditions and social identity of workers. The unit also specifically looks at the day to day experiences of workers both in India and over-seas colonies. It helps in understanding the narratives of power-discourse and linkages between class and culture. The world of labouring population was as much shaped by their subjectivity as by the ongoing movements of nationalism, communalism, discourse of racialism, imperialism and intellectual ideas. How the process of identity formation was permeated by above-mentioned trends can be explored in context of actions of labouring classes. In India, migration of population can be traced back to ancient times. The Indians had close links with the Persian Gulf region and South East Asia in the ancient period. During medieval period, rulers recruited large numbers of Indians in the army from different areas. Thus various caste groups from rural areas such as Grasiyas and Kolis of Gujarat, Syeds of Punjab and the various Rajput clans joined the army. The familial ties, marriages, pilgrimages and occupational needs also induced the mobility of rural population. During eighteenth century, emergence of successor states in Punjab, Maharashtra and Rajasthan was shaped by various mobile castes. Jats in Punjab and Delhi region settled numerous villages. The onset of British colonial rule brought India into capitalist nexus. Initially the focus of the colonial state was on maximisation of profits. The British ruling class converted India into a market for the manufactured articles of Manchester and Lancashire mills by the middle of nineteenth century. The changing needs of British Empire resulted in multiple changes

in Indian economy and society. It paved the way for the recruitment of rural population as labour force.

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## 26.1 PULL AND PUSH FACTORS

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The changing needs of British Empire and impact of colonial rule in India resulted in emergence of factors, which became responsible for the migration of Indians in industrial centres and plantation units both within India and outside.

Initially, the colonial economy was based on the extraction of maximum land revenue from peasants. By late nineteenth century, British administrators were worried about the growing poverty and indebtedness among peasants. The penetration of British manufactured goods resulted in the decline of handicraft industries. This meant that more and more people started losing their jobs. The pressure of market economy and demographic changes reduced the size of land-holdings and majority of peasants became dependent on small pieces of uneconomic land-holdings. It became difficult for the skilled artisans in traditional cotton handicraft industries to sustain themselves. A vast number of them continued in their old profession due to lack of alternative avenues of employment and due to their loyalty to the profession of their forefathers. Gyanendra Pandey outlines this process during nineteenth century in several areas in United Provinces such as Lucknow, Benaras, Mubarakpur, Jaunpur, Gaya and Jais in Rae Bareilly district. The decline in demand for their textiles produced through methods of craft-production and resultant poverty forced weavers to look for jobs outside their residential area. There were instances of migration of numerous impoverished peasant and labourers, small zamindars and artisans to the industrial belt around Calcutta.

The commercialisation of agriculture also led to export of cash crops like indigo, jute, tea and cotton to England and other parts of Europe. It resulted in the emergence of processing centres for agrarian products like sugarcane, rice and oilseeds in urban areas. Numerous plantation industries were also set up. For instance the tea cultivation began in Assam in 1851. British capital developed 51 tea gardens developed in various parts of the country by 1859. Most of them were concentrated in Assam. They required cheap labour. Recruiters were hired to transport labour from Bengal, Bihar and other regions to Assam.

The British rulers were not interested in industrial growth of India. During 1850s, many indigenous traders, who reaped profits as agents of British export-import companies, started setting up industries. Cotton spinning and weaving factories were set up in Bombay, Ahmedabad, and Kanpur. Amritsar witnessed growth of woollen industry. The jute industry was localized in Calcutta. Most of the factories were set up on both sides of the river Hooghly and in Northern and Southern parts of the city. The beginning was made in 1851 and Scottish Mill owners from Dundee played an important role in Jute industries. Mining industry was also developed on a small scale. The coal production amounted to 220,000 tones by 1854. It rose to about 1.7 million tonnes by 1890. The growth of railways and military cantonments also provided an outlet for employing skilled and unskilled workers. By 1920s towns had become centres for the production of manufacturing goods and processing centres for agrarian produce. While industries employed workers in organised sectors, daily wagers like potters, coolies and cart pullers in informal sectors also lived in cities.



Overseas migration was linked with the demands of British Empire. During nineteenth century, Indian army was sent to several countries in South-East Asia. Sikhs were also deployed in police and other departments in Burma, Thailand, Malaya, Hong Kong and China. As news about jobs in these areas reached Punjab, many went to these areas. There was growing demand for Indian labour in overseas British colonies. It arose, when the British Parliament abolished slavery in 1833. The emancipation of 800,000 slaves in colonies was followed by the emergence of the indentured labour. India replaced Africa as the source of plantation labour. Britain legalised the system in 1842. Mauritius was the first of the plantation colonies to import contract workers from India. In his study Verne A. Dusenbery has observed that migration of Sikhs from Punjab during colonial rule was reflective of changing conditions in Punjab and changing opportunities abroad. Rural indebtedness, population pressure, natural disasters and political factors acted as push factors. The advertisement provided by labour contractors, shipping agents and information provided by return immigrants acted as pull factors. Thus regulated and independent channels emerged for the recruitment of labour.

What factors determined migration? One explanation suggests that the 'reserve price' of labour was low in the source regions. According to Lalita Chakravarty, local agrarian labour usually earned more than the migrants coming from regions of poor agricultural conditions. She also suggests that migrants did not necessarily benefit much by migrating to urban industrial centres because industrial employers in such centres used the power of a non-market institution in the form of intermediary or Jobber to keep the wages and bargaining power of migrants low. Other scholars like Rajnarayan Chandavarkar have questioned this viewpoint. Actually migrants came from all strata of rural society. They were not necessarily from the poorest landless families of agricultural labourers. Many such migrants owned land back in their villages. Such migration may be, thus, viewed as a kind of diversification in the portfolio of occupations for the family as a whole. City work meant for them a reduction of risk and to retain a toe-hold in the rural economy. Even agricultural labourers and untouchables the type that fits the reserve price model best may have had other reasons for migration. They experienced a distinct improvement in social climates in the urban centres. The life in colonial urban centres was not as rigid and hierarchical, that was in the semi feudal networks of countryside in say of eastern U.P. The cities had better job opportunities. The socially and economically depressed conditions in the source areas pushed the migrants towards cities, but new economic opportunities created by colonialism and easier social mobility provided now by new means of modern transportation pulled them to new urban centres.

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## **26.2 HISTORIOGRAPHY**

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The historiography of labour history in Indian and global context has undergone many changes since 1960s. Presently there is growing focus on flow of migration and remittance. In colonial context, initial works either focused on industrial labour or documented their institutionalised history. Presently, there is also focus on unorganised labourers working in the informal sector. There are also studies that increasingly focus on gender issues and employment of women workers in various industries and plantation.

For a long time, within Marxist analytical framework, economic determinism dominated labour history. In studying international migration, similar concerns can

be identified. The new classical economics has treated migration as an individual decision for income maximization. There is focus on differentials in wages and employment conditions between countries. The new economics of migration analyses conditions in a variety of markets. In this context migration is seen as a household decision, which aims at overcoming capital constraints on family production activities. Both the dual labour market theory and world systems theories are connected with macro level decision processes. The dual labour market theory links immigration to the structural requirements of modern industrial economies. The world systems theory as developed by Wallerstein regards migration as a natural consequence of economic globalisation and market penetration across national boundaries. While the importance of economic factors in studying international migration cannot be denied it cannot be regarded as the only factor determining the experiences of migrants. Several studies like those of Hugh Johnston have pointed out the process of settlement of migrants in host countries. The emergent experiences of migrants are as much shaped by neighbouring ties with local residents as by the policies practised by administration in host countries. Thus as Hugh Johnston has shown in the early decades of twentieth century, experiences of Sikh migrants in British Columbia were shaped by discourses and reality of imperialism and racialism.

Various studies have classified indentured migration as 'a new system of slavery'. Marina Carter in her study of migration of indentured Indian labourers in Mauritius between 1834-1874 has questioned such assumptions. For her, such studies present static analysis of the indentured system. They have denied agency to the migrant.

The migrants shift to a new social and cultural environment. The investigation of relationship between class and culture becomes important from this perspective. In his seminal work, E.P.Thompson has studied the historical process, which led to the 'making of the English working class'. Though he accorded primacy to economic factors, yet he also took into account the role of culture in shaping the experience of workers.

Various works have been produced on the emergence of industrial labour force in colonial India. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar in his work focused on Bombay working class between 1900-1940. For him it was the nature of the labour market, business strategies at the work place, which resulted in the emergence of sectionalised labour force. Thus he demonstrates how culture was actively constituted through everyday relationships and networks forged by workers at the residential and working places. Dipesh Chakrabarty writing within tradition of subaltern historiography has studied the changes brought by colonialism and capitalism in the Jute mills of Bengal. In studying workers, he has focused on community identity, which was defined by religion.

In her works Nandini Gooptu has studied 'urban poor' in united provinces between two world wars. Not only industrial workers but also manual workers in the bazaar constituted these urban poor. She has focused on workers employed in small scale manufacturing units, artisans, crafts people, transport and construction workers, hawkers, street vendors, peddlers and service group such as sweepers and municipal workers. She stresses that experiences of urban poor were also determined and shaped by non-economic modes of domination, exclusion and oppression based on religion and caste. Chitra Joshi in her recent work has further argued that works of Dipesh Chakrabarty and Chandavarkar have not

accorded adequate place to politics affecting working class. For Chitra Joshi, identities of class and community were continuously negotiated within changing historical situations.

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## 26.3 PATTERNS OF RECRUITMENT

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Recruiters adopted various methods to meet the growing demand of labour. In India, jobbers provided labour to industrial units. They focused on caste and clan ties to bring workers from villages. The recruitment in plantation was specified by penal contract. The colonial state enacted various laws to ensure safe transportation of labourers to plantations. The services of recruiters were hired for this purpose.

### 26.3.1 International Migration

During nineteenth century, overseas migration spread along the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Immigrants went to Mauritius in 1834, to Guyana in 1838, to Trinidad in 1845, to Natal in 1860, to Surinam in 1813 and to Fiji in 1878. The expansion of new opportunities with the large-scale investment of metropolitan capital in the colonies led to emergence of indentured system. It was specified by a contract. Under it, the future immigrant agreed to work for the stipulated period of five years. After the expiry of contract period, he was free to either return or work elsewhere in the country. The terms of contract were enacted by an immigration ordinance by the country of destination. Prospective emigrants were required to appear before a magistrate in India to accept and fulfil the terms of the contract. There after they were kept in a depot in Calcutta until a ship was ready to take them away. To avoid competition, the government of Jamaica, Trinidad, Mauritius and Fiji maintained an emigration agency jointly in Calcutta. It was the emigrant Agent who issued licences to sub agents. The latter maintained depots in the rural districts and hired recruiters who looked for prospective emigrants. The Natal laws, 13,14 and 15 of 1859 also specified contractual period of five years for indentured labourer. The working conditions, wages were also specified. The Natal Law stipulated a minimum proportion of women in every shipload.

Marina Carter has pointed out that Kangani or Maistry sponsored migration system was developed in Mauritius. Early unregulated streams of immigrants started pouring in Mauritius from 1834. This fostered competition between labour, reduced wages and made them more dependent on capital. The adoption of indenture system was less as a response to labour shortage and more an expression of a planter's preference for labour importation. Instead of wage bargaining with ex-slave labour, planters favoured new immigrants. Family settlement was encouraged to foster the growth of a semi-permanent work force on plantations. As the size of Indian labour force increased, new strategies to control labour were designed. These included use of fiscal and other measures to compel old immigrants to stay on plantations and restrict their ability to respond to any short-term fluctuations in the wages. The presence of dependants also limited the ability of labourers to pay their way out of indenture, the establishment of semi-independent camps and more flexible terms of hiring by job-contractors were simply methods of cost-cutting. The Indian immigrants lived a semi-autonomous social and cultural life, maintained their religious traditions, language and dress pattern. They also had opportunities to bring in their families and to acquire land yet there was continuity

with the forced labour traditions. In the organization of family and kin group recruitment, Mauritius resembled *sardari* or *kangani* migration, it was a mixture of free and unfree population, an amalgam of indenture system and chain migration. In this *sardari* ties of loyalty co-existed with the contractual bondage of indentured labour. The relative proximity of Indian sub-continent made it easier for some immigrants to afford their own passage costs and that of family members, giving them greater independence of movement. Increasing number of migrants bought their relatives out of indenture system altogether. The relatively high ratio of returnees to new immigrants influenced the latter's knowledge of local conditions. The focus on family migration was a kind of prelude to permanent settlement and short-term wages were not determinants. Two factors that secured the position of Indians in Mauritius were (i) the morcelllement (parcelling) of the large estates from the late 1870s and (ii) the presence of an Indian elite who lent capital to the first immigrants enabling them to acquire property.

There was independent migration of mostly Sikhs from the early days of twentieth century to British Columbia. Most of the Sikhs went as passenger migrants. According to Hugh Johnston, the first batch of Sikhs came to Canada in 1904. The Hong Kong agents of the Canadian Pacific Railway encouraged them. The Canadian Government tried to control migration from Asia by raising of the head tax on Chinese immigrants. Thus Sikhs, mainly males started moving to British Columbia. Gradually family members and fellow villagers joined them.

International migration did not have a significant factor in Indian economy. In 1881-91, for instance, net emigration from India was about 0.7 million or only 0.3% of the 1881 population. In 1890s emigration increased but it declined thereafter. However, compared to pre-colonial period, it may appear quite a dramatic change. It was an outcome of the expanding British enterprise elsewhere in the world. The steam ship, the railways, and new trade routes facilitated emigration from colonies and within empire. The organised emigration emerged in India in the 1830s through recruiting agents. Madras and Calcutta were the main parts from where emigrants embarked abroad. Their destinations were South East Asia, Burma, the Pacific and the West Indies. The migrations to Mauritius, South Africa, Burma and Ceylon took place from Madras and other ports on the eastern coast. During 1871-1930, every year about 200,000 to 6,00,000 people emigrated from India but the majority returned to India after a few years so that net emigration was rather small. Between 1830 – 1900, about 80% of emigrees migrated within Asia and this ratio increased after 1900. In 1920s net emigration declined sharply as return migration increased. In the nineteenth century, the source areas of migration were combined to a few districts which had high population density.

### 26.3.2 Major Channels of Internal Migration

There was also increase of internal flows of people within India due to new economic opportunities and expansion of transport facilities some of the major channels of internal migration within India are listed in the table No.1. There were five broad types of internal migrations

- i) Migration out of high density regions (especially U.P., Bihar and Bengal,
- ii) Circulatory migration of agricultural labourers among neighbouring regions,
- iii) Traders and professionals seeking out new fields,

- iv) Peasants migrating in search of new cultivable land and,
- v) Agricultural labourers moving into non-agricultural sectors.

**Table 1: Major Channels of Internal Migration, 1901-1931**

East India	1) Bihar and U P to Assam plantation
	2) Bengal (mainly Mymensingh district to Assam, peasants migrated in search of cultivable land and resettlement.
	3) Bengal to Burma to work as labour and in tertiary sector.
	4) U P to Bengal, to work in industry, mines and in tertiary sector.
Central India	5) U P to Central India, to work in mills
	6) Chhattisgarh to Berar, to work as agricultural and mill labourer
South India	7) Hyderabad to Berar, mill labour
	8) Madras ( Tamil Nadu) to Mysore, labour in mines and into the tertiary sector
	9) Madras to Burma, labourer and the tertiary sector
North and Western India	10) Within Punjab, east to west, peasants and pasrtoralists resettled in canal areas.
	11) Rajputana to Punjab, trade
	12) Rajputana to Bombay, trade.

**Source:** Tirthankar Roy, *The Economic history of India: 1857 – 1947*, Oxford Univ. Press, New Delhi, p. 291 Based on *Causes of India*, Vol I (part I & II) 1901 –1931.

## 26.4 SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF MIGRANTS

The available data on migrants throws light on the regions of recruitment. The class, caste and religious identity of the workers have also been pointed out. There was interregional migration from United Provinces and Bihar to the industrial centres within India. Madras, Bombay, Bengal, Gujarat and Punjab were also major centres of overseas migration.

In Kanpur artisan castes predominated. In 1906, Koris constituted 21% and Muslims 33% of the work force in two textile mills. Chamars were dominant in tanneries and leather factories. Julahas came from Fyzabad, Benaras, Hardoi, Fatehpur and Farukhabad. Women were employed only during the time of labour scarcity. Ranajit Das Gupta in his analysis of Calcutta labour force has shown that most of the labourers before 1890s were Bengalis. Gradually workers from United Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, Madras and the central Provinces came to Calcutta. Women constituted 16% of the labour force between 1921-1930. Most of workers came from low caste people, untouchables, traditional labouring and service castes, landless peasants and artisans thrown out of employment due to de-industrialization.

The social-composition of international migrants was also not different. When the indentured system was abolished in the early twentieth century, Mauritius had received an estimated 453,000 Indian labourers. They had come from Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Among Hindus, numerous caste groups such as Chamar, Kurmi, Koeri, Brahman, Ahir, moochi, Vellala and Maratha constituted these

migrants. Some were Christians and Muslims. In the colony of Natal, between 1860-1875, 85% of the immigrants were Hindus. When the indentured labour to Natal was stopped in 1911, 152,184 Indians had gone to Natal. In British Columbia, by the end of 1906, 2000 immigrants had gone to British Columbia. Most of them were Sikhs and had come from the villages of Hoshiarpur, Ferozepore and Jullundhar. They belonged to Jat, Tarkhan and lower caste.

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## 26.5 WORKING CONDITIONS

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The migrants had to cope with a new set of social conditions in the urban centres. Within India, rules and regulations and surveillance agencies deployed by owners controlling factories and plantations conditioned working conditions of migrants to industrial centres. Various methods were devised to extract maximum work, pay low wages and maintain regular supply of labour. In Lucknow, *badla* system was instituted in the 1930s. It maintained regular substitute lists to ensure the regular supply of workers. Casual workers were hired on a regular basis. Women and children were employed but were not enrolled as workers.

The Mill owners and Planters maintained records and employed managers and supervisors to monitor workers. Thus in Cotton and Jute Mills, *Sardars* came to play an important role in shaping the working conditions of workers. There was often display of physical force to intimidate workers.

Various laws were enacted in India specifically to regulate working conditions of migrant workers. For instance The Transport of Native Labour Act (No III) enacted in 1863 stipulated passage and transportation of native labourers by licensed recruiters. The Assam Emigration Regulation of 1877 authorised the chief commissioner of Assam to declare any garden unhealthy or unfit for residence of labourers. The Assam labour and Emigration Act, 1908, abolished the system of penal contracts for new recruiters except in the recruiting districts.

Various laws that were enacted by the colonial state to define factories working hours and wages of workers also were applicable to new migrants from the countryside. Indian Factories Act of 1881 made the beginning. The Indian Factories (amendment) Act of 1891 fixed the working hours for women and children between 5 A.M and 8 P.M. The weekly holiday was provided on Sunday. Indian Factories Act of 1934 reduced the hours of work for all adult workers from 60 to 54 a week. In colonies indentured labour worked from sunrise to sun set. The work of harvesting, transporting, milling and building of dams, factories and houses was dependent on the season. More experienced boys were selected for duties requiring greater skill in the factories. Many of them eventually became the supervisor or mill *sardars*. They kept close watch over all the operations and ensured quality and quantity for their owners. Planters were only interested in extracting maximum labour. They also provided workers with rations and often found excuses to cut down on the ration. Even when labourers fell ill, it was dubbed as 'sham sickness'. Deductions were often made from the salary on various pretexts. The judicial machinery was also used to suppress workers. In British Columbia, owners of lumber mills regulated work.

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## 26.6 LIVED EXPERIENCES

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Several studies have shown that lived experience of migrant workers was shaped by several factors. In British Columbia, Sikhs took pride in the fact that they were capable of performing the hardest and hazardous work. The Julahas in United Provinces took pride in their weaving work. The people migrating to the urban centres within India maintained links with their native villages. The system of money order played a significant role as a medium of sending remittances to his family. Many returned to villages during harvest times. In Mauritius, many indentured labourers became independent and regrouped in regional and caste-based population groups.

The economic conditions of workers were not merely determined by their wages. An estimate of 1926 pointed out that the average income of jute mill workers was Rs. 5/- per week. However minimum Rs. 7/- were needed to maintain a family constituting husband, wife and three children. A sample survey of Kanpur conducted in 1939 showed that 44% of the women had a monthly income of Rs. 9/- to Rs. 11/-. The loss of job only aggravated problem for the migrant workers. In such conditions, many had to borrow in order to survive. It was seen that in industrial areas, *Sardars* provided work, credit and housing to migrant labourers. They also exploited workers. Often they had to be given bribes so that worker could obtain leaves and ensure regularity in job. Such exploitation was often resented. Babuniya, a Bihari female worker of the Titanghur Jute Mill, expressed her views in front of the Royal Commission on labour:

“When I was first entertained I had to pay Rs. 4/- as bakshish to the Sardars who appointed me. Each time I return back from the village I have to pay the same amount as bakshish to the Sardar. I also pay him Rs 2 as every week. My husband paid Rs 6 when he was first appointed. He pays 4 annas a week to the Sardar. If we refuse to pay the Sardars, we will not get work. Every worker pays a similar amount to the sardar.”

The residential areas of workers were usually segregated. Only a few factory owners provided residential quarters for workers. A survey of about 73000 jute workers in Bengal in 1897 revealed that only 13.5 % of them were living in company built coolie lines. During 1920s in cities like Lucknow, Benaras, Allahbad and Kanpur, slums of workers were clearly demarcated. The Municipal Corporations were concerned with hygiene. Workers were identified as those who were responsible for causing filth and dirt in the areas.

The familial, caste and community linkages also shaped the experiences of workers. The daily chores, Akharas religious gatherings, celebrations of festivals and political movements brought workers in public arena. They also forged larger linkages. In the cities of Victoria and British Columbia the Sikhs lives revolved around their Gurudawaras. Often helping hand was also extended to newly arrived immigrants or those who had lost their jobs. Thus in their small residential areas immigrants often discussed their personal problems, shared news about their families living in Punjab. In Mauritius, gradually Indians led semi-autonomous social and cultural lives. They spoke their language and adhered to their dress code and religious traditions.

In India, though working population was clustered in small slums but segregation was also pronounced. Among the migrants, the higher castes like Brahmins tried

to maintain their higher social status. Even when they suffered from financial constraints, they tended to spend more on familial ceremonies. The lower castes often experienced social exclusion. Many of them became part of the Adi Hindu movement in the United Provinces. The leaders of the movement, Achhutanand and Ram Charan challenged the social and political exclusion. Identical trends were evident in Punjab and Madras.

The political mobilization of workers also assumes importance during 1920s and 1930s. Maulana Azad Subhani, an alim of Kanpur adopted the symbol of the garha or hand woven cloth produced by Muslims artisans in an attempt to form political organisation of Muslims working groups throughout UP. During 1940s workers in Bengal were organised along religious lines by the Muslims league.

The increasing influence of communist ideology and leadership was also evident during this period. Frequent meetings were held to organize workers around communist ideology. Class identity of workers was stressed in them. However Dipesh Chakrabarty has underlined the fact that bhadralok leadership held hierarchical notions and often believed in providing the leadership to the workers and assigned the subordinate role to workers.

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## **26.7 PROTESTS AND CONCIOUSNESS**

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The consciousness of workers was shaped by caste, class and community identities. This multiple dimensions of identity co-exist and overlap and did not exist in pure crystallized forms. For the redressal of their grievances workers in organised sectors resorted to strikes. They formed their labour unions. Congress, Communist, Socialist and Muslim league provided the leadership over the period of time in different contexts. Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha was formed in 1919. Kamdatt and Lala Devi Dayal inaugurated it. In 1920 All India Trade Union Congress was established. Despite the efforts of radical and left wing intellectuals to forge class based identity and consciousness workers remained divided along caste and religious lines. They participated in communal riots on a number of occasions. They also extended support to the communal politics of Tabligh, Tanzeem and Shuddhi movements. However the series of strikes also brought forth the consciousness of workers about their rights inculcated a spirit of class solidarity.

