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**INDIAN  
SOCIETY**

*for* **Civil Servies Examination**

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# SALIENT FEATURES OF INDIAN SOCIETY

## Introduction

India has an old tradition of being secular and of respecting the differences between the various cultural and religious communities. The Indian society has been multicultural for ages, multi-linguistic, multi-religious, and multi-racial. It has been known for its cultural and social diversity since time immemorial.

In the following section, we will explore different features of our society starting with pluralism.

## Pluralism

India is a plural society. It is rightly characterized by its unity and diversity. A grand synthesis of cultures, religions and languages of the people belonging to different castes and communities has upheld its unity and cohesiveness. In spite of several foreign invasions, Mughal rule and the British rule, national unity and integrity have been maintained. Foreign invasions, immigration from other parts of the world, and the existence of diverse languages, cultures and religions have made India's culture tolerant, on the one hand, and a unique continuing and living culture, with its specificity and historicity, on the other.

## Religious Diversity

India is a land where almost all major religions of the world are found. Here we find Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Animism. All of these main religions have a number of sects of their own.

Religious diversity has been a factor and a source of disunity and disharmony in the country. As it is well known, these religious differences were responsible for the development of the two nation theory and the consequent partition of the country in 1947. But, unfortunately the partition has neither solved the Muslim minority problem nor it has created a homogeneous population in India from a religious point of view.

## Hinduism

It is an amalgamation of Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Pre-Dravidian religious elements. It is the religion of the majority of the people of India. The followers of Hinduism believe in the doctrine of 'Karma', 'Dharma', rebirth, immortality of soul, renunciation and salvation.

Hinduism allows a number of possible conceptions of God. It also prescribes various alternative paths of attaining God. However the Sakta, the Shaiva, the Satnami, the Lingayat, the Kabirpanthi, the BramhoSamaj, the AryaSamaj etc. are different sects of Hinduism.

## Islam

Islam the religion of the Muslims, originated in Arabia. It came to India towards the last quarter of the 12th century A.D, with the Muslim invasions. The Muslim rulers in India patronized it. They established long dynasties over large chunks of the country and encouraged conversions from Hinduism and Buddhism.

Islam does not believe in idol worship. It professes the fatalistic acceptance of Allah's will and considers Prophet Mohammed as the greatest prophet. The 'Quran', sacred book of Islam, ordains five primary duties of a true and devout Muslim, such as belief in God (Allah), prayers five times a day, the giving of alms, a month's fast every year and a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in the life time of a Muslim.

## Christianity

Christians in India constitute more than 2% of its population. They are very widely scattered all over the country, but they are mainly concentrated in the south and especially in Kerala where they form nearly 25% of the state's population. In the North, Christianity has spread rather sporadically and its influence is mainly confined to certain sections of the tribal population and the depressed castes. There are mainly three sects in Christianity. They are (a) Roman-Syrians (b) Roman Catholics and (c) Protestants.

## Sikhism

It was founded by Guru Nanak in the 16th century A.D. The Sikhs were originally a part of the Vaishnava sect before they converted to it. Sikhism was later developed by a line of Sikh Gurus, who succeeded Guru Nanak. As a social system, it abolishes caste distinctions and as a necessary consequence, the Brahminical supremacy and usages in all ceremonies, at birth, marriage, death and so on.

They as a group can easily be identified by anyone; because of the five "K"s they always wear. The 5 "K"s are Kesh (uncut long hair), Kanga (wooden comb) Kaccha (shorts), Kara (iron bangle in the hand and Kirpan (short sword). Sikh population in India is around 2% which is mainly concentrated in the Punjab and at the adjoining states.

## Buddhism

It originated in India during the 6th century B.C. Its founder was Gautama the Buddha. Buddhism enjoyed royal patronage for a long period beginning from the Great emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century B.C. As a result, Buddhism spread not only in India but also in countries outside India. It has two sects, namely the Hinayana and the Mahayana. The number of the Buddhists in India is very meager and it represents only less than 1% of the total population.

## Jainism

Lord Mahavir established Jainism in India in the 6th century B.C. It is very close to Hinduism. They are even more scrupulous than the Hindus in maintaining caste distinctions. But it differs from Hinduism in its heretical views regarding the sanctity of the Vedas and in its strict insistence on the principle of Ahimsa. Jains represent only a small portion of the Indian population. They comprise about 0.45% of our population. Jains are divided into 3 sects: namely (a) The Digambaras, (b) The Svetambaras and (c) The Dhundias. Jains are mainly urban people and are found in the town and cities of Punjab, U.P, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

## Zoroastrianism or Parsi

The Parsis or the followers of Zoroaster of Zorathushtra came to India in the 7th century A.D. from Persia in order to escape the forcible conversions to Islam. They worship fire. They expose their dead on the so-called "towers of Silence" to be eaten up by vultures so that the elements- earth, fire and water-are not defiled by the contact of the dead matter. Their number in India is negligible. They are about one lakh in total half of which live in the city of Bombay alone. As such they are mainly urban. They are the most literate and are on the top of the economic ladder of India.