In November 1919 industrial Kanpur witnessed its first general strike. Weavers of the woollen mills struck work on November 22, 1919. Many joined the striking workers and very soon 17,000 had joined the strike. It lasted for 8 days. Workers were successful in obtaining substantial increase in wages, bonus and improvements in workings conditions. The general strike of 1938 was more wide spread. It lasted for 52 days and involved 46000 workers. Leading Congress and Communist leaders of the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha, Hariharnath Shastri, Balkrishan Sharma, Sant Singh Yusuf, Aiwaz Ali and Arjun Arora participated in the strike. The Ahmedabad Mill strike of 1918 was rooted in the demand of workers to raise their bonus. As they restored to strike, intervention of Mahatma Gandhi was sought. It resulted in substantial increase in the wages of workers. The principle of arbitration was also accepted.

The Bombay textile strike of 1919 saw the participation of a hundred thousand workers. An increase in wages was demanded so as to offset growing inflation. The entire textile industry of Bombay was paralysed. In the next decade communist leadership unified workers. During 1928-1929 wage reduction and rationalisation



schemes in the mills led to agitation. These measures were suspended as a result of a strike led by communists for six months in 1928. Between 1921 and June 30, 1929, 210 strikes were recorded in the jute industry. Many jute mill owners had resorted to work in single shift. It resulted in loss of jobs. About 60,000 workers were laid off in 1930-1931. The salaries of workers were also reduced.

There is also evidence of protests and resistance by the over sea migrants. The available Durban records show that indentured workers in Natal between 1861 and 1911 did raise their voices against exploitation. For instance in 1864, Doorgiate, coolie number 1349 applied for a return passage to India. Under the contract, he had to work for W.H.Middletan for three years. However in his second year of service, his leg was infected and was amputated. He was forced by his master to work on his plantation. Though he was given 'light' woman's work but he was unable to do the work. When he fell ill, he was accused of feigning illness. He was punished and was forced to return to 'hard work' men's work. He was directed to pay 10 pounds to his master to buy off his remaining term of service. His fellow workers raised the money. Thus he won his freedom and returned to India. There were more instances of contest and resistance on the part of migrant workers. In 1866, a group of coolie near Verulam hired a lawyer. A petition was presented before the Natal Court seeking redressal of grievances against their master. The findings proved that the master Shire had fined his coolie illegally. He had also deprived them of their wages. But nothing came out of these findings. There was an enactment of law, which gave greater control to masters over the workers.

In British Columbia, Sikhs faced discrimination. By 1906 authorities had enacted laws to ban Sikh immigration. The policy of Canadian Government was a continuation of the policy adopted by British imperialism. In Punjab, Government was resorting to greater surveillance over Sikhs. There was monitoring of Ghadar leaders. When Komagata Maru with 376 passengers anchored on May 23, 1914 opposite Vancouver, immigrant officers delayed the disembarkment of passengers. Though local Sikhs extended help and even resorted to legal help, ship had to return back with passengers. It proved to the Sikhs that even within British colony, they were not treated as equal. They had to remain without civic rights. The franchise disqualifications under British Columbia provincial law stayed in force up to 1947-48. Indians were excluded from employment in public and municipal works and from the profession of law and pharmacy. Thus avenues of social upward mobility were denied to Sikhs. They had to negotiate with host society. It strengthened community bonds. Many participated in anti-imperialist struggle after returning back to India.

The end of colonial rule in India on August 15, 1947 was followed by process of decolonisation in several countries of the world. The indentured labourers eventually became free settlers. The immigration laws in Canada and America were changed during 1960s. Asia emerged as the main source of immigrant population for Canada and America. The flow of labouring population to Gulf countries also started. Presently the dynamics of labour flows in global economy have undergone structural changes.

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## 26.8 SUMMARY

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The British laid the foundation of vast colonial rule in India and in other parts of world since eighteenth century. The growing and changing demands of capitalism resulted in the emergence of new working spaces. As thousand moved in search of work, their living conditions were shaped by places of work and residential areas. However the identity of workers was not shaped or determined by those who controlled finances and had employed them. There was realisation that work was essential for survival and in overseas colonies, it was difficult for workers to return back. Yet they negotiated their lives in hostile milieus. They associated themselves with multiple processes of contesting imperial power. In India, the new migrants joined the older industrial labourers and resorted to strike to demand decent wages and also participated in anti imperialist struggle. In Canada, Sikhs maintained close links with home and participated in anti imperialist struggle. Elsewhere, indentured labourers maintained community ties to survive in alien and hostile conditions. The end of colonialism altered their position. Presently as part of diasporic community, Indians can look back at their past experiences with pride. Their contribution in the growth of host cultures has been acknowledged.

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## 26.9 GLOSSARY

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**Commercialisation of Agriculture:** It denoted cultivation of cash crops in India. These yielded high rates of profits and were exported by British rulers to maintain favourable balance of trade

**Indentured System:** It was regulated by signed contract between immigrant Agent and the future immigrant. The latter agreed to work for specified period and was not free to leave the owner during the period of contract

**Kangani System:** It denoted migration of workers both through contract and as free passengers

**Passenger Migrants:** It was used in context of those Indians who went as independent passengers in search of work. Migration to Canada and America reflected it.

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## 26.10 EXERCISES

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- 1) Briefly describe the changing trends in the historiography of migration
- 2) Was the growing poverty of peasants solely responsible for their migration to industrial belts in nineteenth century?
- 3) Trace the patterns of immigration in overseas countries during nineteenth and twentieth centuries
- 4) Briefly describe the lived experiences of workers in colonial India.

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## UNIT 27 SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN THE URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

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Pattern of Rural-Urban  
Mobility: Overseas  
Migration

### Structure

- 27.0 Introduction
- 27.1 Rise of Middle Class
- 27.2 Growth of Capitalist Class
  - 27.2.1 The Role of Colonial State: Stagnation or Market Led Growth
  - 27.2.2 Origins of Capitalist Class and Sources of Capital
  - 27.2.3 Business Structure and Management
- 27.3 New Industrial Labour Class
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### 27.0 INTRODUCTION

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The transformation of Indian society under the impact of colonialism has been a subject of intense debate among scholars. Some argue that colonialism and its edifice were built on the foundations of pre-existing social-institutions, identities and class-structure. They refuse to concede any sharp break or qualitative change in Indian social structure after assumption of power by the British. Others stress the basic socio-economic changes due to colonial needs and requirements. But, according to them, colonialism had a double mission in India- one destructive and the other regenerative. The colonial penetration not only modified the social class-structure of India but also selectively retained certain indigenous elements of social physiognomy.

Colonialism was a system under which the Imperial country exploited markets and resources of their colonies. It benefited the traders, capitalists and bankers of the Imperial country and subordinated all the indigenous social classes of a colony. Peasants of the colonized countries were forced by various means to specialize in the production of agricultural raw produce for the industries located in the Imperial country. The artisans were rendered unemployed in the face of competition from imported industrial goods from the metropolitan country. Despite these economic dislocations, the new colonial economy and administrative structure offered new economic opportunities and risks. This resulted in the rise of some new social classes and modifications in the position of surviving old classes. We will analyse these changes in the class-structure of Indian society due to colonial penetration in the next sections.

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## 27.1 RISE OF MIDDLE CLASS

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The configuration of social classes under colonialism changed as a result of the basic economic transformation and the administrative needs of the colonial state. The rise of middle class was a product of internal changes and external pressures associated with colonialism. According to Prof. B.B. Mishra, there was a lack of middle class in the modern sense of professionals in the pre-colonial period in India. He relates this to lack of sufficient urbanization in the pre-colonial period, rigidity of indigenous caste system and nature of aristocratic bureaucracy, dominance of clergy and lack of professional character of service-gentry in medieval towns. Although colonialism produced economic stagnation and backwardness in India, it also created the professional classes comprising modern lawyers, doctors, teachers, managers, engineers, journalists and so on. This modern intelligentsia was different in tastes, outlook and behavior from the service-gentry of the pre-colonial societies. The changes in social and administrative structures required a new class of educated Indians who could manage social affairs and institutions that were established by the British. New educational institutions- schools, colleges, universities and professional training institutions were started to meet the needs of colonial state and society. The number of those studying English rose rapidly from 298,000 in 1887 to 505,000 in 1907. This was directly linked to increase in the circulation of English-language newspapers during the period. This class of intelligentsia constituted only a 'microscopic minority' of Indian population. Yet, it was an integral part of the new colonial society and administrative set-up. This social group, therefore, enjoyed fair amount of importance- far in excess of its size. English education gave them competence to develop cross-regional and cross-lingual networks as many of them worked outside their hometowns. They played prominent role in public affairs and occupied newly created public spaces under colonialism. They were the pioneers, organizers and leaders of social-religious reforms. They also played significant role in political initiatives of modern mass mobilization during different phases of colonial rule in India. The educated middle class was the product of new western education initiated by the colonial state for practical administrative expediency. The educated middle class grew and expanded after 1858 with the establishment of universities and engineering and other professional institutes. It also developed its own sectional interests, which culminated in formation of association and organizations of various professions.

The western education also brought with it an increased awareness of currently fashionable ideologies, which in turn influenced the ideological framework of Indian nationalism. The intelligentsia also suffered the pangs of separation from the womb of traditional, indigenous culture and identities as a result of alienating effects of education through foreign medium. The professional middle class and intelligentsia were forced to come to terms with a particular variant of colonial modernization. Many of them still clung to traditional social values and institutions. Others reposed their faith in the doctrines of reason and humanism. They thought that western science and technology would provide the key to the regeneration of their own society.

The English-educated professionals' generally came from the upper-caste families especially from the traditional Brahmin and Kayastha families. They took the new education more easily. The early Cambridge school of historians like Anil Seal and J.H. Broomfield interpreted nationalism in terms of such regional educated elites and their factional struggle to gain power, status and influence. However, the real

power and privileges in colonial society lay with the white Europeans. The Indians educated middle class was not a homogeneous class. They never tried to restrict entry to it and in fact, helped in expansion of education through their voluntary efforts and establishment of schools and colleges. Moreover, the growth of middle class educated intelligentsia was an uneven process. There were regional disparities in the spread of education with Bengal and Madras provinces well ahead of rest of India. There were also differences in the social-roots of middle classes in different regions. In some cases, they combined their government-service or independent profession with control over landed resources and trading activities. They were a hybrid of agrarian-based middle classes enjoying rent in-comes in Bengal and Northern India. In Western and Southern India, they were sometimes linked to commercial and business interests. Due to their link with the propertied classes and their specific social roots, they often opposed anti-tenancy legislation, for instance the tenancy legislation of Bengal in 1885. The educated intelligentsia wished for modernization of India in the liberal image of Britain, yet because of their petty rent-collecting rights, they did not want radical transformation of agrarian relations. In places where landlord-tenant relations were communally defined in the sense that they belonged to different religious communities, it had momentous consequence for development of communalism.

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## **27.2 GROWTH OF CAPITALIST CLASS**

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The growth of indigenous capitalist class in India was very slow on account of the British capital's domination. Traditional Indian business communities did survive and in some cases flourished despite this control of foreign capital. Some of them found, with their lack of sufficient capital resources, that investment in certain non-industrial sectors was more lucrative. The British controlled the upper layer of Indian economy represented by the big joint-stock companies, stock markets, big managing agency houses, major banking and insurance sectors as well as foreign trade and shipping. Initially the Indian businessmen were relegated to small private trade, money lending and in the positions of subordinate agents to the foreign capital. However, such a dual economy of colonialism was not a permanent feature of India. Despite a host of problem and structural constraints, the white 'collective monopoly' was breached and the Indian capitalist class grew slowly, utilizing opportunities and overcoming obstacles created by colonial economy. The rise and growth of Indian capitalist class was organically linked to the basic structure of colonialism and bore the imprints of that linkage.

### **27.2.1 The Role of Colonial State: Stagnation or Market-led Growth**

Historians generally relate slow growth of capitalist class and modern industries to colonialism. In his famous 'drain of wealth' argument Dadabhai Nauroji criticized several channels of 'leakage' of potentially investible capital resources. The nationalists saw that the British government in India made certain payments or remitted money abroad for which no goods or services of equivalent value were offered. It was argued that such resources could have been used to create productive assets in India. Shortage of capital and lack of profitable investment opportunities are cited as two basic reasons for slow growth of capitalist class in India during the colonial period. The unilateral transfer of resources by the colonial state to meet the cost of Secretary of State establishment in London, cost of defending the Empire in the east, purchase of military stores, pensions and salaries

of an alien bureaucracy, a guaranteed annual interest to the British railway companies that constructed the railways in India and interest on public debt raised by the colonial government in London money-markets were all part of this capital-transfer. However, we must take this economic critique of colonialism with a pinch of salt. For example, many British 'sahibs' were paid high salaries for work that involved power but no great skills and expertise. This was a pure waste of Indian potential resources. But high salary to a European engineer or university professor, who provided technical skills not available in India, may not be called wasteful.

Another aspect of colonial state that hindered capitalist growth in India was lack of positive action of the type undertaken by state in the other advanced capitalist countries. The discriminatory intervention of the colonial state helped only the interests of British capital. It failed to provide tariff protection to Indian capital and did not foster demand for indigenous industrial products by guaranteeing purchase through state and its agencies. Another crippling effect was poorly developed institutions, especially financial ones such as sufficient banking and insurance sectors. There was also considerable dependency of Indian capitalist class on British industrial methods and technology. As England was no longer a leader of the global industrial technology especially after 1880s, such dependence proved costly for the Indian enterprises.

Within all these structural constraints, colonialism also guaranteed the security of private property and sanctity of contract, basic legal elements for a market-led growth. It accelerated commercialization. The capital constraint eased somewhat due to expansion of foreign trade. This capitalist growth was generally based on sectors where cost of raw materials was low (textile, jute, cotton, sugar, leather, cement, tobacco and even steel).

### **27.2.2 Origin of Capitalist Class and Sources of Capital**

There was a significant level of developed merchant capital in pre-British India. Certain communities such as Chettis of Tamilnadu, Konkani Saudagars, Bohra, Parsi and Jain merchants, Marwaris of Shekhawati region in Rajasthan and Lohana and Khattris of Punjab were prominent in such businesses. The establishment of East India Company's monopoly did not completely wipe them out. Many of Indian traders started acting as middlemen or subordinate agents in the new colonial economy as the British had to rely on the existing indigenous commercial networks and money-markets to carry out their commercial operations. When modern industrialists emerged in India after 1850s, the capital for them came partly from internal accumulation in the wake of commercialization fostered by colonial penetration. The trading communities of Bombay and Calcutta benefited from the enormous growth of foreign trade especially with China. This was a direct result of end of company's monopoly in India-China trade after 1833. It was in these two cities that modern capitalist class developed initially in India capitalizing on huge profits they earned as the 'brokers' of European trading firms. Another important factor was trading profits that emerged in cotton-export during the American Civil War. The rise of two great industrial houses- Birlas and Tatas can be traced to these developments.

The capitalist class did not always originate from among the traditional business communities engaged in trade and banking. Commercial and financial capital did seldom venture outside their established fields of economic activity. When it stepped out of its field, it went into purchase of idle assets such as gold ornaments or such

spiritual assets as building temples. On the other hand, certain other communities utilized new opportunities of profit-making as a result of contact with the Europeans as brokers. For instance, the Parsis were traditionally not traders or financiers, but artisans, carpenters, weavers, and ship-builders. Yet, they profited the most from export of cotton and opium from the Western coast. In Ahmadabad, the Khojas, the Bhatias, and Gujrati traders and financiers also benefited from collaboration with Europeans. They later on pumped their profits into cotton-mills to become pioneer capitalists. The main source of capital in two large-scale industrial complexes of Coimbatore and Madras in Southern India was the savings of the rich cotton farmers-cum-traders. The traditional business communities of the region, the Chettiars, migrated to Burma in the nineteenth century and entered as capitalists in industry only in the 1930s. In Calcutta and Eastern India, Europeans dominated the large-scale industry. The main interests of the Marwari houses were in jute baling, mining, zamindari, and import agency before the First World War. It was only during the interwar period, that Marwaris started entering industry in a big way.

Capital for industry was always in short supply in India. A modern banking system was poorly developed. The banks, dominated by European capital and management followed an implicit ethnic preference of helping only European clients. They avoided giving loans for fixed capital to the Indian capitalists. The other major source of capital- the capital market was also a rather small and insignificant institution. It was also plagued by speculation. Given such high cost of capital, it is not surprising that modern capitalist class mostly developed entirely from communities that had specialized in trading and banking activities. To be a successful capitalist, it was necessary to raise money easily. A strong co-operative community, like one that Parsis and Marwaris had, was needed for this venture.

### **27.2.3 Business Structure and Management**

The traditional Indian business was rooted within the family and community. The business organization and the joint family were frequently indistinct entities. This helped the earlier capitalist in easier access to supply of credit and other skills. Until 1850, partnership was the general form of ownership-cum-management. But some sort of formal corporate management became necessary to overcome the problems of raising finance and managing firms efficiently. The most common institution was the managing agency system. It was a system of vesting the management of joint-stock companies in the hands of a firm of professional managers. Such a firm of professional managers helped the promotion, financing, underwriting and organization of a joint stock company. Under this system, the Directors or representatives of the capitalist owners of a company contracted a firm to manage that company for a fee. The fee was usually a certain fraction of total sales or output. As already pointed out, Indian firms found it hard to meet their needs of capital. They had to rely heavily on loans and deposits from the public. The owners of firms and managing agents supplied large amount of capital. The rest of the capital had to be mobilized from banks and the public. However; loans from banks required reputed guarantor and the deposits from public required that the borrower was a trusted name. The managing agents served these purposes. The system was prone to a number of abuses. The managing agents could operate the company to the advantage of their own private fortune, and not to the advantage of shareholders. The managing agents routinely and illegally speculated in commodity

trade in goods and raw materials in which the company was involved. Such speculation was often against the interest of the company. Despite these abuses the system survived and dominated the economic organization of diverse productive firms.

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## 27.3 NEW INDUSTRIAL LABOUR CLASS

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The modern working class in India was the offspring of modern industries, plantation, mines and transport that developed in Indian colonial economy. Their poor standard of living and miserable working conditions were testified by official and non-official sources. The industrial labour in India was predominantly concentrated in textile industry (jute and cotton) and mines. We will refer to its origins, role and composition in this section.

### 27.3.1 Origins, Markets and Composition

Factory labour provided a new form of employment that emerged with the rise of industries in the middle of the nineteenth century. It represented a shift from rural and traditional occupations such as agriculture and crafts to modern ones such as mechanized industry. Most workers in urban centres like Calcutta and Bombay migrated from rural hinterlands. An important feature of this labour force was temporary nature of industrial employment for the majority of these labourers. Morris D. Morris, in the study of Bombay industrial labour, found that the proportion of workers working in cotton mills for more than ten years in 1890 was only 26.7%. It rose to 39.1% in 1927-28. The shift to urban centres resulted in changes in the nature of work, work place and life styles. The industrial workers comprised of general manual labour capable of performing only particular mechanical tasks and another group of technically trained who could operate a single machine for a variety of purposes and repair the machine. The skilled labourers tended to be more in permanent employment while unskilled consisted of casual or temporary workers. The skilled technical labour generally came from the upper caste with high school education. Unskilled labourers, on the other hand came mainly from agrarian and artisan castes with little or no formal education.

Even though there was an abundant labour supply in a colonial economy like India, and there was no inadequate supply of labour in the long run, the intermediaries in the big industrial centers maintained supply. Initially, shortage of labour forced employers to obtain labour through the Jobbers or intermediaries. But, the practice continued even when labour was easily accessible at the factory gates. The Bombay cotton mills continued to rely until the interwar on 'labour contractors' who brought workers from the areas to which they themselves belonged. They sometimes even managed the workers on the factory floor. The labour contractor was paid for his services both by the mill owners and workers whom he gave employment.

The industrial labour of Bombay cotton mills came mainly from the Konkan, the Deccan and United Province. Jute- industry, on the other hand, employed migrants from Bihar, eastern UP and Orissa. The labourers were employed from these regions because price of labour was low in these regions. The factories utilized the cheap labour from these poor agricultural areas, instead of employing local labour. The mill owners to keep the bargaining power and wages of workers low also used the institution of employment through an intermediary thus creating a



kind of 'labour lordism'. However, the purpose of seeking industrial employment could be to augment family income, reduce and spread risk especially in famine-prone districts, and to retain a grip in the rural economy.

Such linkage with the rural world meant that social and ethnic divisions among labourers remained powerful. The workers did not acquire a proper 'industrial' mentality or a habit of disciplined use of time. Instead of evolving into a homogeneous working class, it remained divided into castes, communities and regions. Adaptation to the factory discipline happened in an imperfect way and workers brought peasants-like mentality into the factory floor and urban life. Compared to rural areas, however, industrial-employment offered better wages, security from famine, better social mobility and lesser caste oppression.

The conditions of workers in tea plantations of Assam and coalmines had shades of semi-slavery and semi-serfdom in them. Most of the workers of tea plantations came from Chota Nagpur and other areas of Greater Bengal during 1860-1890. Later, senior workers or sardars also recruited workers. The labourers generally came from the socially marginal groups and rural labourers. The miserable conditions forced them to leave their homes as the contractors painted rosy pictures of plantations. The workers understood little of terms of contract. The extreme poverty, lack of information on the part of workers, and the employers' greater legal power were common features of indenture system.

The profits of the coal- industry were divided between landlords and colliers. The lands were owned by Zamindars who received fixed rents from the owners of coal- mines. They had no interest either in mining or productivity of the industry. The labourers for mines were available easily and cheaply from among the poorest rural strata of Chota Nagpur region. The availability of labour at low wages with conditions of semi- servitude attached to it made the mining costs very low in India. The mining technology remained manual and crude due to low labour costs. The colliers relied on labour contractors who hired workers at piece rates.

### **27.3.2 Labour Force and Occupational Structure**

Occupational structure depicts proportion of labour force employed in various sectors of an economy. India being an underdeveloped colonial economy, its occupational structure was more or less stagnant. Employment of labour in industrial and mining hovered around 9-10% of total work force between 1911 and 1951. However, the contribution of industrial sector to the national income from 1900-01 to 1946-47 improved slightly from 21 to 25%. This might be due to some organizational and technological changes that led to growth in labour productivity. Sometimes the improvement in education and health might also lead to increase in labour efficiency and productivity. The record of colonial India in these respects was among the poorest in the world. Another significant feature of occupational structure was the drop in the proportion of women in cotton and jute mills especially after 1920s. Employment legislation made special provisions for women, such as maternity benefits and prohibition of night work. These often discouraged employers when male labourers were available for the same work.

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## 27.4 DIFFERENTIAL RESOURCE-ENDOWMENTS IN RURAL AREAS

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During the initial decades of colonial rule in India, British colonial state pursued the policy of maximization of land revenue. The colonial state acted as the supreme landlord. Revenue demand on land was fixed in cash and tended to be abnormally high. The burden was felt more as the agricultural prices fell. The colonial state not only collected taxes more efficiently but also changed the terms of relationship between the tenants and landlords and the cultivators vis-à-vis moneylenders. The colonial judiciary defended the sanctity of contractual relationship. The commercial transaction in the rural economy expanded as the markets for agricultural inputs including land expanded. The high assessments of revenue stimulated production of cash crops like sugarcane, cotton, indigo, etc. The improved transport networks—the railways and ‘cotton roads’ and new institutional arrangements like creation of ports, export-import companies, bank financing such trade, etc. all facilitated increasing commercialization. Sale and auction of land tended to increase with the operation of market forces. The colonial state also further elaborated and redefined property rights in land. The position of rural creditors, usurers and grain dealers was strengthened. They were able to acquire some of the lands that were transferred as result of operation of market forces.. As a result of these basic changes in agrarian relations, the class- structure of rural society was transformed. The small poor cultivators suffered in general, and so also the pastoral communities who lived primarily on livestock rearing and who cultivated lands only as subsidiary work. However, the impact of expansion in market opportunities was not uniform. Here we will examine the differential impact of commercialization on the different sections of rural society.

### 27.4.1 Effects of Commercialisation

There were significant changes in the cropping pattern, their marketability and the composition of rural classes especially after 1850s. Large-scale commercialization started taking place. Peasants shifted their production of agricultural goods from subsistence needs of their own families or local use for communities to sale for distant markets. Trends towards commercialization were fairly pronounced in pre- colonial period also, but the British linked Indian agriculture to global markets. Earlier phase of commercialization was based on indigo and opium- non bulk-items. The second wave of commercialization in Indian agriculture, based on cotton, wheat, oilseeds, groundnuts and sugarcane, affected peasant life in a more substantial way. The land became a saleable commodity and number of land-transfers increased dramatically in all regions in the nineteenth century. As a result of rising agricultural prices and land-values, and relatively lighter burden of land revenue after 1860, rents in nominal and real terms increased. Area under cropped area also increased in most areas. There were also widespread developments of tenancy or markets for user rights in land all over India. Commercialization increased the profitability of land and hence its demand- especially among these with insufficient lands. In other words, inequality of landowner-ship was responsible for growth of tenancy. The most important effect of commercialization was that it increased the demand for working capital credit as well as consumption loans for several purposes. The commercial production of crops needed more investment in agricultural inputs. Due to regional specialization of cropping pattern, farmers became dependent on their consumption needs and food requirements before

harvests on the markets. Farmers also borrowed money to make payments of rent and revenue in cash. The marketing costs of commercial crops also increased because of transport cost and growth of intermediaries in the market structure between the peasant and the global markets.

There were favorable factors on the supply side that increased supply of credit. New markets and profit opportunities became available to usurer and moneylenders due to increased possibilities of spatial mobility. The value of land increased as a result of creation of new proprietary rights in land by the colonial state and as a result of expansion of canal irrigation in some areas. Thirdly, new judicial arrangements gave creditors more powers to recover loans. Some British officials were concerned that increasing sale of land passed the ownership rights to non-cultivating classes through the operation of credit mechanism. Indian nationalist leader, M.G. Ranade, on the other hand, favored transfer of land to rich, resourceful and efficient peasants. Nationalist leaders in general opposed land-alienation legislation on the ground that it would affect credit facilities and values of land.

#### **27.4.2 Was Commercialisation a Forced Process?**

Some historians argue that need to pay excessive revenue or rent in cash force the cultivators to shift to the cultivation of commercial crops in place of food crops in the nineteenth century. They believe that production of such crops was not economically beneficial to the peasants, so they borrowed money from the moneylenders who influenced their production decisions. The professional usurers and moneylenders established control over their produce, cattle and land. Peasants were often forced to mortgage their lands due to debt trap and large-scale transfer of land to moneylenders reduced the cultivators to the status of agricultural labourers or sharecroppers. This view re-echo a powerful official opinion in the last quarter of nineteenth century. Surendra Patel and R.P. Dutt, two radical historians, traced the substantial growth of agricultural labourers during colonial rule to the working of this process of forced commercialization. Dharma Kumar, in her classic work, *Land and Caste in South India*, however, proved the existence of sizable population of agricultural labourers in the pre-colonial South India on the basis of correlation of certain castes to labour status. It is also true agricultural labourers failed to attain any substantial improvement in wages and social status. Castes and status differences persisted and were strongly related to socio-economic opportunities. Commercialization, in other words, strengthened the rich peasants coming from middle or upper castes while it tended to reduce certain groups to bondage and servitude.

Moreover, there was relative decline of land-revenue burden after 1860. In such circumstances, peasants were induced to produce for markets due to incentive of increasing prices of agricultural products. Cash crops were produced primarily because they were the more profitable crops. The beneficial fruits of commercialization, however, were reaped differently. The rich farmers forced smaller farmers and tenants to produce cash crops even if the latter did not benefit from such production. Again, although, non-cultivating moneylending *sahukars* such as Marwaris, Baniyas and Chettiars played significant role in marketing of commercial crops and owned lands; rich peasants and landowners controlled rural credit markets. Commercialization created rich peasants and consolidated their positions in many regions.

### 27.4.3 Class-Structure in Rural Areas

The older group of rural gentry underwent a change in composition and in some cases their wings were clipped away under the colonial rule. The decline of power and social status of older mobility and hereditary elites, especially outside Zamindari settlement areas was directly linked with the British policy of settling 'revenues' with the dominant cultivating groups. In Zamindari areas, the definition of property rights generally strengthened the pre-existing groups of Zamindars and taluqdars who enjoyed rights of revenue collections under pre-colonial regimes.

In other areas, the practice was to settle with dominant cultivating groups. In the Upper Doab and Rohilkhand, for instance, village communities were recognized as proprietary bodies. In Southern and Western India, *mirasdars* or the holders of shares in village land were reorganized. Ryotwari was, in principle, a direct contract between the ryot or cultivator and the state. It was from the dominant cultivating groups that a class of rich farmers emerged. They took advantage of expanding market networks under colonial economy. They had resources like sufficient arable land, livestock, implements and superior access to credit. They also became less dependent on the moneylenders, and began to lend themselves. The Jat peasants of Punjab and Upper Doab, the Vellalas in Tamil Nadu, the Kunbi Patidars of South Gujarat, the rich Kamma Reddy farmers in Madras-Deccan, and the Lingayats in Karnataka belonged to this group.

The other cultivators belonged to small marginal farmers and sharecroppers who did not have enough resources for investment or did not enjoy any security of tenure and were helpless victims of frequent famines despite the fact that expanding markets and infrastructure made food availability much easier. They had no marketable surplus to sell and the incidence of debt weighed too heavily on them.

The lowest in the hierarchy, the agricultural labourers were the most unfortunate, as they did not get any real benefit of commercialization as their wages stagnated and their employment was never secure. Landed groups commanded labour at artificially low cost. The lack of alternative employment opportunities and persistence of caste-oppression made them subject to obligations to supply labour cheaply. The most wretched of them had to suffer the agony of servitude as Halis, Khatbandhi Majdoor, Kamia or Panniyals as the bonded labourers came to known in the different regions.

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## 27.5 MERCHANTS AND TRADING CLASSES

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Some prominent business and trading communities were thriving in India when the Europeans trading companies tried to establish their commercial empires and trading monopolies. Some such prominent trading communities were the Khatri and Lohanas, Marwaris of Rajasthan, Chettis or Chettiars of Tamil Nadu, Bohras of Gujarat, the Konkani merchants and so on. Apart from local market network exchanging rural produce; the traders were also active at limited regional level in small towns with permanent markets known as *qasba*. Long distance trade in low-value high bulk goods through carvanas of peck bullocks was also fairly developed despite high cost of overland transport and insecurity. In the last range came the entirely urban-centred, long distance trade in luxuries including trade in exportable commodities. The rise of many regional states in the eighteenth century strengthened a financial sector dominated by *shroffs* or banking families. These

families converted currencies, discounted bills of exchange or *hundis*, remitted money in advance for land-revenue and lend money to local elite. They played a very significant role in urban economy and long- distance trade. The Jagat Seth house of Bengal was only a better known such family of bankers. The indigenous merchants used the system of *dadni* or advance payment for procuring goods from artisans. Now let us see what happened to these people under colonial rules.

### 27.5.1 Subordination to the European Capital or New Opportunities

The small European trading community was initially confined to port cities. The European companies, through they wanted to monopolize Indian trade, made use of existing network of production and procurement available in India to obtain exportable commodities. In the course of time, they introduced some modifications and innovations in the indigenous system. This was intended to solve some specific problems. The Europeans, for instance, utilized services of *dalal* or broker, an Indian employee with an intricate knowledge of both the local markets and intermediary merchant communities in their relations with the local merchants. The European trade proved beneficial to the country because the company imported gold and silver into India to buy exportable goods. This led to a substantial increase in the supply of money. The increasing monetization in the Indian economy facilitated commutation of land-revenue demand from kind into cash, which led to further increase in trading activities. It also helped in the coming up of banking families so crucial to the expanding world of commerce. The weaver-cum-merchants around Calcutta especially the *Basaks* were prominent beneficiaries of textile exports by East India Company, for example. Therefore, the nationalist story of retreat of Indian merchants from trade is not entirely true.

However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the East India Company was less a trading house and more a rentier. It had acquired rights to revenue of a big empire. The company financed its export of Indian textiles from such revenues. This could have created an adverse impact on the Indian traders. However, the real subordination of Indian traders and merchants began when India was more fully integrated with the inter-national trade. After 1800, the value of India's foreign trade and its composition underwent a phenomenal change. It was the era of indigo-opium trade and the relative decline of cotton textile trade. European firms supplied the capital and handled these new exports as far more profitable. The export of indigo, often produced under extra-economic coercion grew rapidly until 1850's when artificial dyes gradually started replacing indigo. Opium again was produced under state monopoly and the company used it as a convenient means for payment for the Chinese tea, silk and porcelain it exported to Europe. The free trade ideology of colonial rulers served the interests of the exporters of British manufactures especially Lancashire textile millowners in the nineteenth century. All these development reduced the position of Indian merchant classes to some sort of subservience. However, the expanding scale of marketing operations also helped many Indigenous traders to act as intermediaries in opium trade in the first half of nineteenth century and in cotton export during the cotton boom of 1860's. They were not only able to survive but accumulated enough wealth to become the pre- cursors of Indian capitalist class. Some portion of merchant capital was transformed under the colonial rule into usury capital, which again was a very profitable avenue of investment during the colonial rule.

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## 27.6 SUMMARY

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The penetration of Indian economy and society by the forces of colonialism resulted in a number of socio-economic dislocations. The old model of European impact and Indian response cannot explain the nature of social change in India during colonial rule. The colonial impact reshaped Indian social institutions but the agency of Indian social forces also played a key role in the process of social-transformation. The market forces unleashed by colonialism broke the insularity of Indian society and limited colonial variant of modernization left its imprint on the genesis and growth of various social classes in India. Despite a general tendency to subordinate all the indigenous social classes to the imperial interests, the new colonial economy and administrative structure established by the colonial state also offered new opportunities and risks. The colonial social engineering and intervention led to the importing of a number of social initiatives from abroad. However, the colonial state also provided its support to the principles of traditional hierarchy and ritual distinctions, thus consolidating the pre-existing powerful group of landed gentry in the rural areas.

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## 27.7 GLOSSARY

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**Differential Resource-Endowments:** Differential entitlement to the resources of land, labour and credit etc. among various social classes.

**Indenture System:** A system of contractual labour in the plantations.

**Labour-Lordism:** Employing labourers through intermediaries who also controlled the bargaining power of labour.

**Managing Agency System:** A firm of professional managers that helped in the promotion, financing and organization of a joint stock company and charged commission from the enterprises for these services.

**Occupational Structure:** structure of labour force showing proportion of labour force employed in different sectors of an economy.

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## 27.8 EXERCISES

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Answer the following questions briefly in about 150 words.

- 1) How did the organizational-structure of business affect Indian industries?
- 2) How did colonialism affect the class-structure in rural areas?
- 3) How did the Indian Capitalist class mobilize its sources of Capital?
- 4) Explain the nature and composition of industrial labour force in India.

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## UNIT 28 COLONIAL FOREST POLICIES AND CRIMINAL TRIBES

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### Structure

- 28.0 Introduction
- 28.1 Pre-colonial Legacy
- 28.2 The Forest Acts and Ecological Warfare
- 28.3 The Imperial Forest Department and Forest Acts
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### 28.0 INTRODUCTION

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The early Company rule in India tried to make use of the indigenous communities on the margins of the sedentary and settled agriculture in its programme of conquest and pacification. This was a tactic inherited from the practice of making use of fluid political arrangements by the pre-colonial polities like the Marathas. The recognition of the Bhil chiefs as rajas in return for a fixed tribute, establishment of a special Bhil Corps (1823) and a special police force of the Mewatis were part of this approach. The colonial State recognized the importance of forest and wasteland in the settlement of rural society. The disappearance of forest-cover in early 19<sup>th</sup> century was mostly due to cutting of forests for military or security reasons. Another reason was extension of cultivation under pressure so as to increase the revenue-resource base of the Raj. The colonial state favoured sedentary agriculture. Its main motive was to settle and discipline nomadic and pastoral communities and to wean or coerce tribal people from their traditional slash-and-burn agriculture or hunting-gathering life style. The systematic ecological warfare of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, was chiefly a product of commercial needs and requirements. Although, indigenous elements in the form of merchant-cum-usurers were associated with the process, the institutional and ideological framework was specifically colonial. This institutional arrangement consisted of the Forest Acts and bureaucracy as well as the Criminal Tribes Acts and the settlements. We will trace the convergence of environmental, legal and social history in the next sub-sections of this Unit.

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### 28.1 PRE-COLONIAL LEGACY

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Alfred Crosby (1986) gave a notion of 'ecological imperialism.' According to the notion, a complex set of weeds, animals and diseases brought by the biological expansion and migrations from Europe destroyed the flora, fauna and human societies or the indigenous ecosystems of the New World. Basing themselves on this notion, Gadgil and Guha (1992) projected colonialism in India as an ecological watershed. According to them, although the Europeans could not create neo-Europes in India by decimating and devastating indigenous population and their natural resource-base but they did intervene and radically altered existing food producing systems and their ecological basis. Three basic elements of this unprecedented intervention in the ecological and social fabric of Indian society by colonialism, according to them, are:

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- (a) A shift from subsistence-oriented resource gathering and food-production to commercial production;
- (b) Destruction of cohesive local communities and their institutions and emergence of individualism in their place; and
- (c) Breakdown of a system of restraints on traditional resource-use due to development of markets as the focal points for organizing access to resources.

Richard H Grove (1998) has criticized this line of thinking as a belief in pre-colonial golden age of ecological balance and harmony.

According to him, exclusivist forms of state forest controls developed in pre-colonial states in South Asia, which saw rapid state-sponsored de-forestation. The control of state over forest-resources was gradually increasing in India since about 800 A.D. It was reinforced in Mughal period and received further impetus during the ascendancy of successor states. The Maratha state tried to acquire control over forests of the Western Ghats and to set-up plantations, both for shipbuilding and revenue. The states of Cochin and Travancore also exercised similar monopoly rights over forests. The Amirs of Sind adopted a policy of afforestation and forest protection during 1740-1840. This was meant to encourage development of their hunting reserves or *sikargahs*. However, the state control in pre-colonial times was limited to the extraction of certain plant and animal species or to the maintenance of hunting reserves. Sometimes state asserted control over certain specific products. For instance, Tipu Sultan asserted right of state over sandalwood, a valuable tree. Forest management and control was also crucial for military reasons in some cases especially for the defense of forts. Sometimes agrarian empires in the pre-colonial times cleared woodlands to augment land revenue resources in pre-colonial times. Although commercial and strategic compulsions initiated the process of forest clearance in pre-colonial periods, there were no sharp conflicts over control of forest-resources like the one that surfaced in the colonial period. In the pre-colonial period, even if there was no perfect ecological harmony, arable land was in abundance, state control was limited and a hierarchy of user-rights rather than an absolute notion of property in arable and forestland was prevalent.

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## **28.2 THE FOREST ACTS AND ECOLOGICAL WARFARE**

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Large-scale commercial logging began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The demands of European entrepreneurs and the colonial state were much more extensive than the demands of earlier rulers. The contractors hewed many teak forests during 1800-1830 on the Western Ghats for the Bombay marine. Palmer & Company, a managing house based in Hyderabad, similarly logged in the Berars. The expansion of Coffee plantation in South after 1840 and of Tea plantation in Assam and the Bengal Hills further accelerated the process. By around 1860, commercial demands for timber were growing due to demand from shipbuilding, iron smelting and other industries. As a result of this Oak forests in Britain started vanishing. Therefore, there was great demand for Indian teak as it was the most durable of shipbuilding timbers. Construction of ships in Surat and on the Malabar Coast and export of teak-timber to meet the demands of the Royal Navy greatly stimulated the process of deforestation and denudation. The revenue orientation of colonial land policy also worked towards deforestation. Forests were seen as an obstacle to expansion of settled agriculture. Under the pressures of heavy land-revenue assessments especially on better soils, peasant cultivators moved into hills or onto poorer waste soils and cleared forests. The British, drawing on their experience of Ireland and Scotland took ecological warfare to new heights. There was a large-scale expansion of cultivable land due to 'clearings' of forests in Northern India after 1860. This led to a sharp decline in the fortunes of the extensive nomadic and pastoral economy of the plains.

The expansion of railways after 1850s was another main cause of commercial logging. European and indigenous private contractors made huge gains in the process of utilizing woods for commerce. Before the opening of Raniganj coalmines, railways used wood as fuel. The railways were using fuel wood in North Western Province even in 1880s. H.Cleghorn, in his work, *The Forests and Gardens of South India* (1860) described the impact of the railways especially in Melghat and North Arcot Hills. The pace of deforestation was correlated with the expansion of railways. The railways expanded from 1349 Kms in 1860 to 51,658 Kms in 1910. The demand for railway sleepers grew proportionately. Only three Indian timbers- teak, sal and deodar- were more suitable as sleepers. Sal and teak forests were available near railway lines in the Peninsular India and were worked in early years. However, subsequently deodar forests in the sub-Himalayan region of Kumaon and Garhwal were also utilized.

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### 28.3 THE IMPERIAL FOREST DEPARTMENT AND FOREST ACTS

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The policy of non-intervention and laissez faire gradually gave way to legitimate State intervention. The Scottish Surgeons like Alexander Gibson and Hugh Cleghorn, in the service of the East India Company, pointed the connection between denudation and droughts after 1837. Protection of forests was now seen as essential for maintaining water supplies and safeguarding agricultural prosperity. Some scholars see conservation, as a justification for the strategic and commercial interests of Empire while Richard Grove believes that a wider concern with agrarian prosperity and social stability was primarily responsible for this shift in the attitudes of the colonial officials. The role played by strategic and commercial needs of the Empire cannot be denied as the colonial administrators indicted traders and private capital in their accounts but the real brunt of state regulation and control was felt by small indigenous forest users like tribes practicing shifting cultivation. In particular, Kumri or shifting cultivation in Western Ghats, was held to be responsible for deforestation. Shifting cultivation was banned in Coorg in 1848 and restrictions were imposed on it in Belgaum in 1856. In 1847, Bombay Forest Department was established. By 1865, an Imperial Forest Department, with a formal bureaucratic all-India structure had been formed. A special executive post of forest officer was created and government's control over larger tracts of woodlands was established. This paved the way for exclusion of private capital as well as rural forest-users and shifting-cultivators from the forests.

Dietrich Brandis, a German botanist, was appointed the first Inspector- General of Forests. The Forest Act of 1865 initiated the process of establishing a legal mechanism to curtail the previously open access enjoyed by the rural communities. The colonial state, prior to Forest Act of 1865, recognized the customary rights of common property resources in forests. The Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878 asserted state monopoly over forest resources. The Forest Act of 1865 was passed to facilitate state's possession of those forests that were required for railway supplies. The pre-existing customary rights of rural people were left untouched. However, the powers of regulation and control were given to the forest officers. Prior to 1878, forest reserves area was limited and there were only 14,000 square miles of reserved forest for the whole of India. However, forest officers were asserting their powers even on non-zamindari private lands. In March 1868, teak, sal and shisham were declared protected species in the Central Province even if they grew on non-zamindari private lands.

The status of forests and woodlands as a common property resource became a matter of legal debate among colonial forest administrators. Sharp and conflicting viewpoints emerged in a conference of forest officers in 1874 that was called to examine the defects of the 1865 Act and suggest a new piece of legislation. The

## Social Questions Under Colonialism

debate on the issue was framed within a specific discourse of property. This discourse celebrated proprietorship and as a result customary common property rights in pastures and woodlands, which were a negation of such notion of private property, were denied.

Three distinct strands of thinking manifested within the colonial bureaucracy on the question of customary common property rights. The first section, called 'annexationist' by Gadgil and Guha, wished for a total state control over all forest areas. They argued that all land, those were not cultivated by peasants belonged to the state. They further claimed that the so-called norms of community and access to forests were dependent on the sweet will of the rulers. They cited Tipu Sultan's edict banning the cutting of sandal wood trees. They asserted that only those rights of use, which were explicitly granted by the state, were to be accommodated and conceded. Baden-Powell and the then Secretary of the Agricultural Department, A.O.Hume took this position that state monopoly of forest and wasteland was an undisputed feature of 'Oriental' sovereignty and the colonial state by its 'right of conquest' inherited this monopoly right. The second prominent position mainly held by forest officials of Madras government, denied the legitimacy of any state intervention in the customary rights of use exercised by the rural communities. Intermediate position, represented by the Inspector-General of Forests, Dietrich Brandis and some other officials, held the view that the state had undisputable right in certain cases but favoured retention of customary rights of villagers to freely graze their cattle, cut wood, etc., subject to some restriction by the state. The passing of Indian Forest Act (1878) clearly resolved the question in favour of an 'annexationists' position. The imperatives of colonial economy, conquered subjects, commercial and strategic interests of Empire overshadowed and destroyed the customary rights of use of the rural communities.

The forests were classified into three categories as reserve forests, protected forests and village forests under the Forests Act (1878). The reserved forest consisted of compact and valuable areas, which would lend themselves to sustained exploitation. A complete state control extinguished private rights, transferred them somewhere else or in exceptional cases, allowed their limited exercise. The second category of protected forests was also under state control where rights of state and other users were recorded. However, state's control was strictly maintained by outlining detailed provisions for the reservation of particular tree species as and when they became commercially valuable, and for closing the forest whenever required to grazing and fuel-wood collection. Subsequently, with the rising commercial demand, many protected forests were converted into reserved forests. The Act also created a class of village forests but this option was hardly exercised over large parts of the sub-continent. The Act of 1878 also enlarged the scope of punitive sanction available to the forest administration, closely regulating the extraction and transit of forest produce and prescribing a detailed set of penalties for transgression of the Act. 'Protection' was meant to increase timber-productivity, which could be achieved only by eliminating trees and species that were not important commercially. The forest department made a distinction between 'superior' and 'inferior' species for this purpose. To manage such multi-species forests, cutting the 'inferior' varieties and planting 'superior' species in the 'blanks' increased proportion of 'superior' trees. Exclusion of livestock and prevention of fire were two main planks of the 'scientific management' by which forest officials manipulated cycles of renewal to selectively assist timber trees. It was only at the turn of the century that experience demonstrated that such strict exclusion of rural forest users did not increase timber productivity. It was found that grazing and fires did not necessarily affect timber trees. The forest officials towards the end of the 19th century adopted a flexible approach within overall framework of control.

Another important aspect of forest administration was that it generated surplus revenue consistently in the period 1870-1925. In other words, the administrative machinery was more than self-financed. This was made possible by the rising demands of the urban centres for fuel-wood, furniture, and building timber material and supply facilitated

by improved transport. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a variety of industrial uses of the forest produce such as resin, turpentine, essential oils and tanning material also increased the commercial value of the forests. The strategic value of India's forests was also realized in the World Wars when they supplied huge quantities of timber and bamboos to the timber branch of munition board.

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## 28.4 IMPACT OF COLONIAL FOREST POLICY ON INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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The colonial Forest Acts had a number of ruinous consequences for many nomadic and pastoral communities and for people surviving on hunting gathering of forest produce and based on shifting cultivation. The Acts enforced an unnatural separation between agriculture and forests. Many of the customary rights exercised by rural and tribal people were abolished while the use of forests was determined according to the commercial priorities of the Empire. Grazing and shifting cultivation was banned. Such changes in the use of forests had very harmful effects on the daily life of the villagers. The pattern of local use and control gave way to state control.

State reservation of forests affected the ecology as certain plant species like Oak and Terminalia were replaced by commercially useful species of teak, pine and deodar. The former types were quite useful for indigenous communities as fuel, fodder, manure, and small timber while the latter served the commercial interests of the colonial state. The colonial administration disapproved shifting cultivation or Jhum and forced many tribal communities to adopt sedentary agriculture as the colonial officials believed that revenue generating potential of settled agriculture was more. For instance, frenetic attempts were made in 1860s to wean away the Baigas of Mandla, Balaghat and Bilaspur area of the Central Provinces from shifting cultivation. The discrediting of the traditional subsistence mode of livelihood of the rural and tribal people also meant devaluation of traditional conservation methods or indigenous wisdom about the forests and their ecology. The Forest Act of 1878 excluded a range of activities of indigenous hunters especially of the underprivileged groups belonging to low caste and tribal communities. At the same time, the colonial bureaucracy institutionalized hunting or *shikar* as an organized 'sport' for maintaining the physical fitness and leadership qualities of white *sahibs*. It became not only a form of amusement but also affirmed their status as racially distinct elite. Even the selection of wild carnivorous animal species to be eliminated was culturally informed as such errant and dangerous species were compared to human outlaws.

The impact of colonial forest policy, on the indigenous social groups, however, was not uniform. For instance, private forests of malguzars and zamindars constituted about 20% total land area in the Central Province and there was a triangular contest between the colonial state, revenue right holders and their tenants over forest use rights. Colonial state's redefinition of property rights brought large tracts of cultivable waste under the control of Forest Department and became a key factor in the colonization of the land. The control and power of colonial bureaucracy also strengthened agrestic serfdom and practice of *begar* (unpaid free labour) in many areas inhabited by tribal communities. Associated with increasing penetration of market forces was intrusion of indigenous capital (merchant-cum-usurer) into forest areas. The settlers from plains entered areas inhabited by tribal groups secured by proprietary rights and forms of debt-recovery alien to such indigenous communities. As a result of all these social and economic changes, conflicts and confrontations over forest and pasture lands, over the exercise of customary rights by local social groups became frequent. A variety of forms of resistance including migration, defiance of forest laws, legal assertion of their rights to open *fituris* or rebellion were adopted by the indigenous communities to articulate their grievances against the partnership of colonial state and money-lender-traders.

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## 28.5 PACIFYING THE INTERNAL FRONTIERS

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The colonial state paid special attention to the mechanism of social control and pacification of internal frontiers. Control and distribution of forest and cultivable waste and extension of arable was part of their policy to contain the 'unruly elements' such as Pindaris (erstwhile irregular cavalry soldiers in the service of the Maratha polity) and other nomadic groups. Forests were seen in the eyes of colonial officials as the abode of robbers, lawless squatters. They drew up on their experience of break-up of common tenurial systems of Ireland and the Scottish highlands to push back forest frontier and achieve political stability by wiping out unstable concentration of power on the fringes of settled agriculture. They discontinued with the earlier practice of not assessing forest and cultivable waste and promoted sedentary agriculture. The colonial authorities attempted to settle and discipline groups such as the Gujars, Bhattis, Rangar Rajputs and Meos, who moved around with their cattle, extracting 'protection rent' as they moved. From the very beginning, the colonial state used surveillance and mechanism of social control and defined certain social groups as beyond the bound of civility. This criterion was applied to entire castes and communities. W.H.Sleeman's *The Ramaseena or the Vocabulary of Thug Literature*, exemplified this process of depicting certain groups as barbaric. In 1835, a special Thagi and Dacoity Department was set up to investigate and punish gang robberies and murders. Subsequently, a large number of people, groups, communities and tribes were stigmatized as 'the criminal tribes'. The legal language of the colonial officials was used against a wide variety of marginal groups who did not conform to pattern of settled agriculture and wage labour, especially nomadic, pastoral communities and forest -dwelling tribes.

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## 28.6 THE CRIMINAL TRIBES ACTS AND BRANDING OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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A wide variety of ideological elements converged in the making of 'criminal tribe' ideology. The Brahmin subordinates of British officials were always apprehensive of nomadic and wandering groups outside the institution of caste. The British tradition also associated forests with crimes and outlaws. The hereditary-based theory of crimes that was popularized in Europe by Cesare Lombroso perceived the criminal man as a separate species with specific hereditary and anatomical features. This belief in the professional and hereditary character of crime was commonly prevailing among the colonial administrators of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Criminal Tribes Act (1871) provided for registration of all or any member of such tribes who were notified as 'criminal tribes.' The registered members had to report themselves to the local police authority at fixed interval of time and notify their place of residence or any intended change of residence. Any contraventions of these legal provisions invited severe punitive measures.

The construction of entire caste and communities by the British officials as 'criminal' was part of a larger discourse in which caste and community determined the occupational as well as social and moral profile of all its members. The 'criminal tribes' were branded simultaneously as typical and deviant. The Criminal Tribes Act (1871) listed over 150 tribes as 'criminal.' Most of these belonged to marginalized social groups outside settled domesticity. The colonial state defined these groups as criminal by reference to their caste identity and a legal characterization that rendered crime as an in-born trait of such selected communities. Such communities could not lay any claims to the protection and impartiality of law. Their criminality was represented as an inheritance and a profession, inextricably linked to their forefathers.

Even before the passing of Criminal Tribes Act (1871), colonial authorities adopted similar modes of surveillance. A Superintendent of Thugi and Dacoity Department referred to a 'predatory tribe' of Bawarias especially in the lower Doab region. Kanjars and Sansis were also treated in the same manner. Attempts were made by police and judicial authorities to register all Sansis, Harnis and Bawarias. Thanedars or head-constables were required to take security from village headmen where these tribes resided and were to be held responsible for reporting on their movements. Gradually attributes generally given to the Thugs such as cruelty and violence were also ascribed to such groups. The authorities at district administration level, especially Magistrates, in Punjab and North Western Provinces maintained that the provisions of Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure were inadequate to suppress their criminal activities. Therefore, they emphasized special surveillance measures to deal with this peculiar and hereditary nature of their criminality. They were to be treated like wild dangerous animals- to be watched, tamed and hunted up. The chief mechanism of control was to start from the maintenance of their record and by maintaining a check on their mobility.

The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 instituted a special set of laws, rules and procedures for dealing with the 'criminal classes'. The members of these classes and tribes were denied a right to appeal in an ordinary court of law. The Act was similar to the Habitual Criminal Act passed in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to exercise discipline and control over the criminal sections of the working class in order to construct moral subjects. Subsequently, a distinction was made between honest, industrious section of the working class and vagrant, criminal, dangerous elements and a need for institutional segregation of the later was stressed in the period 1860-75 in England. The legal enactment put restrictions on the movement of the members of 'criminal tribes' and provision of a regular attendance gave powers to the village patels and local police officials. They used such provisions to harass and exact forced labour from the members of such communities. Even when the repressive strategy was supplemented by a strategy of reclamation or reform, officials highlighted the failure of re-settling such tribes in terms of stereotype attitudes. It was claimed that the members of these communities were unwilling to accept hard moral life of domesticity. This attitude tended to reinforce the stereotype of innate criminality of such tribes. The Amended Criminal Tribes Act (1908) provided for settling of convicted members of tribes in special settlements, to mould and reform them by enforcing work habits under the control of special settlement officers. These settlements acted as sanctified prisons providing captive labour at miserable wages and harsh working conditions to a number of factories, state forests and public works departments. The basic assumption of colonial sociology was that hereditary circumscribed communities that moved from place to place and shifted their identities committed most of the crimes. Such assumptions and enactments of the colonial state were in accord with the values of indigenous landed magnates and their notion of social order.

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## 28.7 LAW VS. CUSTOM DEBATE

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The British ruled over India by their 'right of conquest'. The colonial state used law as the most important source of constituting its legitimacy. The appropriation of revenue, forest and natural resources was not arbitrary, unjustified exaction as was the case under 'oriental' pre-colonial despotic rule but as a legal right of the state. The colonial state itself was projected as a firm and impartial law-providing authority that respected 'universal principles of jurisprudence'. Law making, however, was an ideological enterprise and as an alien power, the colonial state could not completely ignore the existing legal norms and customs based on rank, status and gender. The colonial rule monopolized legitimate violence and used it as a sole prerogative of the state in its pacification drive. It, however, also used rhetoric of reconciliation with "laws and customs of people". For instance, if the indigenous penology punished



crimes according to the caste status of a criminal, the colonial state also recognized caste hierarchy. Concessions were made to 'rank and respectability and to the patriarchal authority of husband over wife and of master over servant. The high caste and rank people were exempted from religious oath in the courts of the Company. The colonial state exhibited ambivalence towards the principle of equality before law. It stemmed from negotiation of the colonial state with the existing customs. Many of the customary practices were re-ordered by the colonial state to suit its law and civil authority. The colonial state exercised its discretion in selectively retaining such customs and practices. For instance, in case of 'criminal tribe' this offence was traced and deduced from membership of a 'criminal community', but the powerful land-owning elites who were also often knit into indigenous systems of power and patronage with these same communities, were not made target of such special laws.

Veena Oldenburg (2002) has shown how the codification of 'custom' as adjudicable law in the Punjab countryside led to an erasure of women's voices and customs. According to her, in the pre-colonial customs, women had been co-parceners in the agricultural produce with their male counterparts as they engaged in sowing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and other agricultural works. However, colonial legal arrangements privileged male tillers of the soil and made them sole proprietors of the lands and its produce. In the pre-colonial society, the transmitted customary practices were negotiated and contested by men and women. These fluid customs were converted into written, fixed, judiciable and enforceable corpus of law. They were elicited only from men and customary law and its colonial legal rendition was only a high caste male reading of the principles of clan, caste, tribal organization and societal norms.

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## 28.8 SUMMARY

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In this unit we have seen how the forest policies of the colonial state and branding of certain communities by it marginalized nomadic and pastoralist people and devalued their mode of living. The colonial policies were driven by the commercial needs and requirements. They harmed the existing customary practices and rights of common people in the common property resources especially in woodlands and pastures. The colonial state also stigmatized certain communities as criminal by birth in order to maintain a rigid social-control over the mobile elements of the society. Law was an important tool of the colonial authorities for subjugating people and resources of the indigenous society in a legitimate manner. The colonial state, however, could not completely ignore the existing customs, legal norms and power arrangements within the indigenous society. It selectively used and retained practices relating to social rank, status and gender, thus privileging the upper caste male practices. In the process, it marginalized the lower caste people, the nomadic and pastoral communities outside settled agrarian economy and women. The mechanism of social control reinforced the grand alliance of alien colonial authority and indigenous powerful upper castes and classes.

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## 28.9 GLOSSARY

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<b>'Annexationist' Forest Policy</b>	:	A strand in thinking of colonial officials that favoured total control of state over forests and wanted to abolish existing customary rights of the indigenous communities.
<b>'Criminal Tribes'</b>	:	Branding of certain communities as 'criminals' by birth.
<b>Common Property Resources</b>	:	Resources that are managed and used by community collectively.

<b>Customary Rights</b>	:	Certain rights sanctioned by popular customs of the people.
<b>Ecological Imperialism</b>	:	A set of weeds, animals and diseases brought by the biological expansion and migrations from Europe destroyed the indigenous ecosystems of the colonies.
<b>Ecological Warfare</b>	:	The process of destruction of ecosystems due to intrusion of commercial interests.
<b>Kumri/ Zhum/ Slash-and-burn Agriculture Shifting Cultivation</b>	:	Shifting cultivation practiced by tribal communities.
<b>Pacification Drive</b>	:	Attempt to <b>disarm and control people.</b>

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## 28.10 EXERCISES

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- 1) Describe the various positions taken by the British officials in formulating forest policy.
- 2) What was the impact of colonial forest policy on the indigenous communities?
- 3) List the main provisions of the Criminal Tribes Act(1871).

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## **UNIT 29 GENDER/WOMEN UNDER COLONIALISM**

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### **Structure**

- 29.0 Introduction
- 29.1 The Historical Perspective on Woman Emerging in the Nineteenth Century
- 29.2 The Impetus of Social Change and Reform Centering on Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- 29.3 The Changing Role of Women in the Modern Period
- 29.4 The Normative Order and the Changes that Movements Brought to Women in the Political Space
- 29.5 The Class Differentiation of Women and their Consequent Public Spaces or Lack of Public Presence
- 29.6 Summary
- 29.7 Glossary
- 29.8 Exercises

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### **29.0 INTRODUCTION**

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The nature of women's question in the colonial period was quite complex. The women were subject to a traditional order, which reigned them in as regards their social and public positions. It was the campaign of the social reformers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which brought their conditions centre stage. Western ideas and legislations by the colonial authorities under pressure from the reformers sought to create conditions, which were conducive to emancipation. In this unit, we will be taking you through the story of some major developments in which women themselves played an active role in changing their lot.

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### **29.1 THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN EMERGING IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

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The historical developments regarding woman was and continues to grip the human intellect even today. There have been many ways of looking at the woman question: from the Conservative to liberal Feminist, Marxist to Socialist Feminist and now the Post modernist and the Deconstructionist schools of analysis. Today a large number of works relating to women and work, middle class women, women and nationalism have become possible. These studies range from being very general to extremely specialised monographs focussing on women. This is because of the initiatives of the feminist movement, the International Decade of women and academic projects focussing on the status of women in India. Today the scholars working on women range from those who are parts of women in history or women and history or history of women perspectives.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the woman's question came to play an important part of public discourse the issue of great importance was women's suffrage and equality in the western world. In the case of India that these questions came up during the course of our integration into the colonial society and culture as well as that a number of demands centering on woman became part of the anti-colonial movement has its relevance for shaping the nature of questions raised on the woman question aping of western values by Indian woman and its dangers, the essentialising of the golden era that India too had when there were women who too had a share in the fields of

knowledge and were themselves achievers to be glorified as ideals. These ideas would in their own way contribute to the debate around woman in colonial India in such a way that the problems of woman in Indian society got lost in the maze of culture, ideology, hegemony and assertion of the male idiom of politics of representation, identity politics of national culture and the national liberation movement that assumed centre stage till 1947. Issues such as social reform and women which had found conducive environment under the anti-colonial movement lost steam completely in the post colonial period until these issues were raised by women's groups in contemporary India.

The context of the range of works on the conditions of women in our society from very early on as in the writings of Altekar et al was to look at how hindu culture provided or limited the roles assigned for women from the ancient times. There are the examples of the Gayatri and Maithrayees who challenged the sages and were in their own right capable and knowledgeable human beings. The dominant option that prevails is that women were at some point in history subordinated to their acceptance of domesticity and reproduction and nurture role in our society. "A mother is more revered than a thousand fathers". Though a large section of women toiled alongside men in the fields, the mines and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the factories, it is the former image of women that has larger presence. It is the middle class women and their issues that found greater focus in the process of the anti-colonial movement and even today as it is their voice that can be rendered more easily on account of their social standing and educational background. The range of issues that came up in this situation was therefore demands such as women's education, women's representation in various bodies, property rights and so on. The visual representations were of the subordinated purdah clad and voiceless woman folk of the country who were waiting to be emancipated and liberated from the drudgery of domesticity, reproduction, sexual inferiority and subalternity. Here we can place the writings of women, men both Indian and from the European world who have written heart rending and at times sensational picturisation of the condition of women in India as for example the work of Katherine Mayo in the text "Mother India". Such characteristics of the dismal defensive responses from Indian intelligentsia as well as radical and reformative experiments that particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century created a whole range of debate on modernity, westernisation, progress and development among the Indian intellectuals.

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### **29.3 THE IMPETUS OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND REFORM CENTERING ON WOMEN IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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It was in the nineteenth century when the Indian subcontinent was teeming with ideas of significant importance on reform and change that the woman question assumed centre stage. This was to some extent related to the nature of questions that were taken up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These were influenced by the colonial ideology and political concerns that were voiced during these times. Campaigns such as for example that the condition of the women in a country is representative of the conditions and civilisation of the area transformed the mindset of the educated literati of Indians who saw in the amelioration of the conditions of the ideas such as Western impact and Indian response schema has been put out as the characterising the social reform agenda in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or for that matter transforming society. To Desai, this resulted in measures that were conducive for the emancipation of women and attempts to elevate their status that were initiated by social reformers. Was this a period of Renaissance? This was another rendition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where scholars such as Sushoban Sarkar see in the reform initiatives the rebirth of vitality into colonial Bengal. All this engagement with the woman question related major reform legislation very helpful for women: Anti-Sati bill of Bentinck, Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 and Educational Institutions for girls. The reform movements produced variety in its

regional focus on one or many of the issues that generally invited the concern of the 19<sup>th</sup> century mind.

In Western India part of the reform was on education of women and a range of social practices such as child marriage, widow re-marriage and the freedom of woman too to not consent to a marriage. Thus we have the images of Pandita Ramabhai, Ramabai Ranade and Tarabhai Shinde who worked on these issues on whom a number of scholarly works are available. That Ramabai Ranade was the child wife of a very important social reformer in Maharashtra M. G. Ranade made it possible to raise these issues in the nationalist campaigns. That the questions relating to woman such as the age of marriage as well as educational opportunities became the sites of reform for the Indian Social Conference under the leadership of Ranade. Interestingly it was on the issue of Age of Consent Bill that there came up a debate within Indian Nationalist dividing them: Tilak, totally against appealing to an alien government to make any such legislation to remedy an Indian social evil and the likes of Ranade etc. favouring it. Pandita Ramabai for example taking a particularly critical stance on the Rukmabai episode which was the case of a woman who did not want to give conjugal rights to her husband who was illiterate, sick and from whom she wanted to be free. It is at this time Malabari sought to work on getting the Age of Consent raised as well as divorce possible for women. Both these issues raised hell among many Hindu Nationalists as it was deemed as going against the grain of hindu beliefs and customs for women and as attempts to ape the western values for Indian women which was too much to accept.

The other area where the position of women was the site of reform was Bengal in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. There has been a major debate on the implications of these efforts of social reform. To some historians the reform agenda was part of the process of modernisation of the traditional society. To others, reform was a tool in the hands of the colonised to regain their identity and to rejuvenate Indian culture. To some others it was through reform that the nationalist discourse constructed woman in an essentialist sensibility. And thus it was through reclaiming the space for woman, albeit based on essentialist notions, within the social fabric that the male colonial subject helped form a hegemonic national culture. This to some historians is the basic weakness of the social reform agenda of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It remain embedded in the politics of power and representation that only situated the condition of the woman and through it sought to create the nationalist basis of mobilisation but did not resolve the woman question in any way. For example, the entire age of consent debate though technically concerned with the issue of the mature age at which the state wanted to ensure marriage took place, became the battleground for Indian nationalists as an attack on the right of the colonised to decide matters for themselves. Nonetheless, significant important issues that came to the fore and even were legislated upon was the Anti Sati Act of Bentinck, 1829, the widow remarriage Act of 1856. It is through these issues concerning the position of women within Indian society that the first visible mobilisation of Indians through associations took place. The demand for womens' education too gained aground as it was argued that it was of utmost need for the happiness, welfare and civilisation. The fact that there were texts such as Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's paribarik prabandha that are essays concerned with characterisation of the family.

Partha Chatterjee raises interesting questions: Was the field of education the site of challenge from the inroads of western ideas for the Indian reformers. And hence became a thrust area of great effort for the social and cultural space in colonial India was one where the colonial state put out the civilising mission of the colonised worshipping four million gods and prey to a variety of social evils by way of modernising them and liberating the 'barbarian' minds through western education. The nationalist agenda around the woman question put out its cultural defence that at its initial phase manifested as reform of woman's condition and at a later stage became a revival of earlier traditions neither of which resolved the woman's question. To Partha Chatterjee

then the nationalist paradigm made its own selection “to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project” And thus reform was both emancipation and self emancipation of woman and the image of the new woman who was fixed between the confluence of modern bourgeois values of order, cleanliness etc. as well as culturally specific spiritual and faithful qualities of traditional moorings. Role models of women were inscribed by the social and religious regulatory family and kinship practices. And thus the nationalist project of emancipation was incomplete because of its limited endeavour and aspirations that never really undid the social normative order: of the relations between gender in society and only touched its surface somewhat in its mobilisation strategies in the course of the anti-colonial movement.

In taking these arguments further in the context of the characterisation of the role of woman in Bengal, Tanika Sarkar points out that the good woman in Bengal was a good wife. The political vocabulary of Hindu nationalism was woman’s chastity. To quote her, “The chaste body of the Hindu woman was thus made to carry the unusual weight since she had maintained this difference in the face of foreign rule. As opposed to the Hindu man who she argues had been colonised and assaulted by the western power knowledge. However she points out there also was the space that was traditionally available to women to read the scriptures that found the way out for the aspirations and expectations of women in traditional society to work through critically. For example in the life of Rashsundari Devi a Vaishnavite landlord wife whose biography *Aman Jiban* she evaluates, she elaborates this argument of feminine autonomy. Rashsundari’s biography is of the life of an ordinary Hindu woman in 19<sup>th</sup> Bengal which very carefully centres itself on her concerns and herself who was married off early. Although Rashsundari suffered the long winding years of caged existence as a wife and mother, she found refuge in reading the religious texts that probably had a liberating effect on her otherwise drab existence. It is only when Rashsundari becomes a middle age woman that we get a sense of fulfillment and peace in her when she puts out the idea of my sansar at the point when she is a mother-in-law, a grandmother and is beyond that stage of life where she was controlled. What thus comes across is the image of a woman who while fully rendering the familial responsibilities as in the various stages of life too at the same time through traditional idioms of reading religious literature and devotion expressed herself identity in such difficult times too.

In Southern India too under the leadership of Veerasalingam and later in the Madras Presidency legislature two issues around women became very crucial in the debates, one the anti nautch movement and the marriage bill which became the Sarada Act. In Kerala the Marumakkathayam was done away with by way of legislation in 1896 and in its place after a long standing debate within Kerala society, the integration of Kerala into the patriarchal rights concept came into being in the early twentieth century. With the work of Anne Besant and Margaret Cousins the question of women’s rights to representation and suffrage became an issue that engaged the minds and petitions of emergent women’s groups in colonial South India. It was in colonial Tamilnadu that the movement of Periyar, that the anticaste movement also took up the question of the role of women in society as its centrepiece as articulating its ideas of a new society which has its tensions in theory and practice for woman as has been shown in the writings of S. Anandhi.

Educating women was an important area of focus of the reformers. The Woods despatch of 1854 and the move to focus on mass education of the Indians included the women as an important component to be targeted. Thus came the Bethune schools, the Theosophical Society endeavours as well as a range of reform initiative schools such as under the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj etc. But then came up the issue of the nature of education and it is here the different approach to woman may be seen and their socially assigned role primarily as middle class mothers come to light as most of the initiative for educating girls initially was towards needle work, homeware and such other matters apart from the ability to read. Thus this was at some

level the duplicating of the colonial state endeavour to generate consent for colonialism through educating the women who would then inculcate similar values to their children.

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### **29.3 THE CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MODERN PERIOD**

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It is with the policies of the state as well as through popular pressure through reformist organisations, cultural politics as also nationalist mobilisation that a number of measures relating to woman's condition got taken up. These had far reaching consequences on the nature of the family and position of woman within societies. The impact on women was by no means a unilinear, progressive one. Instead today there is recognition that some of the earlier liberatarian measures too had embedded within them the privileging of the dominant notions of woman's role in society as well as was building new images of women that did not undo the conservative social fabric. The reformist measures to educate women remained an elite enterprise that even today remains unrealised for a substantial section of women in society. Reform for women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also varied depending on the community, region and class that we are talking about and hence it is necessary to keep this in mind while making any general assessment for women and reform in modern India. For an upper caste woman the matter of education and widow remarriage was significant while for the lower caste woman in the early twentieth century just the right to cover her breasts and to be able to go to the temple of worship or learning would mean a qualitative difference in their acquisition of rights and empowerment.

In the context of Kerala to state a case the Madras High Court decree of 1869 called the sambandham not marriage but a state of concubinage. Thus by a single legal decision that declared the practice of sambandham as null and void as far as the legality of such custom as signifying marriage. This provoked a major debate in colonial Malabar as to the legitimacy and the viability of such social custom as being a primitive practice that as Sir Sankaran Nair put out was a great legal impediment to progress. In the course of the next fifty years first the Malabar Marriage Act 1896 and then the Marumakkathayam Act of 1933 contributed to the disintegration of the earlier practice of taravad and in its place brought into being the patriarchal, patrilineal family as the norm where earlier matriliney had been the accepted practice. Thus some of the legislation that was undertaken during this period had far reaching consequences on the nature of the family. These acts in Malabar created the patrilineal family where earlier the woman was the key determinant of lineage.

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### **29.4 THE NORMATIVE ORDER AND THE CHANGES THAT MOVEMENTS BROUGHT TO WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL SPACE**

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The political experiences of women had by the early twentieth century facilitated the emergence of institutional mechanisms. Thus organisations of women came up in the twentieth century that then became the sites of public policy making and intellectual discussions. Major women's organisation that came up are the WIA, Women's Indian Association, the National Council of Women in India, NCWI and the All India Women's Conference, AIWC. All of this was middle class in its orientation except for a few as for example the work of Maniben Kara who became part of the M N Roy Group and took up the cause of the woman workers. Most women's organisations concentrated on politics, religion, education and philanthropy and thus were successful in bringing feminism and nationalism closer in the anti colonial movement and were part of the nationalist political horizon within which they remained. Thus a number of successful

women such as Muthulakhshmin Reddy, Shaffi Tyabji, Sarojini Naidu, Amrit Kaur to name a few luminaries did good work. Most of these women came from well heeled families and it is that rendered possible the space for them to emerge as well as laid the limits of their program for women too. Most of the time the women's question was subordinated to the larger interest of the freedom movement and thus Margaret Cousins for example exhorted, "Work first for political liberty...".

The demands of the women for political representation in the twenties and thirties brought to the fore the opposition to these reforms within the nationalists. The reform minded women did not stop at piecemeal legislation, they were aspiring by now for economic independence and comprehensive legislation for social and economic change. Even Gandhi who wanted to improve the status of women appealed to these women to live in the villages to realise that law was not relevant in the manner in which they were demanding for a sizeable number of rural women. Nehru endorsed women's public life but privileged agrarian reform over family law reform such as of property law and was against any collaboration on this matter with the colonial state. The Muslim league had no opposition to reforms so long as it was confined to Hindu Law. Thus the question of reform of family laws found no support from the mainstream political personalities and it remained a feeble though consistent demand of the women's organisations as necessary to change social relations in the family that still remains incomplete. Franchise compromise and the Rau's Committee's report did not reflect the mood of the women who gradually became one of the minority groups in the political firmament of vote bank politics of the twentieth century.

With the widening of the mass base of the national liberation movement under Gandhiji, we witness the greater representation of women in numbers in the public space. Gandhiji's ideal of women's passivity and self imposed suffering as celebrations of strength was limiting with the widening of the mass base of the national liberation movement under Gandhiji, we witness the greater representation of women in numbers in the public space. Gandhiji's ideal of women's passivity and self imposed suffering as celebrations of strength was strengthened by the impetus the Civil Disobedience movement got from the involvement of women. Women were now part of the mass politics and were picketers at foreign cloth shops, at liquor shops, at mill gates and in front of nationalist processions as barricades. We have the evidence of firebrand radical women such as Latika Ghosh, Sarojini Naidu as also patient self sacrificing women such as Ambujathammal a staunch Gandhian activist in Madras and Satyavati Devi in Delhi all of them in their own way imbued nationalist politics with a gender sensibility. At the same time it must also be noted that though women became part of the nationalist rhetoric and the subject matter of reform in this period it did not in any way lead to a fundamental transformation of women's roles within society or for that matter provide a fertile ground for the shaping of the identity of woman different from that prescribed by the norms laid out in contemporary society. Most of the efforts of the reformers were at the level of work that remained at the tip of the iceberg. There were centuries of ideologically ingrained values that appeared to be common sense, common custom and popular practice that could not easily be shorn off from the people's sensibilities.

The anti-colonial movement centre staged the woman question whose partial resolution was part of the enterprise of the nationalist question. But post the nationalist movement paradigm, with the attainment of freedom the reformative endeavour on the condition of the Indian woman and her social position has remained incomplete. The civil rights and the citizenship of woman integrally and equally as any other group in the mainstream social fabric has not happened in the Indian subcontinent as yet.



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## 29.5 THE CLASS DIFFERENTIATION OF WOMEN AND THEIR CONSEQUENT PUBLIC SPACES OR LACK OF PUBLIC PRESENCE

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It was during the colonial period that the modern factory as a form of workplace took shape. This has far reaching consequences for the nature of work relations for women. As unlike the open field in these factories women and men were cooped up with not enough light, space or ventilation. Thus the questions that came up with the women going to work in the factories was one such debate in late 19<sup>th</sup> century India. To the conservatives this would create women with loose morals as also made the safety of women very difficult to ensure. At the same time it was impossible to prevent the employment of women as these were the new sectors where women secured work easily. In fact, in the initial period of industrialization, women were invited to become part of the workforce as there were ample jobs available for men, women and children. Not to forget, women were sought after for they made economic and social sense for the employer: cheap labour, amenable to arduous labour. And it is in the factory system that we see legislation particularly for women bearing in mind their primary role as a mother and as a secondary wage earner taking shape. The emergent work relations and policies towards women workers in colonial India has been well brought out in the writings of Radha Kumar for Bombay, Samita Sen for Bengal and Janaki Nair for Mysore. We thus have evidence of how state policies impacted traditional society and vice-versa and at times how the bourgeois visions of the colonial state created its poor image in colonial India for the women engaged in industrial work. These in turn created the new work culture for women and men in the factory system.

Hence came the question of how to make the workplace safer for women and such attempts by labour reformers as well as government. That the factory and its environs were restrictive in many ways may be seen in a folk song from Ambasamudram where workers described the ethos of the mill as follows: “In the distance the dorai is coming, keep three feet off or he will beat you for three days...”<sup>5</sup> It may well have been the case that the power of the dorai at the mill was so all encompassing then just as we now are witness to the torture of domestic helps within urban environments even in contemporary India. For the woman, the workplace was constraining more than in just physical terms. The constant fear of advances from the “all powerful maistri” is an oft-repeated complaint from women workers to every authority for possible redressal. The Royal Commission on Labour recorded this as universal phenomena all over India. We have ample instances of this being a major problem for women at the workplace. In Madurai and Coimbatore, there were many attempts to seek redressal from the management through the maistri’s suspension and the appointment of a female maistri in departments where women worked in large numbers.

In India, the Factory Act of 1881 marked the beginning of the colonial government’s endeavours to influence labour regulations and industrial management by British laws and practices.<sup>8</sup> This act defined what a factory unit was, as also the measures that were binding on an industrialist to operate a factory. It sought to prevent the overworking of children but little effort was made in the interest of women workers. The Indian Medical Department advised the inclusion of women also as a section to be protected from overwork, night work and long hours.<sup>9</sup> Acts that incorporated the recommendation followed in due course. The fact that India was a colony of the then most industrialized nation had great consequence not only for the course of industrialisation that took place but also the pattern of legislation. The next Act of consequence for women workers was the Act of 1922, whereby the government excluded women and children from all heavy work. Act II of 1922 also made provision for complete prohibition of night work for women workers.<sup>19</sup>

The issue of wages is a disputed arena for the simple reason that the grounds for payment were by no means rational. To the worker, there was always the scope to demand more, while for the entrepreneur there was always the urge to keep it to the minimum. As regards the payment of wages to women, the rationale operative was the secondary nature of women's work. Well grounded in the patriarchal family structure was the enunciation of the male wage as primary and later the concept of the living/fair wage as accommodating the upkeep of the male labourer's entire family. This, we see, was the determining factor for the low wages of women. A male doffer earned more than did a woman doffer. That cannot be explained as being the result of lower skill, as we shall discuss later in this section. In this, regional variation is also marked as in Madras the wages were higher than in Madurai, which, however, rated better than Coimbatore in terms of the wages paid.

Thus around the issue of wage, sexual harassment by the maistri or a petty official at the mill, for better conditions at the workplace the women were actively involved in protests and strikes. Though this as well as their involvement in nationalist mobilization especially during major movements such as the civil disobedience and Quit India the women from the working classes also got integrated into the public space of protest and strike politics.

There is also work that bring out the early involvement of women from the peasant group being actively associated with the local level politics as well as Kisan Sabha questions. The writings of Kapil Kumar represent the visibility of women in protest politics for example in the movements spearheaded by Swami Sahajanand. Women's involvement in mass politics during the anti colonial movement is evidence of their integration into the political questions of their times. Captain Lakshmi in the INA, Godavari Parulekar in working with the Warli tribe, the women working for the Telengana movement and the variety of women involved in the communist party activities in the course of the twentieth century carved out a niche for themselves in the male bastion that was politics.

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## 29.6 SUMMARY

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In this unit, we familiarised you with the story of women in India coming into their own in a landscape which was dominated by the colonial impact and the nationalist movement. That the women's question became a part of both reform movements and the movement for independence. But in this process, we cannot undermine the agency of women themselves who played an active role in fashioning a space for themselves. We also gave you an idea about how there was a difference between the conditions of women in the working class and the women belonging to the middle class. Some of the questions they addressed were different. However, a patriarchy buttressed by the colonial rule itself was an overarching framework within which women struggled to come into their own.

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## 29.7 GLOSSARY

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- Essentialising** : Here it is meant the phenomenon of looking at a period or a movement by pegging it to one basic feature.
- Feminism** : The movement of women often led by women around the issue of the reform of their condition or aspiring for their revolutionary change.

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## **29.8 EXERCISES**

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- 1) What were the issues taken up by the social reform movement which impacted the women's question?
- 2) Discuss the aspects of the movements that brought women into political space.
- 3) What were the issues women faced at the modern factory in the colonial period.

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## UNIT 30 SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

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### Structure

- 30.0 Introduction
- 30.1 Notions of Racial Superiority
- 30.2 Colonial Sociology and the Study of Subordinated others
- 30.3 Continuity and Change in Discriminatory Practices Based on Caste
- 30.4 Certain Socio-Economic Aspects of Servitude
- 30.5 Gender Discrimination
- 30.6 Clothes and Customs as Marker of Social Discrimination
- 30.7 Religious and Social Discrimination
- 30.8 Summary
- 30.9 Glossary
- 30.10 Exercises

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### 30.0 INTRODUCTION

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Historians of Modern India have keenly debated about the kind of social change brought about under the colonial rule. There is no doubt about qualitative changes in the nature of administration and economy initiated by the intervention of British administrators. However, British administrators also borrowed the notions of rank, status and hierarchy from the indigenous cultural and religious traditions. The early colonial rule may have been a period of military conquest and economic plunder but it was not one of clumsy and ham-fisted social intervention by rulers imbued with a sense of racial superiority. Early British orientalist did not regard Indian culture and traditions as inferior. There was, however, a definite bias towards studying the more elite and exclusivist traditions of upper caste Hindus and respectable Muslim classes rather than the more flexible and all-encompassing religious and cultural traditions of lower orders of society. This was reflected in privileging of knowledge of Brahmanical texts and pronouncements of *ulema* or Muslim religious leaders rather than the uncodified cultural traditions of subordinated social groups. The principles of caste-hierarchy and ritual distinction helped in settlement of countryside by providing ideological support to British scholars and administrators, who, making use of a neo-Brahmanical interpretations of Indian society set about the task of rank-ordering indigenous social groups in various regions. The colonial sociology involved multiple changes in the social structure of colonial India. The social relations affected in the process of consolidation of colonial rule ranged from familial domain to that of community, from personal relationship to larger linkages in public spheres. One could argue that notions of status, hierarchies both indigenous and those imported from metropolis permeated these intricate and many-sided relationships. Even when a formal equality was professed between kinship and caste groups under the colonial regime, two broad categories of privileged and deprived existing side by side were a norm.

The present unit proposes to explore the nature of social discrimination and its diverse forms in different parts of India. The interface between colonial state and society on the one hand and relationships among Indians on the other hand provided the context within which social discrimination was practised. Social discrimination and backwardness existed in India even before the advent of British rule. But the formation and development of colonial state heralded the process of major social and administrative changes, which remoulded many of the pre-existing social hierarchies. We wish to explore how the new colonial milieu influenced various forms of social discrimination along race, caste, class and gender. In other words, we hope to pinpoint the structural basis of institutionalised discrimination.

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## 30.1 NOTIONS OF RACIAL SUPERIORITY

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The British colonial rulers came to India imbued with the spirit of liberal humanism. This liberalism defined white European men as the maker of history, the creators of empires, the founders of modern nations, the conquerors of backward people and masters of sciences and technology. Naturally, they placed the people who did not make progress or lagged behind in time at the lower ladder of development. The colonial subjects were simply written out of history, out of modernity and into a timeless primitiveness-Eden-like, simple and permanently fixed. The colonial rulers used the domestic ideology of gender to demonstrate backwardness of India and its inhabitants. The European white men were strong, active, and intellectually fertile with a sense of self-control and discipline while the colonial Indian subjects were effeminate, fearful, passive and sentimental. In other words, British imperial experience brought into prominence the 'masculine' virtues of the master race and devalued 'feminized' colonial subjects. The British sahibs maintained their privileges and segregation not merely in ideological realm but in various fields. The British in India maintained their segregated and dominant position in India. They not only built their bungalows separately but even their shopping malls, recreational clubs were also distinct. The relationship with Indians was established for the purpose of governance. The British as administrators, military personnel's and even as civilians demanded regulated behaviour from Indians. It was presumed that in hierarchical society, Indians were bound to adhere to their customs and they had no rights to appropriate symbols of ruling class.

The urban morphology exhibited this clearly. The Europeans lived in large segregated sprawling houses with surrounding lawns and separately even from indigenous elite and mercantile groups. Despite the notions of rule of law and equality before law, the British community in India opposed Ilbert Bill, which sought to empower Indian magistrates in the countryside to try British subjects. The Indians were denied every opportunity to join the privileged Indian Civil Service, which was dominated by the graduates from elite universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The white sahibs were to be carried around in palanquins in the early phase of colonial rule. The post was accessible to them even before sorting out of post. The Post Office Act (1854) charged double postal rates from indigenous newspapers to that charged on the imported English newspapers. While the liberal traditions wished to recreate India as the mirror image of British society, in actual practice India was governed with an iron hand and Utilitarians also declared that India was not capable of governing itself. In order to establish their control over the forest resources of India, the British forest bureaucracy discouraged slash and burn cultivation practised by many indigenous tribal groups and penalized small scale hunting by such social groups, which used to be a major source of proteins in their diets. But, organized hunting was cultivated as a sport among the members of civil and military colonial bureaucracy to demonstrate their racial distinctiveness.

In the 1830s F.J.Shore, a judge in upper India resented that 'natives of rank' visited the rooms of Englishmen with their shoes on. He was adhering to the practise where in British had noticed that only rich Indians generally wore shoes and their helpers and subordinate went barefoot. The complaint of F.J.Shore rested on the notion that British were the superiors in India. He attributed the behaviour of Indians to 'the bad manners of the natives of Calcutta' belonging to 'an inferior order'. Shore also regretted that it was the carelessness of Europeans and their unfamiliarity with 'eastern etiquette', which had resulted in usage of practice. In their public pronouncements and patronized newspapers, British often ridiculed Indians. For instance Tribune, which was started by Dayal Singh Majithia in 1881, exposed the misdeeds of administrators in Punjab. In a series of articles, the paper exposed the deputy commissioner, C.A.Roe of Multan in handling the issue of cow- slaughter. The

Tribune noted that decisions of C.A.Roe had resulted in communal riots in 1881. It was strongly refuted by the Civil and Military Gazette. In one of its article, it dubbed Multanis as liars. It accused them of exaggerating and fabricating actual incidents.

The rulers also believed in public display of their power. The colonial rulers made use of the many ceremonial trappings of pre-colonial sovereignty for this purpose. The imperial durbar in 1911 was specifically organized to display their racial superiority. In that year, King George V & his queen came to India and King George was formally crowned as the King Emperor of India. To celebrate the occasion, the Government of India decided to hold the imperial Durbar in which the leading Princess by offering homage would express their respect to the imperial majesties. Before the actual ceremony, rehearsal was also held to explain the proper form of offering homage to King Emperor and his consort by the Princess. However Gaekwad of Baroda could not attend the rehearsal. On his behalf, his brother took notes. On the day of the imperial Durbar, the Gaekwad also offered his homage. He came wearing a plain knee-length jacket, red turban and white European trousers. He also carried an English style walking stick. In offering his obeisance, Gaekwad however neglected the Princess and while retracing several steps, he turned back and walked down the steps swinging his stick. It was this behaviour which was dubbed by the Times reporter as seditious. Very soon English newspapers in India and England started heated discussion on the behaviour of Gaekwad. In analysing this episode Bernard S. Cohn has pointed out that use of a walking stick had evoked strong reaction among the British because they regarded it as marker of white sahib's identity.

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## 30.2 COLONIAL SOCIOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF SUBORDINATED OTHERS

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An understanding of process of social discrimination requires some background of pre-colonial hierarchy and rank ordering of society as well as transformations initiated by the colonial state. In the historiography of modern India, works on colonialism such as those of Thomas Metcalf, Nicholas Dirks and Partha Chatterji have explored its institutional and ideological basis. Bernard S. Cohn in particular has shown that colonial rule was also a cultural construct. The very process of acquiring information about Indians was connected with strengthening and legitimisation of colonial rule in India. The process started after the annexation of Bengal in eighteenth century. The interests of British administrators in knowledge of Indian law, culture and religion were intertwined with requirements of running the colonial dispensation. Colonialism reconstructed cultural forms and social institutions like caste to create a line of difference and demarcation between themselves as European modern and the colonized Indian traditional subjects. In such production and identification of Indian traditions, caste-hierarchy was recast as the spiritual essence of India that mediated and regulated the private domain. Caste-ridden Indian society was depicted as different from the European civil society because this institution was opposed to the basic premises of individualism. The operation of this pre-colonial source of identification and sense of loyalty could easily be used to justify the rule of modern colonial administrators. So, according to Dirks, it was the colonial rule of India that organized the 'social difference and deference' solely in terms of caste. Caste hierarchy and ritual ranks in their various manifestations and forms were not unchangeable in the pre-colonial times. There were also non-caste affiliations and social identities such as kinship networks linked by matrimonial alliances, commercial activities and state service and patronage in pre-colonial times. However, caste was also a typical marker of identity and a powerful social metaphor that designated higher and lower orders. The penal system of Peshwas, for instance, punished culprits according to caste status. Caste, therefore, was not merely a fabrication of British rulers designed to demean and subjugate Indians. It, however, did definitely helped colonial rulers in justifying their rule to 'civilise' and 'improve' the 'fallen people'. The evangelicals condemned the

‘Brahmanical tyranny’ and the colonial state also used the principles of caste-hierarchy as a kind of bulwark against anarchy and as an upholder of social order. Till 1860s, tenets of social policy centred on abolition of Sati and Female infanticide and this was connected with ‘civilizing mission’ of the rulers. Their notion of patriarchy made them conclude that they alone were capable of maintaining a rational social order based on the idea of material and moral progress in India. As India became the direct colony of Britain in 1858, rulers stressed racial superiority in the public domain. Viewed from this perspective, social discrimination can be described as those policies of British rule, which denied equality and respect to Indians. Social discrimination was also inherent in the assumptions of rulers revolving around customs and behavioural pattern of Indians. However it also remains a fact that upper castes and dominant groups in India endorsed some of these practices. Social discrimination was, in this sense, rooted in exploitation, denial of identity to subordinate groups. It was also rooted in practice of segregation and imposition of subordination on exploited and oppressed groups.

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### 30.3 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES BASED ON CASTE

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In this section, we deal with the changing face of caste during nineteenth century. The colonial rule was consolidated and it acquired powers of intimidation and observation that influenced the Indian subjects. It was in these conditions that caste became the measure of the new ranking order. Thus, the tribal social groups like Bhils, Kolis and Ramoshis became dependent labourers while the privileged landowning and trading castes Hindus were treated as high, pure and superior. With their notions of private property and privileging of settled agriculturists, the Britishers gave tangible force to distinctions between ways of life that had not previously been analytically ranked, compared and standardized. It was not merely the census, which enumerated Indians, and fixed caste identities, there were also several policies adopted by British administrators, which dubbed some tribal and caste groups as criminal. Stewart N. Gordon’s study of the Bhils highlights this change in their life. During the Mughal period, Bhils residing in isolated tract in northeast Maharashtra had moved into the Khandesh valley. During the rule of Marathas they started collecting levies from passing carvans. In order to protect travellers, some Bhils leaders were granted the right to collect duties from travellers. Gradually they started working as watchmen. Many of them settled on the plains and became peasant cultivators. When the British controlled central India in 1818, they formulated policies, which perpetrated stereotypes against Bhils and their ways of food production. While land was given to Zamindars, Bhils residing in hills were without permanent sources of income. They were seen as criminal. The very fact that they lived in hills generated fear among British. John Malcolm dubbed them as outlaws and ‘enemies of order and peace’. They were seen as those who cherished their predatory rights. This led British to dub them as ‘criminal tribe’. John Briggs, commissioner of Khandesh harped on this rigid identity for Bhils. Subsequently, under the policy of Elphinstone, who was the governor of Bombay, Bhils were gradually settled in plains but it remained a fact that those residing in hills remained segregated and many of them became the victims of agrarian bondage as agricultural labourers for the landowning Hindu castes.

During the nineteenth century, colonial administrators classified the subcontinent’s ‘castes’, ‘tribes’ and races in terms of importance and desirable quality defined as per the ‘modern science’ and discovered tenets of ‘Hindu religious faith’. These classificatory schemes served the needs of British administration, which wished to represent itself as protector of the ‘sanctity of contract and private property’, and settled agriculturists against the ravages of Pindari-bands and other so called predators.

The thrifty husbandman, the pious man of trade and the chaste 'clean-caste' wife became ideal inhabitants of India and those primitive tribes, pastoralists and low-caste untouchables who shared little in the domain of modern progress were placed at a lower ladder in the newly constructed taxonomy for social groups. In the pre-colonial periods, birth and moral attributes did play a role in determining a person's caste status but there was also considerable openness and fluidity. Now, in the middle of colonial rule, Brahmanical standards of piousness, purity and refinement of manners were applied more vigorously to the caste-hierarchy. This finely tuned difference created rigorous barriers between those of 'clean' caste, and those stigmatised as innately degraded, unclean and polluting. Defined as the fixed attributes of birth and rank, jati and varna ideals were used to coerce and dominate, especially as rural elites tried to maintain authority over tenants and dependent labourers. But while new disabilities were, thus, imposed on lower castes and tribal social groups, the volatile and unpredictable colonial milieu also simultaneously offered new opportunities and new set of material and ideological resources which could be utilized by the less disadvantaged to move up and demand better entitlement to the resources. In the formal sense, the colonial rule professed equality between its subjects. But this did not mean an end to social discrimination. The insistence on contract, enforceable by law and new courts, meant that those with better resources could consolidate their position by manipulating the new colonial institutional framework.

The local rural magnates in different parts of the country tried to claim a right to demand servitude and deference from landless labourers or subordinated *kamins* and other *balutedars*(clients) as well as from the marginal tribal cultivators. Much of this was done with extra-economic coercion using strict norms of hierarchy and pollution-barrier. In large parts of Madras Presidency the greater part of agricultural labourers, belonging to lower castes, had been reduced to near servitude. Large parts of Tamil country as well as Malabar and Kanara region witnessed growth of this type of agrarian bondage. In some districts, the conditions of untouchable Pallans or Paraiyans were really terrible. In this part, The British legal and judicial system reinforced the traditional caste institution and social distinctions, giving a fresh lease of life to the power, privileges and authority of upper castes. The Brahman landlords, who did not engage themselves in any kind of manual unclean, ritually polluting labour processes utilized the services of either tenant-cultivators or employed bonded labourers in their fields. This type of agrarian servitude was also quite common among the Cherumans of Malabar where they were treated like slaves and could be sold, mortgaged and rented out. There were groups outside the agricultural sector in the countryside who provided various kinds of services to the upper castes and classes. The Bhangi 'scavengers' of north India, the Vannan washermen of Malabar, the Chamar leather-workers of north India and the Shannars or toddy- tappers of Tamilnad. Various social disabilities were imposed on such people who performed indispensable defiling tasks for the purity-conscious upper caste Hindus. They were forbidden entry into temples. They could not make use of public wells. They were also denied use of certain types of clothes, ornaments and other paraphernalia of upper caste people, to walk freely in certain quarters and localities. A Nadar of Tamilnad could not approach a Brahman within twenty-four paces. Their women were not allowed to cover their breasts. There were also much larger group of dependent rural labourers such as Chamars in the Gangetic plain, the Mahars in the western India and Paraiyan, Pala, Mala, Holey and Cheruma in the south who were depicted as permanently unclean and impure by virtue of the defiling labour which they performed, not as free wage labour but as providers of compulsory labour services to local rural magnates or proprietors. However, much of this ritually defined subordination of these lower social orders was the creation of colonial economic penetration because until well into nineteenth century, settled agriculture had not completely overshadowed the pastoral and tribal ways of life and production systems. Expansion of cultivation in less fertile tracts involving dry crops required few labourers apart from the immediate kin of peasant family. There were, of course, caste-specific conventions and norms of



pollution-removal acts and services that provided the model the working of village *baluta* system in the western India and *jajmani* relationships elsewhere in the pre-colonial scheme of things. This also had created a separate category of village menial servants known as *kamins*, *praja* and *ayagars* in different regional contexts. The relationship of these social groups with their patrons was not always harmonious and it is doubtful whether their share in the material and ritual assets of the indigenous society were so well protected as sometimes depicted. The famine records of nineteenth century demonstrate that they were, in fact, first to perish in large numbers in case of calamity. Yet, in more recent colonial times, these lowly placed *kamins* and group of dependent labourers, accustomed to limited entitlements, found that their lot was worse off as their former patrons abandoned the existing webs of rights and services, leaving former dependents to fend for themselves in a presumably casteless labour market.

Sometime it is believed that untouchability and rigid concepts of pollution were basically a reflection of traditional rural India and the colonial milieu created new avenues of opportunities in the form of urban industrial workplaces and modern western education. There is no doubt that social transformation linked to colonialism brought many non-elite migrants into colonial coastal towns and industrial and new administrative centres. Moving to cities, leather workers tended to be employed as low-paid labourers in tanning and shoe-making factories. Doms or the traditional north Indian funerary specialists took up the jobs as mortuary attendants at dissecting rooms of the colonial hospitals. In cotton mills also mill hands were generally from social groups that had been identified as 'impure' or unclean. In the rural settings, these groups faced conditions of servitude and bondage and paradoxically, when they moved to urban as unskilled labourers, the Bhangi, the Mahar and the Chamar also encountered caste norms. The nature of casual labour in the factories, shipyards and tanneries tended to increase the power of pollution barrier and social life in such workplaces also reinforced their lowly, impure and untouchable status. Thus, we find a close correlation between caste norms and ritually governed entitlement to resources. Moreover, while most of these social norms and practices predate colonial rule, the latter in fact, entailed certain changes in the position of subordinate social groups in different parts of the country.

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#### 30.4 CERTAIN SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF SERVITUDE

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Most of the agricultural labourers in south Gujarat belonged to the tribal groups like Dubla, Naika and Dhodia communities. Many among them worked as *halis* or bonded labourers. *Halis* were like permanent estate servants of their masters known as *dhaniamas*. They would become bonded labourer in perpetuity for a trifling sum of money. They were like unpaid labourers who did all type of manual *begar* for the local rural magnates. M.B. Desai estimated that in Surat district about one fifth of tribal labourers were *halis*. The upper caste women of landowning castes like Anavils, Rajputs and Patidars could not work in the fields due to social taboo associated with manual labour. Such groups, therefore, employed bonded labour on a large scale. The caste divisions in south Gujarat had got crystallized into two major categories: the kaliparaj and the ujaliparaj. The ujaliparaj comprised the higher castes such as Brahman, Bania and Rajputs whereas the kaliparaj included the lower castes such as Dublas, Dheds, Dhodias and Naikas. The distinction was clearly visible in the various aspects of their social life including food habits, literacy and religious beliefs. More importantly, however, it was a matter of entitlement to various material and productive assets and resources especially agricultural land and expanding networks of markets that were created by the colonial economy and differential access to it for various sections of rural society. Similar class cleavages were also discernible in the other parts of western and southern India where untouchable lower castes, tribal groups and marginal

tenant-cultivators suffered from insidious social discrimination. *Hali* system of keeping bonded labour in south Gujarat was permeated by notion of patronage and was based on use of labour-services of subordinate families in perpetuity by the dominant landlords of that locality. According to Jan Breman, Hali was the term used for a farm servant who along with his family was in the permanent employment of a landlord, a *dhaniamo*. Such form of labour employment was everlasting and was transferred from one generation of farm servants to next generation. The practice had its genesis in incurring of debt by an agriculture labour for marriage or any other social ceremony. The debt was obtained from a master who was willing to employ him. Over the period of time, as debt increased, enduring oppression of farm servant also became fixed and preset, as the *hali* would never be in a position to repay his debt. According to Jan Breman, established service relationship could end only if another master was willing to take over the *hali*. The *Hali* system governed the social relationships between Dublas and Anavil Brahmins, who were not priest as in the traditional social hierarchy. Many of them had become landlords even before the Mughal period. Being of the highest castes, they did not participate and contribute in the defiling manual labour that was so vital for agricultural production. Employing *halis* belonging to Dublas caste facilitated their dodging of such menial tasks, which would degrade their position in the caste-hierarchy. *Hali* apart from working as farm servant often performed other duties assigned by his master. His wife also served as maid in the house of the master undertaking all domestic drudgery. His children also served the master especially in tasks involving animal husbandry.

The continuation of *Hali* system was the result of not merely the exploitative power of landlords. It was rooted in the established social relationship based on patronage and the so-called affection, generosity and intercession of their semi-feudal masters and a 'permanent security of livelihood' for the *halis* could be assured. Thus, their servitude was mixed up with a sense of gratitude. Alongside, *Hali* system guaranteed dominant status of anavil Brahmins. During nineteenth century, many of them were involved in sugar plantation. As their income increased, many of them married their daughters into the families of Desais. The employment of *halis* provided them with continuous supply of agricultural labour.

The conditions of lower social orders in other parts of the country were no better. The Chandels in Bengal, the Doms in Bihar and Bhuniyas in south Bihar also reveal that similar scrupulous discriminatory processes of prejudice and inequity were at work. The Namsudras of Bengal, earlier known as Chandels were relegated to the position of Antyaja, for whom even service castes such as barbers, washermen and sometimes lowly placed scavengers refused to perform services. The Bhuniyas provided labour services to the high caste *Maliks* as bonded labourers and they were incorporated as *kamias* in the social hierarchy. The changes associated with colonialism, thus, represented a real shift in both the language and the lived reality of rural social life. The landowning local magnates who had earlier defined their respectable status predominantly in terms of protected landed rights and privileged military service in some parts of the country, now buttressed demands for labour services by imposing grand codes of ritual servility onto an increasing assortment of landless farm servants and former tribal share-croppers who had not previously been bracketed with 'untouchables'. The colonial policy-makers helped such social engineering by inventing customary obligations for those defined low in caste terms. The protection provided to their landed rights by the colonial regime further encouraged such elites to demand *begar* and *vethi* from disadvantaged social groups.

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### 30.5 GENDER DISCRIMINATION

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Several studies have explored gender relation in colonial India. The position of women within households was marked by subordination at a general level. The institution of

Patriarchy and the legal machinery in public sphere further reinforced this subordination. Radhika Singha, Tanika Sarkar and Kumkum Sangari have highlighted these aspects in their works. Urvashi Butalia has pointed out particularly how communal riots violated bodies of women. The print media especially newspapers during colonial rule clearly indicates that women were essentially seen as marker of honour of community and nation. They were not regarded as independent individuals capable of actualising their innate potential. In a male dominated social arrangement, any attempt by them to marry out of caste or with males of different religion evoked widespread resentment. Seen from the perspective of women, social discrimination was practised both at the familial and public levels. The denial of an independent identity amounted to subjection of women. Here it is also important to point out that social religious reform movement focused mainly on the plight of upper caste women. The fate of women and men belonging to lower stratum of society remained neglected. Here women suffered from several discriminatory practices, which were, imposed in the name of customs by the appropriation of upper castes norms and values. Even the stress on the education of women enabled them to become better wives, mothers and managers of their affluent households. The social reformers evoked the vision of an ideal social world, which was at variance from the actual world in which they lived. Therefore, their moral world was conservative and hierarchical, a framework comprising of high and lowly, each in their place. In this male vision, women were placed at the margins of public space. They had to be subordinated even within the realm of domesticity. In some cases, it was the fear of Christian conversion that led to creation of institutional and organizational networks to spread female education. Women had no genuine say over theologies, educational curricula and administrative structures in such institutions.

Sometimes, when the reformers tried to reclaim 'golden age of equality', a time when women were educated and could participate equally in rituals with men; in such discourses also they stressed the traditional and venerated ideal of *pativarta* and the social role of women were still moulded by high caste, middle class patriarchal values. In the religious and social discourses, women were relegated to the margins of sacred space. More importantly, their sexuality, their forms of entertainments and their habits were to be controlled in the name of traditions and customs of lineage. In order to recover a lost past, reformers paint a picture of contemporary moral and cultural degeneration and a homogenized image of traditional women. For the nationalist intelligentsia, securing image of domesticity through a moral and physical rigorous confinement to maintain the fidelity and chastity of women became a new rationale for the subordination of women. The Victorian colonial image of women also equally emphasized the authority of a new reformed ideological community in enforcing these notions of proprieties and contributed to fortification of women subordination in domestic and public space.

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### 30.6 CLOTHES AND CUSTOMS AS MARKER OF SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

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In any society, clothes worn by people of different age, gender and class background act as marker of specific identity. Such identity is reflected not merely in familial space but also in public domain. In colonial India, wearing of specific clothes was connected with maintenance of social distinction. In many parts of India, low castes and tribals were not allowed to wear clothes used by higher castes. It severely restricted the mobility of women belonging to lower castes and tribals. They were subjected to numerous exploitative practices, which were justified in the name of prevailing customs.

In the state of Travancore, low caste shanars who identified themselves as Nadars were engaged in menial and other informal and casual jobs. They were palm tree tappers, carters and agricultural labourers. Many of them were tenants of Nair

landlords. In social hierarchy, they were placed below Nairs who were the landowners and performed military service in the state. Social norms in society were enforced by the state by pointing out specific code of respect and avoidance behaviour. Thus a low caste person while approaching a Brahmin had to speak from a specific distance. In case of Nadars, they were required to stand at the distance of thirty-six paces from the Nambudri Brahmin. Nadars were also not allowed to wear shoes, golden ornaments and carry umbrellas. Their women were not allowed to cover the upper parts of their bodies. All castes below the rank of Nair could wear single cloth of rough texture, covering their bodies from waist up to the knee.

The situation changed when missionaries in Travancore started spreading Christianity. They were concerned about clothes worn by Nadar women. Under the influence of Christianity, many Nadar women started wearing long clothes. Many of them opted for Nair style breast cloth. It evoked strong reaction from Nair community. During 1820s many Nadar women wearing such clothes were attacked and were beaten up in the markets. There was widespread social tension in 1859. The Maharaja of Travancore responded to social tension by issuing a proclamation on 26 July 1859. Under this proclamation all communities were allowed to dress in coarse cloth. They were also allowed to cover their bosoms. However the proclamation also directed Nadar women not to wear breast clothes identical to that worn by Nair women. Thus even the Maharaja of Travancore believed in maintaining social distinction. However Nadar women defied this directive. In his assessment, Hardgrave has concluded that response of Nadars was connected with their attempt to enhance their social status. R.N.Jesudas however has linked this issue with a wider class struggle in the state of Travancore.

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### 30.7 RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION

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The social history of colonial India is replete with instances of discrimination of untouchables and other low castes in the name of religion and established social norms. The Brahmanical domination and ritual purity of upper castes was maintained in villages and urban areas in numerous ways. Even when reformers sought to break caste restrictions, it did not work. For instance, during 1920s Shuddhi movement by the Arya Samaj sought to remove caste divisions. For this purpose, purification ceremonies were held and inter-caste dining was encouraged. However, Swami Shardhanand noted that though upper caste leaders participated in such ceremonies but they did not participate in inter caste-dining ceremonies.

In many parts of India, untouchables were not allowed to enter temples and other sacred places. In villages they were allowed to live only on the outskirts of village residential area. They were not allowed to fetch water from village wells. Under colonial rule, even when traditional ties broke down in the wake of growing economic penetration of colonial economy, it was seen that there were virtually no avenues for low castes to ensure make use of expanding opportunities as they had no entitlements to land and other non-material resources. In Madras, Punjab and Maharashtra, some individuals and small sections among lower castes had tried to improve their conditions but by and large they did not have access to education. Even when they had appropriate skills, in factories they could be employed only in tasks considered to be polluting. For instances in Jullundhur, Kanpur, many were employed in tanneries and shoe-making factories but upper castes maintained distance from them.

There was growing realisation among exploited people that they were discriminated against by dominant and powerful castes due to their lowly ritual status. Non-Brahmin movements such as that of satyasodhaks under Jyotiba Phule in western India and activities of other reformers and leaders like B. R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi sharpened such consciousness. The above-mentioned trends can be exemplified by

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analysing the position of Mahars in Maharashtra. In villages, Mahars were employed as watch men, wall menders, messengers, servants of village headmen and government officials. They were also engaged in the task of removing cattle carcasses. The families of Mahars performed these duties from one generation to another. They were not allowed to question their subordinate position. In the mid-nineteenth century, a Mahar boy from Dharwar sought admission in a government school. He was not granted admission. For the redressal of his grievances, the ‘untouchables’ of Dharwar appealed to the Education Department of Bombay province. In 1857, they also petitioned to the government of India at Calcutta. However, his petition was dismissed on the ground that there was strong opposition from higher castes. In 1890, Gopal Baba Walangkar, and some the retired army soldiers from Ratnagri submitted a petition to the ‘Shankaracharya and other Hindu leaders’. In their petition they listed the disadvantages suffered by the ‘untouchables’. They also pointed out that the ‘untouchables’ did not have access to schools. They were denied stay in dhamshalas and were not allowed to participate in trade.

Krishnaji Keshav Damle vividly described the social stigma attached to ‘untouchability’ in the nineteenth century in his poem:

The First question of the Untouchables Boy  
The children of untouchables  
Poor, gay, playing on the road side—  
A Brahmin came from far  
To the simple, kind what should he say:  
‘ O you brats of Mahars, move away  
Be gone! What are you playing at, you lout?  
Run and give way to the Brahmin!’  
The boy fled— who would dare stay!  
One amongst them did;  
The wicked Brahmin brandished his club and shouted,  
“Ass! Thy shadow must not fell on me,  
Get thee gone, or else this “sweet present”!’  
The kid too slunk homes words,  
Musing—————  
“What if my shadow fell on him?  
What’s so wrong about it?”  
At home he asked the question to his mother.  
The poor mother said:  
“We are low and they are high,  
When you see them, you had “better step aside”

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In Bengal, though economic position of Namasudras were not identical in all parts of province, but they were subjected to numerous social disabilities. These affirmed the dominant position of Bhadralks. For instance, their own Brahmans performed all the religious and social ceremonies of Namasudras. In social feasts they had to sit separately and were expected to clean their dishes. Their living space was also segregated. The voices of many Namasudra recounted such experiences. Citing his

childhood experiences, a Namasudra pointed out that his mother worked in the houses of Kayastha landlords in Burdwan. He also accompanied his mother. His sister also helped in looking after the children of landlords. Thus though coming from lower caste, they were allowed entry into the house of a higher caste landlord. However, one day he saw the eldest son of the landlord urinating in the house. He also did the same but his act infuriated the landlady. She thrashed him. After words, she bathed ceremonially as she had touched an untouchable.

It was presumed by dominant upper castes in Punjab that they had the right to demand labour from Kamins. The latter worked as scavengers and agricultural labourers. Over the period of time, such exploitation was resented. In 1927, in village Baghiana in Lahore district, Kamins belonging to the Balmiki community refused to continue their traditional work of the flaying of dead animals. Against this decision, landowners offered joint contract to Balmikis at lower rate to do the work. When it was refused, landlords resorted to boycott of Balmikis. The latter were not allowed to use the village tank, thoroughfares and common lands. They were also attacked and were not allowed to lodge complaint at the local police station.

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### 30.8 SUMMARY

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On the basis of certain instances, an insight into the processes of social discrimination based on caste, gender and unequal entitlement to resources has been provided. These discriminations were practised under the norms of ritual distinctions and patriarchal ideology. Subordinate social groups also experienced unequal entitlements to land, educational opportunities and other non-material community resources. It was these lived social experiences, which provided the rationale for the resistance against the disadvantaged position inflicted on some social groups by the colonial rule. The institutionalised discrimination was discernible in social relationships in rural India. However, what was considered as natural and inevitable by dominant castes was eventually perceived discriminatory by the lower castes and this opened the terrain for contestation between them.

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### 30.9 GLOSSARY

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<b>Hali System</b>	:	It denoted relationship between Anavil Brahmin landlords and Dublas farm labourers.
<b>Bhadraloks</b>	:	Upper Castes, mainly Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaidyas in Bengal
<b>Kamins</b>	:	Untouchables in Punjab who are required to offer begar/forced labour to upper caste landlords.
<b>Mahars</b>	:	Untouchable caste in Maharashtra.
<b>Dhaniemo</b>	:	Landlord-creditor in South Gujarat.

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### 30.10 EXERCISES

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- 1) “British Rulers denied social respect and equality to Indians rulers for upholding the dominant position” Comment.
- 2) How did women of lower caste suffer in Indian society during nineteenth century?
- 3) Describe *Hali* system in South Gujarat
- 4) Recount some of the experiences of untouchables pointing out social discrimination in colonial India.

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## UNIT 31 POPULAR PROTESTS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

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### Structure

- 31.0 Introduction
- 31.1 Historiographical Trends
- 31.2 Dominant Features of Pre-Colonial Society
- 31.3 Colonial Rule and Ruptures in Society
- 31.4 Characteristics of Popular Protests
- 31.5 Kol Revolt
- 31.6 Santal Revolt
- 31.7 Munda Uprisings
- 31.9 Moplah Uprisings
- 31.9 Punjab Disturbances of 1907
- 31.10 Kisan Sabhas and Baba Ramchandra
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### 31.0 INTRODUCTION

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The official documentation deploys terms like Fitari, Hool, Ding , Ulgulan and Vidroha to describe varied uprisings which were dubbed mainly as law and order problems. However recent researches have shown that these terms denoted popular uprisings against colonial exploitation. These were led by peasants and tribals who were not monolithic entities. The differentiation within peasants and tribals indicated that they were parts of existing social structures and during time of protest, they were as much helped by other poor classes.

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### 31.1 HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRENDS

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Numerous works exist on the agrarian and social history of precolonial and colonial India. While the imperialist historiography has denied exploitation of India and has taken credit for bringing intellectual awakening in India, the nationalist historiography for a long time has only focused on Indian national movement. The role of congress leadership in mobilising peasants has been highlighted. However this has come under scrutiny.

Within Marxian framework, agrarian society and economy has been analysed within the context of mode of production. In the process social differentiation within peasantry has been also pointed out. However Shahid Amin in his study of 'Peasant Production' in colonial Uttar Pradesh has stressed the need to study process of production. In his assessment, only then the problems of peasants and nature of their subjectivity can be highlighted.

Initially works like those of S.B.Choudhary also focussed on the role of peasantry in studying popular movements. However this lacuna has been removed. Social Anthropologists and Historians have focused on various tribal movements to indicate the nature of social structures that determined popular protests led by tribals. In this regard K.Suresh Singh has produced seminal works on the protest movement led by Birsa Munda.

Ranajit Guha who has studied the popular aspects of peasant insurgency between 1783 and 1900 has provided an analytical framework. He has shown that official documentation was indicative of 'power-discourse'. He points out since most of rebels were illiterates they found their existence in official documentation within colonial perspective so only by deconstructing these documents voices of peasants can be found.

He has argued that, as the rebel was conscious of starting revolt against dominant groups so he was an insurgent. However he found his identity at the level of dominant groups. That's why he possessed negative consciousness. Ranajit Guha's work definitely helps in understanding social ties, intellectual and spiritual beliefs that went into the making of peasant revolts. Though historians have questioned his concept of negation and the categories of dominant and subaltern groups but it remains a fact that he has produced wealth of information on the nature of popular protests.

The role of national movement, Mahatma Gandhi and Communist leadership in mobilizing people and coordinating anti imperialist movements has been highlighted in several works. Gyanendra Pandey and Kapil Kumar have analysed Kisan-Sabha movements in Northern India during 1920s. The autonomy of Kisan leaders like Baba Ramchandra and role of restrictive leaderships of congress in controlling peasant movements has been highlighted. Similarly the role of communist party in 1940s in leading popular protests against colonial and feudal exploitation has been highlighted. Mridula Mukherjee in her study on the Punjab has shown the variegated social structures in rural areas, which provided the milieu for variegated protest movements against colonial regime.

In recent years, there has been stress on the environmental history. Ramchandra Guha and Gadgil have argued that Marxian framework of mode of production does not take into account the exploitation of natural resources. They have focussed on 'modes of resource use' to point out how human beings either used natural resources rationally or exploited them on an unlimited scale. Both have argued there emerged 'ecosystem people', 'omnivores' and 'carnivores'. In 'This Fissured land', both have focused on colonial forestry to point out its role in dislocating 'ecosystem people'. Their work definitely helps in understanding the social economic position of tribal & non-tribal people who were at the subsistence level.

Several historians and anthropologists have done the categorisation of various popular protests. Kathleen Gough has focused on restorative and transformative movements. E.J.Hobbsbawn has deployed the concept of social banditry in studying pre-industrial Europe. He has differentiated between crime and revolt. Gough has also used this category. However Ranajit Guha has argued that while Hobsbawn has dubbed such protest as pre-political in pre-industrial Europe, however under colonial rule, aims and ideological basis of peasants revolts, though in nascent form were political in nature. K.Suresh Singh in his analysis has pointed out the changing nature of various protest movements.

The presence of millenarian trends in popular uprisings has been studied by Stephen Fuchs in his 'Rebellious Prophet' the emergence of messianic leaders who emerged during times of ruptures between traditional and alien cultural norms has been highlighted by him.

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## 31.2 DOMINANT FEATURES OF PRE-COLONIAL SOCIETY

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Several researches have shown that pre colonial Indian society was not static. Though village was the basic unit of administration and social ties. India was mainly rural and was constituted by thousands of villages. However these were not 'little republic' as



colonial administrators dubbed them to show that villages were static and self-dependent, having no linkages with larger 'political set-up'. The land revenue was the main source of income for the state. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, decline and disintegration of Mughal Empire was followed by the emergence of numerous successor states. During this period social structure was shaped by several elements. One of the most important elements was rooted in economic ties within village and between villages and urban centres.

The political turmoil of the later eighteenth century left its mark on the countryside. In the Delhi region, semi-tribal groups like the Gujars and Jats extended their settlements from the upper doab, to the arable 'upland' plain. Their settled village communities depicted hierarchy of traditional rights over land. There were either 'primary' or 'secondary Zamindars'. Mostly there existed joint extended family management and partial ownership constituted the most common tenurial form. In Punjab, primary Zamindars were the cultivators. The bhaichara communities of the Jats owned land collectively. In the upper doab, primary land control rights were held by dominant castes that were elites in the society.

The relationship between groups of dominant peasant castes and service and artisan castes were shaped by the Jajmani system. It centred on the organization of production and distribution around the institution of hereditary occupational castes. The non-agricultural castes were either granted fixed village produce in lieu of their services or small plots of land. The prevalence of caste system did not denote rigid division. M.N.Srinivas has pointed out the process of upward mobility in several parts of India. Though service and occupational castes were free to sell their products within village or even outside, however there was a tendency towards a high degree of specialization. It resulted in close relationship between specific castes and occupations. The dagbar who made leather bags for holding Ghi and Sugar cane juice was socially and occupationally distinct from the Chamar manufacturing shoes, leather ropes and drumhead. The flexibility and mobility was evident in the fact that a very large proportion of the gentry in Bihar, both Hindu and Muslims, cultivated with their own hands. Brahmins were also farmers in the South.

In the tribal regions like Bengal, land hitherto held by tribals was gradually being claimed by dominant castes. While some tribal groups were hunters and gatherers, others were engaged in shifting cultivation. There was dependence on forest and water bodies. In the western ghats of Maharashtra, villages were formed by two caste groups of the Kunbis and Gavlis. The former living in the lower valley practised paddy cultivation. The Gavlis living on the upper hill terrace kept large herds of buffaloes and cattle. There was interdependence between both groups for obtaining necessities of life. In the state of Karnataka, in a village Masur, British Gazetteers noted the existence of thirteen different endogamous groups. Some of them were fishing communities, other were agriculturalists, horticulturalists and entertainers.

There were no direct linkages between caste and class. Within a caste, social differentiation existed on the basis of status and power. Infact the relations of domination and subordination were governed by moral codes. The low castes were required to obey and respect dominant castes. Within the family, patriarchal domination caused the subordination of women. Kinship and sexual status was also marked by difference in speech. In his description of Malabar in the nineteenth century, Logan noted—

'The house itself is called by different names according to the occupant's caste. The house of a Pariah is a cheri, while the agrestic slave—the cheraman—lives in Chala'.

In Gujarat a patidar youth was not allowed to initiate conversation in the company of his elders. In Orissa, a Bauri untouchable was not to speak to a high caste until spoken to. In parts of southern India, a servant would cover his mouth while receiving his master's command. The objects of wear also constituted status symbol. Umbrella

and shoes were markers of high castes. In Gujarat, the so-called impure Mahars were not allowed to tuck up their loin cloths but had to trail it along the ground.

Thus social differentiation was buttressed by customary and cultural norms. The religious groups enjoyed power in tribal regions. There was faith in superstitions and rituals sanctioned by dominant religions. There existed village deities and also symbols of nature. The role of education was limited. It was the religious beliefs, which shaped the ritual practices and belief systems of people.

Within this milieu, several changing processes marked colonial intervention.

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### 31.3 COLONIAL RULE AND RUPTURES IN SOCIETY

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It was the East India Company, which had come to India for trade. Taking advantage of local polity, it laid the foundation of colonial rule from Bengal in the eighteenth-century. Irfan Habib has divided colonial rule of British into three distinct phases from monopolistic trading rights, company shifted to the policy of free trade in the early nineteenth century. After 1813, British declared themselves to be the 'Paramount Power' in India. The colonial expansion lasted till 1856. After suppressing the revolt of 1857, British converted India into the direct colony of Britain. In the subsequent years, colonial domination was further entrenched.

From the outset British evolved policies, which were meant to maximize their resources. The ideological basis of British rule rested upon the suppression of subject population. The advent of Christianity from eighteenth century was marked by the establishment of press, church, hospitals and orphanages. Alongside administrative structure was supported by the police and the army.

The established colonial hegemony led to disaffection of different social groups. The Dual System in Bengal (1765-1772) resulted in widespread famine claiming 1/3 of total population. The attempts of British to deprive locally influential Rajas, Zamindars and Military persons also caused tension.

As land was the main source of income for the state so British focused on the land revenue system. For this purpose Cornwallis introduced the Permanent settlement in 1793 in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. During the same period, Monroe introduced the Ryotwari system in Madras. In 1835, William Bentinck introduced the Mahalwari system in North Western Province. It was further extended to Punjab. After annexing Punjab, in 1849, British introduced agrarian changes in the provinces. There was extensive canal colonisation in western Punjab. These agrarian changes not only augmented the resources of state but also gave birth to colonial sociology.

The colonial sociology encouraged land lordism. In canal colonies, supporters of Raj were given land, which led to settlement of Punjabis in western Punjab from central Punjab. Everywhere position of peasantry started declining.

The penetration of market forces and connection with capitalism led to commercialisation of agriculture. However numerous studies have shown that it only led to decline and indebtedness of peasantry. In pre-colonial times also small peasants had to borrow from village's Banias. However in the existing network, peasants could not be evicted from their land. Under colonial rule, big merchants and Zamindars became the moneylenders. They used the legal system to deprive peasants of their land. The situation was worse in tribal regions where outsiders started settling as traders and moneylenders. In several places, tribal population could not understand the implication of established legal and administrative set up. There was hatred for outsiders or dikus as they were called.

The process of deindustrialisation further deprived peasants of their source of income. Numerous village industries declined. The artisans were reduced to the position of labourers. They had to leave their villages in search of work. Their living conditions in industrial belts like Calcutta, Bombay and Kanpur were miserable. In this way, there was decline and disintegration of traditional ties symbolised by the Jajmani System.

As British declared themselves to be the owners of forest wealth, it directly affected the position of tribal communities which were dependent upon forest. It was in 1865 that an Act was passed which declared claims of the state over the forests. It was followed by the enactment of the Indian Forest Act of 1878. Under this Act, control of state over the resources of forests increased. Very limited rights were given to traditional tribal communities. Thus, there was ban on the shifting cultivation. The tribals as per their customs were not allowed to hunt and they were assigned limited space for their animals. The extension of railways network further led to penetration of rich trading classes into the distant areas of India. The development of plantation economy not only led to degradation of environment but the 'rule of records' as formed by the British led to the undermining of traditional rights.

Subjected to exploitation, various castes and communities responded in multiple ways. The web of relationships that had existed since pre-colonial times were sustained in several parts of India. Those who had been deprived of power and authority gained support from common people. Thus displaced rulers had the support of local population. Within specific regions, tribal population reacted against exploitation. In several cases intertribal affinities were formed.

The social religious reform movement in nineteenth century also had its bearing on small peasants, low caste groups and tribal population. There was influence of Christianity as well. There was affirmation of faith in specific belief systems. By late nineteenth century, as nationalism was evident in public domain and gradually it gave birth to mass nationalism, there was change also in the popular protest movements. While some retained their autonomy, others joined anti imperialist struggle.

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### **31.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF POPULAR PROTESTS**

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In his assessment, Ranajit Guha has counted 118-protest movements between 1783-1900. Their number kept on rising in the twentieth century. It is not possible to analyse hundreds of these movements. However by focusing on the structure of protest, dominant characteristics of popular protests in colonial times can be pointed out:

- 1) In the initial years of British rule displaced rulers and military personnels reacted against colonial demands. For instance when Warren Hastings demanded money from Chet Singh, Raja of Banaras and when latter failed to give it, he was arrested. However people of Banaras supported Chet Singh and protested against colonial rule. The Bishenpur revolt of 1789 led by local ruler and supported by local people was also identical in nature. Between 1799-1800 Poligars who were deprived of their military power adopted Gorilla warfare to thwart the authority of British rulers. These were localised protests and rooted in specific causes.
- 2) In all popular protests, economic exploitation as perpetuated by the British rule caused tension. The land revenue policies and Forests laws led to resentment. Alongside exploitation of dominant Indian Zamindars and Moneylenders was also opposed. Thus the revolt of Sanyasis and Fakirs, which resulted from the famine of 1769-70, was directed against British rulers and local Zamindars in Bengal. The revolt of Kols (1831-32) and Bhumij (1832-33) was also rooted in colonial exploitation.

- 3) Many uprisings were restorative in nature. The rebels aimed to restore back pre-existing political structure and social and economic rights. There was protest against the penetration of alien authorities and outsiders. Thus in the revolt of 1857, leadership of traditional rulers was accepted. Alongside small peasants belonging to Jat and Rajputs also rose against alien rule. There were peaceful efforts to restore back what the protestors regarded their rights. Thus in the Pabna uprising of 1873-1883 tenant farmers hoped that the British rule was in favour of restoring back their landed rights.
- 4) In numerous uprisings there was protest against growing indebtedness. Thus the Deccan revolt of 1875 was against Marwaris moneylenders.
- 5) Violence was an integral part of popular protests. It was directed against oppressors.
- 6) Over the period of time, protest movements/uprisings became more organised. The role of charismatic leaders and religion in providing support and strength to rebels also became clear. Thus Titu Mir in rising against the exploitation of zamindars, who were Hindus, effectively used Islam in forging solidarity among his people. The millenarian trends were also evident in the revolt of Santals and Mundas.
- 7) In terms of seeking support it was found that inter-tribal and inter regional linkages were also formed. The revolts were only directed against exploiters. Thus, the Kinship ties, caste and tribal identities were permeated by class-consciousness.
- 8) The role of women was also apparent in the revolts of Santals, Mundas and Mopilahs. They were an integral part of families and communities. They helped their male folks in productive activities and during the time of tension, they also joined them in acts of violence.
- 9) Numerous historians have explored the nexus between popular movements and national movement. The role of Gandhian leadership in converting national movement into mass movement was also evident. During 1920s Kisan Sabhas in U.P and Bihar provided organizational skills to peasants. Similarly, the role of communists in leading peasants' protests against colonial and feudal exploitation became explicit in 1940s.

The above-mentioned features can be analysed in detail by focusing on specific protests in colonial period.

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### 31.5 KOL REVOLT

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It erupted in some parts of Bihar in 1831-1832. Kols were agriculturalists. The growing land revenue and indebtedness caused socio-economic tension in the area. It was noted by British official Wilkinson that landlords and contractors had increased land revenue by 35%. There was resentment against the land revenue system as the British introduced it. The tension erupted when in 1831; twelve villages of Sinhari Manki in Sonpur were handed over to outsiders. They were reports about maltreatment being meted out to his sisters. It was also reported that one Munda women had been kidnapped in Singbhum. There was growing recognition that British policies had deprived Kols of their rights over land. It was against this exploitation that Kols of Sonpur, Tamar and Naundgoan were directed to assemble in Tamar. The decision was taken to avenge insult by indulging in acts of loot, killing and burning. They were also extended help by the Mundas. The revolt spread in Chotanagpur, Singbhum and Palamau. Thus the revolt of Kols exhibited the tribal consciousness against exploitation. Their ability to unite their people and to secure help from other tribals residing in their vicinity was indicative of the fact that they were united in their protest against colonial exploiters.

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## 31.6 SANTAL REVOLT

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Santal revolt was characterised by class solidarity transcending ethnicity. There was not only well defined programme to resist exploitation but the leadership of Sido and Kanhu was characterized by usage of spiritual codes to organise rebels. Before the outbreak, elaborate preparations were made. Both written and oral messages were used to solicit support. Above all, women also played an important role in the uprisings. The way this revolt started and spread over vast space showed that Santals were determined to combat their exploiters.

Santals lived in Birbhum, Singbhum, Hazari Bagh, Bhagalpur and Munger. They were agriculturalists. However the entrenchment of land lordism, usage of legal machinery by money lenders subjected them to continuous exploitation. As per the contemporary accounts of lawyer Degamber Chakravarty and Chhotre Dasmanj, Santals failed to comprehend the exploitative nature of British administration. Initially they hoped that their grievances would be redressed by the British officials. However when it did not happen, Santals decided to rise in revolt.

In leading Santals against growing exploitation, leadership was provided by Sido and Kanhu. They proclaimed divine sanction to lead the revolt. They issued parwanas containing their messages and directing local population to extend help to them. For it, they sought help from non tribal population like artisans and other service groups like the Dom, the Lohar and the Gwala. The defaulters were explicitly warned that they work loose their lives. Thus Sido and Kanhu exhorted their local populace to take up arms against exploiting money lender and British administrators. Thus one of the parwana sent by Sido and Kanhu read, “the sahib and the white soldiers will fight. Kanoo and Seedoo manjee are not fighting. The thacoor himself will fight———”. They also observed, “The Mahajans have committed a great sin; The Sahibs and the amlah have made everything bad, in this the Sahibs have sinned greatly. Those who tell things to the magistrate and those who investigate cases for him, take 70 to 80 Rupees. with great oppression in this the Sahibs have sinned. On this account the Thacoor has ordered me saying that the country is not the Sahib”.

There were series of meetings in which tribal chiefs and local population outlined preparations for the revolt. It started in 1855 with series of dacoities in Bhagalpur, Birbhum and Bankure where Bengali landlords were attacked and their properties were looted. From the beginning looted goods were equally divided among rebels. There was participation of women in dacoities. There was appropriation of religions rituals practised by upper castes. For instance, Sido and Kanhu offered puja to Goddess Durga. For the performance of Puja, two Brahmins were abducted. It was also decided to march to Calcutta in order to present their grievances before the rulers. However brutal suppression by authorities who resorted to destruction of Santals villages and accumulated loot, led to weakening of the movement. Santals resorted to plundering for the purpose of sustaining themselves. However, eventually the army suppressed the revolt. There were arrests on large scale. Women were also arrested.

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## 31.7 MUNDA UPRISINGS

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The scholarly work of K.Suresh Singh on the history of Munda tribe reveals how this tribal community responded to on going exploitation. The penetration of outsiders and colonial administration coupled with missionary activities created a milieu in which Birsa Munda provided the charismatic leadership and led the revolt in 1899-1900. The millenarian trends were evident in this uprising. The support of regional customary ties permeating different tribal groups helped in solidifying support for the Mundas. The leadership of Birsa Munda was successful in uniting exploited against the exploiters.

This tribe resided in the region south of Ranchi. The land holdings were based on tribal lineages or the Khuntkatti land system. This was eroded by merchants and money lenders who penetrated into their area as contractors and landlords. There was recruitment of indentured labour. To redress their grievances, Mundas resorted to peaceful methods. They sought help from missionaries. However there was no change in their position.

The growing resentment resulted in the protest of tribal chiefs-Sardars. They tried to dislodge the alien landlords and also tried to put an end to forced labour. In this, they sought help of a Calcutta based Anglo-Indian lawyer. However they were cheated. It led to the feeling that both Sarkar and the missionaries had done nothing to resolve their problems. They had to seek help from within their community.

It came in the form of Birsa Munda. He was born in 1874. His father was a share cropper. Initially, he received education from the missionaries. He was also influenced by Vaishnava religion. The practitioner of vaishnavas had led a movement in 1893-94 to prevent village waste land being taken over by the forest department. Birsa Munda also came under the influence of Christianity and mixed many of its beliefs in his religious and spiritual formulations. It was in 1895 that he had a vision of a supreme God. He claimed himself to be a prophet having miraculous heading powers. Soon thousands of people flocked to hear the 'new word' proclaiming an immediate deluge. For extending help to the Sardars in their struggle, Birsa was jailed in 1895. After two years, when he was released, Birsa had become more determined to fight against oppression. In 1898-99, a series of night meetings were held in the forest. Birsa exhorted gatherers to kill 'Thakedars, Jagirdars, Rajas, Hakims and Christians'. He promised that 'the guns and the bullets of enemies would turn into water'. There was faith in his miraculous powers.

The uprising began in 1899 on Christmas Eve. The Mundas shot arrows and tried to burn down Churches in Ranchi and Singhbhum. They also targeted the police. However they were defeated at Sail Rakab hill on January 9. There was arrest of Birsa Munda who died in jail. Many hundreds of Mundas were arrested and were punished. Though the Munda uprising failed to redress grievances of local population but the vision of Birsa Munda survived and kept on inspiring the local people.

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## 31.8 MOPLAH UPRISINGS

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Between 1836-1919, Moplahs rose 28 times against the exploitation of Jenmis or landlords. There was participation of only 349 Moplahs in these outbreaks. However what distinguished their violent revolt was the permeation of Islam in inducing them to rise against the landlords. Though illiterate Moplahs did not understand the doctrines of Islam correctly but they believed that by killing Jenmis and then by facing death, they would attain martyrdom. In this form of protest, they were symbolically prepared by their wives.

Moplahs lived in Malabar where they were either lease holders – Kanamdars or cultivators- Verumpattandars. They were Muslims and were subjected to the growing authority of Hindu upper caste landlords. These were Namboordi and Nair Jenmis. The British policies further strengthened their hold over Moplahs. They lived in small villages and had very limited resources. It was the mosque, which provided them identity. The number of mosques rose in Malabar from 637 in 1831 to 1058 by 1851. They also came under the influence of Sayyid Alwawi and his son Fadl who were Tangals of Mambram near tirurangadi. It were in Ernad and Walluvanad talukas of South Malabar that revolts started. Many Jenmis were killed. Most of Moplah martyrs were poor peasants. Thus some historians see it as a class struggle, which was permeated by religious ideology.

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### **31.9 PUNJAB DISTURBANCES OF 1907**

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The process of canal colonisation in western Punjab was rooted in the rule of British paternalism. Large tracts of land were colonised by carefully selecting different caste and status groups. The crown tenants were granted the right to purchase land after completing an initial period of probation. Many big landlords emerged in this region. The existing laws were manipulated. The local lower level bureaucracy extorted money to prevent punishment to the potential defaulters. Subjected to everyday administrative interference, resentment grew in several canal areas.

It exploded in the form of the agrarian agitation of 1907. The discontent of peasants resulted from a series of government measures. The Punjab land colonisation bill was introduced in the Punjab council on October 25, 1906. It sought to alter the conditions on which land was granted to colonists in the canal colonies. In November 1906, the government ordered enhancement in the canal water rates on the Bari Doab canal. It provided water for irrigation in the district of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Lahore. The increased rate was up to 50 percent. The land revenue in the Rawalpindi district was also enhanced. More over the colonization Bill of 1906 sought to legalize the imposition of fines for infringements of the conditions laid down for grant of land. These were to remain outside the purview of courts. The law of primogeniture for inheritance was stressed. There was even bar on the purchasing of the land by the colonists.

Subjected to these restrictions, peasants started their agitation. Not only there was breakdown in rural and urban divide but also peasants cutting across religious differences joined the struggle. The big Zamindars Association took the lead. With the coming of Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai, agitation became wide spread. Numerous public meetings were held to criticise government's measures. Eventually the government had to yield. The viceroy vetoed the colonization Bill. The Punjab government also withdrew the enhancement of water rates. The agitation symbolised radicalization of peasantry and its linkages with nationalism.

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### **31.10 KISAN SABHAS AND BABA RAMCHANDRA**

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David Hardiman has observed that by the end of nineteenth century, there was emergence of peasant nationalism. By the time mass nationalism had emerged under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, there was widespread influence of Congress in many parts of India. In U.P, numerous Kisan sabhas had emerged. When the Non-Cooperation movement started in 1921, Kisan Sabhas provided the recruitment ground for Satyagrahis. However autonomy of Kisan Sabhas and their participation in anti imperialists struggle was also evident in Southeast Avadh. Here, Baba Ramchandra provided the leadership. His domination over peasants was resented by the Congress leadership, which wanted peasants participation to be non-violent in nature. However peasants rose in widespread agrarian riots in Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh, Fyzabad and Sultanpur between January and March 1921. Not only bazaars were attacked, the houses and crops of Talukdars and property of merchants was also targeted. On January 6, 1921, 10000 peasants attacked Fursatganj bazaar in Rae Bareli and resorted to fixing of prices for grain and cloth. There were also clashes with police. The subversion of colonial authority was evident in setting up of peasants' panchayats to redress their grievances. Thus through Kisan sabhas, peasants were organising themselves. They also responded to mass nationalism. However, they also exhibited consciousness, which was cognitive of exploitation being perpetuated by big landlords and merchants. That's why attempt of Congress to channelise them in peaceful struggle directed only against authorities failed.

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## 31.11 TELENGANA

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During 1930s and 1940s peasants had come under the influence of Kisan Sabhas, Congress and Communist ideology. In several states, violent protests were led by feudal exploitation and the control of land by feudal lords was strongly resented. It was in Telengana that the biggest peasant guerrilla war occurred between July 1946 and October 1951. It spread over 16,000 square miles covering 3000 villages. Nearly three million people participated in the struggle.

It was in Telengana that lower caste, tribal peasants and debt slaves were subjected to exploitation of Muslims and high caste deshmukhs and Jagirdars. The state of Hyderabad under Asafjahi Nizams was also indifferent. The influence of communists spread during world war II. They had used the Andhra Mahasabha to spread their influence. They also provided leadership in leading struggle against local issues. There was also massive collection of arms by peasants.

The revolt began when on July 4, 1946, thugs employed by the deshmukh of Viunar in Jangaon taluka of Nalgonda murdered a village militant. The latter was involved in struggle to defend a land of poor washerwoman. Very soon, the movement spread into the district of Warangal and Khammam. From early 1947 small bands were formed. They used guerrilla warfare resulting in disappearance of Vetti and bonded labour. Not only agricultural wages were increased but also in several instances, confiscated land was returned back to previous peasants holders. Even wastelands were redistributed. Sundarayya, a leading figure in the armed struggle had shown in his narrative, how socio-economic equality was sought to be established in the liberated areas. There was wide spread influence of the communist leaders. However strong military action and indifference of better off peasants led to slackening of influence of communist leaders. They were driven out from the settled plains of Nalgonda, Warangal and Khammam. They had to make Nallamallia hills across the Krishna to the south and the Godavari region to the northeast as their base. Chenchu and Koya tribals were organised. However gradually by 1950-51, guerrilla action degenerated into occasional murders. Though the Telengana movement could not benefit tribals but the regime of Hyderabad was destroyed. Andhra Pradesh was formed on linguistic lines and Jagirdari was also abolished.

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## 31.12 SUMMARY

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The above-mentioned narrative indicates the popular movements denoted struggle of dispossessed and exploited peasants and tribals. Their social milieu was tied down by co relationship with several other caste groups. The colonial rulers through their administrative set up also subjected them to exploitation. There was penetration of outsiders into their region. Over the period of time, several protests sought redressal of their grievances in peaceful way. They also responded to the call of dispossessed local Rajas in their struggle against colonial rulers. However, over the period of time, there was recognition that both rulers and Indian dominant groups were exploiting them. Most of popular protests remained localized. During the time of revolts, they used existing social ties cutting across ethnicity. There was also influence of religions. In an era of mass nationalism, these protests came to exhibit class consciousness. Autonomous leadership provided the ideological basis and all India based movement led by the congress. The growing influence of communists also became apparent. Thus both leadership and specified goals came to characterise popular uprisings.



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### 31.13 GLOSSARY

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<b>Vanis</b>	: Village Mahajans
<b>Thangals</b>	: Priests in malabar
<b>Jenmis</b>	: Landlords of Malabar region
<b>Social Banditry</b>	: a term used by E.J.Hobsbawm, to point out acts of violence in pre industrial Europe by poor people. These were not criminal acts but were result of collective action by poor people to redress their grievances
<b>Deshmukhs</b>	: revenue collector turned landlords.
<b>Restorative Movement</b>	: a term used by Kathleen Gough to study those protest movements of peasants and tribals, which aimed at restoring pre-colonial political set up.
<b>Transformative Movements</b>	: These denoted strong organisational set up and well defined ideological base. Leaders, who after subverting colonial authority aimed at establishing new order in the region often, led these. Such set up was meant to grant rights and privileges to exploited people.
<b>Insurgency</b>	: Acts of violence/protests by peasants
<b>Millenarianism</b>	: Stephan Fuchs studied these movements under this concept, which were marked by the emergence of messianic leaders. They drew inspiration of various religious and promised their followers new world where in they were to enjoy their rights.

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### 31.14 EXERCISES

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- 1) Assess the role of British policies in undermining the rights of peasants in nineteenth century India
- 2) Briefly describe the dominant features of popular protests in the nineteenth century
- 3) Describe the role of religion in the Moplah and Munda uprisings.
- 4) Assess the contribution of Ranajit Guha and K. Suresh Singh in the historiography of popular uprisings in colonial India.
- 5) Briefly describe the Telengana struggle of 1946-1951.

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## UNIT 32 STUDYING TRIBES UNDER COLONIALISM

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### Structure

- 32.0 Introduction
- 32.1 Perceptions of Tribes Before Colonial Annexation of Territories
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### 32.0 INTRODUCTION

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This unit shows how the different perceptions of tribes and their problems have influenced the anthropological writings of our times. In the main we identify two tendencies in this unit: one which argued for the isolation of tribes in order that their ancient heritage be preserved and the second one that argued for the assimilation of tribal people into the mainstream of Indian life. Between these two ends of the spectrum there were varying degrees of opinion that reflected the status, political stance and historical conjecture at which particular actors stood. But this was only part of the story as perceptions of tribes were also determined by the exigencies of colonial rule. Thus the competing perceptions of tribes, as we know them today, were a result of the transformations of the polity, society and economy in different points in history. It uses selected primary and secondary materials for this purpose.

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### 32.1 PERCEPTIONS OF TRIBES BEFORE COLONIAL ANNEXATION OF TERRITORIES

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The first forays of British colonists into North and Central India in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century got them in touch with several non-agricultural communities. These communities were dependent on both land and forest resources for their survival and often came into conflict with their rulers in order to meet their needs. In his recent work on Khandesh and Central India Sumit Guha shows that early British accounts in the region suggest that the complex interrelationships between pre-colonial regimes of natural resource management, environmental changes and tribal subsistence in the Maratha period. The resultant identity of people as tribals is then governed by the multiple contexts of survival within which these people used to live. Larger patterns of resource use and the impact of other forces on them also determined the political economy of such identities and survival systems.

In pre-colonial Central and Northern India one of the main factors that had an impact on both identity and subsistence was the military conflict between ruling elite in both the Maratha and Mughal periods. The chieftain societies of different tribes like the Gonds or the Khakkars or Jats also participated in these conflicts. At the same time the tribals who were peasants and or gatherers in the forests were forced to support their own chieftains and therefore formed bands in forests and formed important part of the chieftains mercenary army. In this context it is important to remember that the term “tribes” has been used very loosely for communities which were existed in a “pre-class society”. In keeping with this definition many communities that were later

described as peasants by Britishers were termed tribes by the accounts of the medieval period. Chetan Singh's early article on the role of tribal chieftains in Mughal administration clearly identified warrior and ruling classes of indigenous kingdoms as superior tribal linkages. Amongst these were the Jats, the Kakkhars, Baluchis and Afghans in this vein, the chief feature of their society not only being their blood and kinship line of descent but also their pastoral and non-sedentary occupational characteristics. In a later article Singh is however more categorical about the mention of hunters and gatherers as primitive people. For example he writes of their references in Akbarnama where tribal people were described as "men who go naked living in the wilds, and subsist by their bows and arrows and the game they kill". He also argues that the medieval texts show that in case of tribals like the Gonds "that people of India despise them and regard them outside the pale of their realm and religion". Such an identification of tribals as outside the realm of the sedentary cultivation was contingent upon the development of a system of land administration which was an important characteristic of the Mughal 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and British regimes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before that the British perceptions of tribes were conditioned by their own contingencies. For example the Anglo-Maratha conflicts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century led to descriptions that described the Gond chieftains as the "lords of the rugged hills" and their subjects as people who were prone to anarchic behaviour and "habitual depredations". Some of these depredations were described as "ravages of lawless tribes" who assisted the errant and "chaotic rulers. We see similar perceptions of the tribes on the Northeast frontiers of the British Rule. Writing about the Eastern Naga tribes in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Captain Michelle said that the Nagas carried on the most profitable trade in slaves and suppressed all ryots in their neighbourhood. The greed of gain caused endless feuds between villages and tribes. . There are numerous accounts like this that stress the importance and the situation of the tribes before the annexation of territories and after British domination. In almost all these accounts the tribal problem appears to be one where the British see themselves as people who have a duty towards teaching tribals civilised behaviour and an orderly life. While this expression of the civilising mission did not change after the annexation of territories. Rather it expressed itself in a different form.

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## 32.2 TRIBES AND THEIR COLONIAL RULERS

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The advent of colonialism in regions that were earlier under residencies and indigenous chieftancies saw the assertion of British colonial sovereignty in several significant ways some of which have been described by Nandini Sundar in the context of tribal Bastar. However from the point of view of perceptions about tribals themselves perhaps the most important factor that influenced them was the settlement of territories and land rights in the Provinces with significant amount of tribal populations. The permanent settlement in Bengal in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent ryot settlements in Madras, Central Provinces and United Provinces all betrayed a bias towards a certain notion of the agrarian society which was firmly grounded in the ideas about modernity and progress. Within this perspective an evolutionary way of seeing development also influenced the colonial images of tribal life. For example the *Report of the Ethnological Committee of the Races of Central Provinces* that described its task in the following manner:

"We have confined our analysis entirely to very curious tribes in this country, which are usually called aborigines, their original seat in reality being unknown and which are supposed to be different in languages, custom and physical formation from the greatness of India".

The term 'race' excluded all races and castes that were considered immigrants, i.e., the Hindu cultivators who settled in the valleys and the plains since the ancient times. It only included the tribals who were considered the original inhabitants of the country

and carried special reports on areas like Chanda, Bhandara and others that were considered to be strongholds of tribal population. The notion that tribes were the original and isolated inhabitants of the forests was useful to colonial officials in their endeavour to take over the fertile plains and valleys of different parts of the country. In keeping with this image they were also described as rather timid, shy and well behaved. For example Briggs remarked in his *Lecture on the Wild Tribes* that they were the “best behaved wild tribes” even while they lived in seclusion and acted as the “wild beasts around them”.

The second characteristic of the official images in the early and mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was the notion that these “primitive tribes” were essentially animist forest people who hated the intrusion of outsiders into their life. A good example of this was the description of the Baigas and the Gonds of the “remotest hills” in the Central Provinces who were described as living in harmony with nature. Forsyth’s account of the Maikal hills was reflective of this when he wrote that:

“The real Byga of the hill ranges is still almost in the state of nature. They are very black, with an upright slim, though exceedingly wiry frame showing less of the negretto type of features than any other of these wild tribes.... Destitute of all clothing but a small strip of cloth.... The Byga is the very model of a hill tribe”.

This introduction to the Byga is accompanied by Forsyth’s detailed account of the forest hunt and the pursuit of game. He considered their cultivation practices and hunting as a sign of their seclusion and primitiveness.

Finally, despite such a classification of the Bygas, Forsyth and his colleagues were not unaware of the differentiation within the tribal economy. Tribals were classified according to their level of development and their amalgamation of the Hindu society. Social customs and conventions was a yardstick to assess the ‘scale of civilisation’. On the economic front the scale of civilisation that the report referred to was measured by the yardstick of progress which was manifested in the idea of a peasant. This meant that the colonial ideals about the improvement of the tribal society was centred around their perception of their own role in teaching tribal people how to live a civilised life. This meant that they were to be taught plough cultivation that was more desirable than shifting cultivation and that all those living in the rural areas had to be taught the value of a sedentary peasant society.

It is in this context that the first impressions of bewar (a term for shifting cultivation in the Central Provinces) justified the British need of intervention for the improvement in Baiga lifestyle in consonance with the above-mentioned idea of progress. In colonial terminology the terms bewar and dhaiya were used for the Baiga cultivation. The term bewar was sometimes also used for the field that the Baigas prepare for cultivation. Despite this confusion, in all cases the term *dhaiya* and bewar were used for survival systems that were classed primitive, isolated and highly destructive to forests. For example, Richard Temple just after the formation of the Central Provinces that:

“One great cause of wastage and destruction of the forest is called Dhya cultivation? This Dhya cultivation is practically a substitute for ploughing and a device for saving trouble of that operation. It is resorted to by hill people who are averse to labour and have virtually no agricultural capital”.

Temple classified the dhaiya economy as “primitive” or “backward”. Its traits were laziness and wastefulness. He implied that the tribals of the Central Provinces preferred to do the minimum amount of labour to eke the minimum that they needed. Above all such images also stressed the fact that bewar cultivation was not eco-friendly and brought about the destruction of the forests. All these arguments were used to justify colonial interventions for controlling land and forests in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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### 32.3 ROMANTICISM AND TRIBAL PROTECTION: COLONIALISM AND ANTHROPOLOGY IN 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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The late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a worsening of living conditions of tribal people in the tribal areas. Most areas like Bihar, Orissa and Central Provinces, land alienation and indebtedness amongst tribal people grew at an alarming rate. At the same time the conditions of tribals in forests also worsened as they were reduced to providing cheap labour to the forest department. All this created conditions of extreme dissatisfaction that also led to much protest by tribal people. Some of the most famous ones were Birsa Munda's movement in 1875, the Gudem Ramapa Uprising and the Santhal Uprising that forced the colonial policies. In other areas like the Mandla district of the Central Provinces Baiga tribal people fled from the forests and the British were forced to negotiate with them so that they remain in their villages and work for the forest department. They were thus forced to create an area where the otherwise banned practice of shifting cultivation would be allowed in some part of the forests. All these protests and negotiations not only resulted in some welfare measures being put into place but also resulted in the crystallisation of the tribal cultural identity which was reflected in anthropological and official texts of the time.

One of the most important debates of the time was the debate about the demarcation of tribal areas into protected zones under the Government of India Act of 1935. The enactment of the provisions showed that the tribals had now become completely dependent on the welfare measures of the state to meet their basic needs. The debate on the measures proposed under the Act also revealed the way in which different people viewed tribal people. One of the most important figures in the debate was W.V. Grigson, an official who was commissioned to enquire into conditions of tribals in the Central Provinces viewed them with the lens of benevolent patriarchal authority. In the *Maria Gonds of Bastar* he wrote that the Marias, a primitive tribe of Bastar, were people who had lived in harmony with forests and thus he said that:

“In most of this area (*penda* area) the forests have been too remote and inaccessible to be exploited, and that, even though some fine timber has been sacrificed much that has gone is over mature. Vast areas of forest have been reserved by the State, and it is not possible to work half these reserves. The Maria does not rage through the forest clearing patches for cultivation at random; he has more or less definite rotations, and a field of two to three years' they may have a twelve or fourteen years' rest, and a dense forest at the end of it. The axe and fire have let the light of civilisation penetrate slowly but surely into the Bison-horn country as nothing would have done for centuries; they alone have prevented the Abujhmarh tract from remaining a trackless wilderness”.

This view marked a significant departure from the views of officials in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It also showed that the officials were forced to recognise the rights of tribal people in a manner that they were being articulated at that time. Further people like Grigson also reflected upon the role of the British Empire in tribal development when he wrote that,

“Above all there must be an approach to some elements of 'economic democracy' if the aboriginal is to play his due part in the India of the future.... There is no political democracy without economic democracy”.

For Grigson 'economic democracy' denoted ownership of land, freedom from indebtedness and from exploitation of labour at unusually low wages. To achieve 'economic democracy' outside intervention in tribal areas had to be restricted and

government protection ensured. However what is significant about Grigson's perception is the fact that he considered the people in Bastar as similar to that of people in Africa when he wrote that:

"The primitives have more in common with African tribes than they have with people in other parts of India such as the plains of Bengal, the Punjab or Maharashtra.... I don't think that "self governance" outside the village or tribe has ever entered their heads. It is obvious that what is needed is a form of protectorate and this can only be achieved through benevolent autocracy".

The belief that tribals were not able to look after their own interests was largely based on the assumption that they had always lived in a hostile society that had exploited them. The creation of a protectorate would in fact enable forces that had their benefit at heart to protect their interests and also bring about their economic development. This perception was integral to many official anthropologists of the period whose vision was also informed by the European anthropological writings of their times. The most prominent of these anthropologists was Verrier Elwin who worked first in Central India, then Eastern India and finally the NorthEast. The romanticism and the functionalism of his anthropology have had an important impact on the way in which people have looked at tribal people. In the 1940s Elwin wrote in his famous pamphlet, *Aboriginal*, that "*a tribe that dances does not die*". By making such a statement he exemplified the fact that tribal people were distinguished from others by their distinctive cultural identity. For Elwin the 'primitive' was a romantic category which he described in the following way when he wrote that:

"The life of a true aboriginal is simple and happy, enriched by natural pleasures. For all their poverty, their days are spent in the beauty of the hills. A woman carrying a load to the hill-top pauses a moment to see the scene below her. It is the 'sweet forest' the 'forest of joy and sandal' in which they live".

The 'forest of joy' was Elwin's dreamland - a place where people tended the dead, were devoted to the soil, staged a magnificent and colourful tribal festivals, and were infused with the spirit of sharing. For Elwin these were 'things of value in tribal life'. For him the 'primitive' constituted a 'pure' and a 'pristine' state of existence that was morally superior to the civilized world. Elwin's image of the forest dwellers voiced his despair at the tendency towards the destruction of an idyllic society. However this emotion was not expressed in a vacuum and embedded in it the critique of the modern industrial society. Thus he said that:

"Until modern life is itself reformed, until civilisation is itself civilised, until war is vanished from Europe and untouchability from India, there is no point in trying to change the aboriginals".

"Far better let them be for the time being – not forever of course; that would be absurd. Perhaps in twenty, fifty or hundred years a race of men may arise who are qualified to assimilate these fine people in their society without doing them harm. Such men do not exist today".

Elwin assumed that the contact between the tribals and the wider agrarian society would result in the injustice to their cause. In this he also critiqued the British rule for its policies towards the tribals. He opposed the British policy of extending of modern commercial economy into these areas, and wanted a relaxation of forest rules. In this he also received the support of some colonial officials, notable amongst whom was the Governor of Bombay, Mr Wylie who wrote that:

"We are dealing with people whom their admirers describe as the ancient lords of the jungle but whom I personally prefer to consider as forest

labourers isolated from the normal working of the law of demand and supply and as such at the mercy of the Forest Department who are the sole pervayers of the labour from which, if the inhabitants of the forest villages are to stay there at all, they have got to make a livelihood”.

Sharing such a critique with Elwin also ensured that many colonists like Wylie and Grigson also shared with him the solutions to the problem. Ideally Elwin wanted the forest dwellers to acquire the spirit and benefits of civilisation without a painful transition process. Thus he wrote that:

“I advocate, therefore, for the aboriginals a policy of temporary partial protection, and for their civilized neighbours a policy of immediate reform....It is not enough to uplift them into a social and economic sphere in which they cannot adapt themselves, but to restore to them liberties of their own countryside”.

By advocating this position, Elwin showed how systemic change in forested areas, were organically linked to changes in modern society, which he considered decadent. Such a perception of tribes, their problems and he solutions was to influence the thinking of scholars down the ages. The most prominent of these is Ramachandra Guha, who in a recent biography of Verrier Elwin celebrated the cultural primitivism for which Elwin became really well known:

“Most of all Verrier Elwin must be distinguished from other primitivists in that he actually lived with the persons whose culture he so vigorously celebrated. The narrator of primitivist revelries has the choice, which he generally excercises. ‘to return, at the end his sojourn, to the highly civilized countries he came from’.... Not many who wrote so eloquently of the return to nature,’ he [Elwin] remarked, ‘were prepared however, to take the journey themselves, *at least not without a return ticket*”.

Elwin was living with the tribals and his understanding of their problems was therefore based on their experiences and life rather than the participant observation of an academic anthropologist. But even if this distinguished him from others, his long-term ideas and the policies that he recommended succeeded in supporting the benevolent imperialism of people like Grigson. But it is not only Guha who were influenced by colonial anthropology. Several other actiivists and anthropologists also used the arguments of people like Elwin and Grigson to justify their arguments for the restoration of traditional tribal rights and identities in the current polity.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, tribes were seen as self sufficient and isolated societies that lived in harmony with nature. In the late 1980s and early 1990s a significant body of environmental history concentrates on the history of state forest management and its impact on the rights of local people. In these studies, some historians follow the assumptions of their predecessors by stressing that tribal communities had stable systems of survival. However the notion of stability and harmony is elaborated in terms of the theory of ecological prudence. Authors like Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil argue that pre-colonial societies were well-adjusted caste institutions that regulated resource use where each community occupied a specific ecological niche in society. These ecological niches were closed and self-contained systems of resource use that were regulated by social and cultural codes. And within this system the tribes were given the niche of being either hunter gatherers or shifting cultivators who were well adjusted to their surroundings in all its aspects.

The notion of a community is characterised by the idea of egalitarianism and homogeneity where there is little differentiation in terms of access to resources. It is also marked by the fact that political and ritualistic authorities are the source of resource management as well as the cohesiveness of the community. Kinship is defined as the organising principle of labour and the conceptual and the cultural

aspects of society defined the way in which the community related with other and defined the boundaries of the community. This is reflected in the work of Nandini Sundar and Ajay Skaria who attempt to complicate the picture by hinting at the transformation of community identities in history. While they are right about the transformations in identity, they too refuse to acknowledge the fact that the identities that they themselves were writing about were a result of the underdevelopment of tribal regions. The self-perceptions of tribals people of themselves as the original inhabitants or as shifting cultivators and hunters and gatherers got solidified with the colonial government putting a ban on these practices. Thus the primordial tribal identity was hardly traditional in nature and in fact reflected the destruction of the productive forces in tribal societies.

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### 32.4 TRIBALS AND THE NATIONALISTS: ANTHROPOLOGY FOR NATION BUILDING

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In the contrast to the views of the anthropologists and the colonists the nationalists of the 1930s and 40s were severely critical of colonial policies and hostile towards anthropological writings that celebrated the cultural primitivism. The supporters of tribal culture values considered the relationship between tribes and peasants to be exploitative in character. They contended that the segregation of these people was the most effective way of modernising them. Nationalist anthropologists and Congressmen contested these assertions, thereby arguing that the basis of exclusion was completely unfounded. The Congress debated the pro-exclusion British officials on two counts. The first argument was political. It concentrated on being anti-imperialist in its stance and laid emphasis on the development of an overwhelming Indian identity that was intended to mobilise people against the colonial rule. The second contention contested the social and anthropological basis of the contentions made by those supporting the government policies of Exclusion and Partial Exclusion.

The Congress thought that the future of tribals was integrally linked with the economic progress of the rest of the Indian population. They did not want to deny these communities an opportunity to associate and learn from other advanced communities. They disagreed with the official view that the tribal people had special needs and rejected anything that celebrated the distinctiveness of cultures. For example in this scheme of thinking anthropology deserved contempt. Two leaders of the Central Provinces, M.S. Aney and N.M. Joshi, charged all anthropologists with desiring to keep all the “primitive races of India uncivilised and in a state of barbarism as raw material for their science in order to add to their blessed stock of scientific knowledge.

But the most articulate position in this respect was taken by G.S. Ghurye in his monograph *Aborigines – so called and their future* in which the crux of his thesis was that ‘aborigines’ were an integral part of the Hindu society since a very long time. Explaining why these communities must be called “so-called aborigines” he said that:

“It is clear from this discussion that the proper description of these peoples must refer itself to their place in it near Hindu society and not to their supposed autochthonism. While sections of these tribes are properly integrated with Hindu society, very large sections, in fact a bulk of them, are rather loosely assimilated. Only very small sections, living in the recesses of the hills and the depths of the forests, have not been more than touched by Hinduism. Under the circumstances the only proper definition of these people is that they are imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society. Though for the sake of convenience they may be designated the tribal classes of Hindu society, suggesting thereby the social fact that they have retained much more of the tribal creeds and organisation than many of the castes of Hindu society, yet they are in reality Backward Hindus”.



## Social Questions Under Colonialism

According to Ghurye, the historical process inevitably led to the Hinduization of the tribals. He argued that they would witness moral and economic betterment if they were 'properly assimilated' into such a society. Their dance and music would be allowed in Hindu society; and even if they lost some part of their culture, they would be at an advantageous position in the long-run. Of the preservation of "tribal culture" Ghurye stated that:

"Isolationism or assimilationism does not therefore appear to owe its inspiration either to a supposedly queer academic interest of the anthropologist or to the possibility of the perverse mentality of British administrators. It is very largely a matter of opinion as to [which is] the best way of preserving the vitality of the tribal people only secondarily complicated by other considerations".

Ghurye stated that the exclusion of the tribals was a political statement that was to be opposed. According to him its sociological and historical assumptions were inaccurate. He saw the peasant and tribal communities as open and dynamic structures, each influencing the other. But despite this conceptual framework, the merits of the assimilation of the tribes into Hindu society continued to be over emphasised in Ghurye's work.

Ghurye was not the only nationalist sociologist to criticise the pro-Exclusionist policies. In an essay entitled 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption' Nirmal Kumar Bose laid down his interpretation of the relationship of the dominant Hindu communities with tribes. He said that,

"From what has been observed among the Juangs and from the reading of law books, it is to be noted that the Hindu society while absorbing a new tribe or while creating a new *jati* by differentiation of occupation, always guaranteed or tried to guarantee monopoly in a particular occupation to each caste within a given region. The last point is very important; for the same *jati* may be found practising many different trades if it finds the prescribed hereditary occupations no longer economically satisfactory".

The stances of both Ghurye and Bose resulted in a defence of Hindu culture and society. They saw the tribal identity as a sub-set of the larger identity of the caste Hindu society and therefore did not consider the assimilation into Hindu society a major problem. But this was not true of all nationalists. Social workers like A.V. Thakkar reflected upon the need to develop a strong nationalist identity. In 1941 Thakkar wrote that,

"These people were the original sons of the soil and were in possession of our country before the Aryans poured in from the North West and North East passes, conquered them with their superior powers and talents and drove them from the plains to the hills and forests. They are older and more ancient children of the soils than the Hindus and more so than the Muslims and Anglo-Indians. But they are steeped in ignorance and poverty and do not know their rights and privileges, much less their collective and national responsibility".

In his interpretation of the tribal past, Thakkar tried to reinstate the position of these communities as the 'original inhabitants of India'. However in doing so he also asserted that the present conditions of poverty and ignorance in which tribal people lived had to be changed. This transformation could not be brought about through a policy of isolationism or Exclusion. Thakkar argued that the spirit of provincial government of national responsibility could only be inculcated into these communities through a policy of "assimilation". But his path of assimilation was slightly different from that of Ghurye and Bose. He said that:

“It is difficult for me to understand why these persons [persons in favour of Exclusion and Partial Exclusion] fear the contact with the Hindus and Muslims of the plains. In few cases the social evils of the plains are likely to be copied by unsophisticated aboriginals. But it is not right to consider that contact will only bring bad customs into tribal life and that the aborigines will suffer more than they benefit. Safeguards may be instituted to protect the aborigines from more advanced people of the plains, as has been done with regard to non-alienable land. But to keep these people confined to and isolated in their inaccessible hills and jungles is like keeping them in glass cases of a museum for the curiosity of purely academic persons”.

Thakkar considered the strategy of assimilation was an essential part of their development process. He believed that if these communities learnt some good things from the Hindu society, they would also be exploited by it. Hence he proposed a different type of a policy of protection for these communities. Rather than the confinement of these communities in a segregated space, he proposed protection of the forest communities through the legislation of special laws. In this sense, even if Thakkar was opposed to the Exclusion, he was in favour of some kind of protection for tribals.

The predominant nationalist view that the tribes was not a historically and anthropologically valid category was reflected in the writings of post colonial writers who were inspired by them. Reviewing the literature on tribes and peasantry Andre Beteille wrote in 1987 that there was no satisfactory way of defining the tribal society. Arguing that it was difficult to call any one a tribal in Indian society, rather the agrarian society was comprised of a heterogeneous body of peasants cut up into various ethno-linguistic categories. In a similar vein Guha also argues that historically informed anthropologists like G.S. Ghurye and D.R. Gadgil were justified in repudiating the categories of aboriginals and tribals and that the historical record supported such skepticism. Thus we find that the anthropologists, sociologists, and historians of contemporary tribal India were profoundly influenced by the writings of people who studied tribes in the colonial times.

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## 32.5 SUMMARY

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In this unit we introduced you to various strands of writings on tribal studies. We saw how the colonial officials and the nationalists differed in their perceptions of tribes in India. Different shades of opinions amongst both of them have also been spelt out.

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## 32.6 GLOSSARY

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**Pre Class Society** : Historically societies that emerged before the formation of classes occurred. These societies were primarily marked by kin based or lineage based formations.

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## 32.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) What were the different views of British officials about tribes in India?
- 2) What was the defining principle of the nationalists on tribes in India?

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*M. A. History*

*List of Courses*

<b>Course Code</b>	<b>Title of the Course</b>	<b>Credits</b>
MHI-01	Ancient and Medieval Societies	8
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MHI-06	Evolution of Social Structures in India Through the Ages	8
MHI-07	Religious Thought and Belief in India	8
MHI-08	History of Ecology and Environment: India	8

***M. A. Course - Evolution of Social Structures in India Through the Ages***

***Block-wise Course Structures***

- Block 1 : Introductory
- Block 2 : Cultures in Transition
- Block 3 : Early Historic Societies: 6<sup>th</sup> Century-4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.
- Block 4 : Early Medieval Societies
- Block 5 : Medieval Society
- Block 6 : Society on the Eve of Colonialism
- Block 7 : Modern Society