## Animism

It is mainly a tribal faith. In India there are about 25 million people who believe in Animism. It is a primitive religion, according to which man is believed to be surrounded by a number of impersonal ghostly powers. These powers are said to reside in rocks, rivers, trees, stones etc.

## Linguistic Diversity

India presents a spectacle of Museum of tongues." The 1971 census reports the presence of 1652 languages in India. Most of the languages are spoken in the North India. This multiplicity of languages creates new social cleavages in the already divided population of India by caste and creed and renders the task of inter-communication in the country difficult, if not impossible.

Indian languages can, however, be grouped into four different speech families such as : (1) the Indo-Aryan, (2) the Dravidian, (3) the Austric and (4) the Sino-Tibetan.

## Caste and Class Diversity

As a form of stratification, the caste is peculiar to the Indian society. It may be called as an extreme form of closed class system. The status of individuals in the social hierarchy is determined by birth. The caste system is also found in other parts of the world, but not in a complete form as it is evinced in India. The Indian caste system is divided into the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. It is not confined to Hindus alone. We also find castes among other communities like Muslims, Christians or Sikhs.

Castes are small and complete social worlds in themselves marked off definitely from one another though subsisting within the larger society.

## Characteristics of the Caste System:

### Segmental Division of Society

Under caste system, society is divided into several small social groups called castes. Each of these castes is a well-developed social group, the membership of which is based on birth. Since membership is based on birth, mobility from one caste to another is impossible.

Each caste has its own traditional social status, occupation, customs, rules and regulations. It has its own governing body called the caste council or 'jati Panchayat', which enforces the caste rules.

#### Hierarchy

The caste system is always characterized by a hierarchical arrangement. It implies that there are some castes which are considered superior to the others. Traditionally it is the hierarchical arrangement of caste according to different degrees of dominance and subordination. The Brahmins in India are placed on the apex of the social ladder. A Brahmin is entitled to whatever exists in this world. In the caste hierarchy the Brahmins are followed by the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas. At the bottom of the ladder are the Shudras.

#### Restrictions on Interaction

In the caste system, there are several restrictions on interaction. The members of one caste cannot mix or move freely with the members of the other castes. This ban on interaction becomes still more rigid when the question of mixing of a superior caste with an inferior one comes to the front. Every caste abides by well-established customs and well-defined norms of interaction.

#### Social and religious disabilities

In caste system, the members of a higher caste impose certain disabilities and restrictions on other castes. In the Hindu caste system, the Brahmins are the most privileged caste and the Sudras are the oppressed ones. A Shudra cannot even touch an individual belonging to a higher caste. People belonging to the lowest caste in the hierarchy are not allowed to dwell in the cities and purchase property in the localities inhabited by the high caste people.



### Imposition on restrictions on commensality

Each caste group has its own laws which govern the food habits of the members. Generally, there are no restrictions on fruit, milk, butter, dry fruits etc. But there are some restrictions regarding unfried food. Unfried food has been divided into two classes, 'pacca' and 'kachcha'. This division is based on the use of 'ghee' with or without water. The kachcha food can be accepted only from a person of one's own caste or of a higher caste.

### The Ideology of purity and pollution

The higher castes are believed to be pure and the lower caste people as impure. A central point in Hindu ritual is that it is necessary to make offering to the gods in order for human affairs to continue without undue disaster. The Brahmin or the priest acts as an intermediary between the general society and the gods. The lower castes are regarded as less pure and more polluted. This concept of dividing people in terms of pollution and purity was given by the famous Anthropologist Louis Dumon.

### Restrictions on Occupations

The different castes are usually associated with traditional occupations. Hindu religious texts determined the occupations of all 'Varnas'. One's birth into a particular caste determines his occupation during his life time. A Sudra cannot be engaged in the profession of a priest and a Brahmin is debarred to engage himself in impure occupations like making shoes which is the occupation of the lower castes.

### Marital restrictions

Caste endogamy is strictly enforced wherein the members of each caste marry only within their own caste. Inter-caste marriage is prohibited.

### Hereditary status

Caste system is based on the inscriptive pattern which implies that the birth of a person in a particular caste decided his caste and his status in society. It is usually difficult or rather impossible to change one's own caste despite the acquisition of qualifications or disqualifications, the membership of a particular caste continues and does not undergo any change.

## Family

Family is one of the most important primary groups in society. It is a small social group consisting ordinarily of a father, mother, and one or more children. Family in India has remained a vital institution. It is sheet-anchor of the patriarchal authority on the one hand, and a protector and defender of individual member's right to property on the other.

The Indian family system is thus like a socialistic community in which everyone earns according to his capacity and receives according to his needs.

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

### Characteristics of Joint Family

- **Large Size:** A single family consists of only the husband, wife and their children. But a joint family consists of parents, children, grandchildren and other near relatives along with their women. It is a group of which several basic families live together at one and the same time.
- **Joint Property:** In a joint family, the ownership, production and consumption of wealth takes place on a joint basis. It is a cooperative institution, similar to a joint stock company, in which there is joint property. The head of the family is like a trustee who manages the property of the family for the material and spiritual welfare of the family members. The total earnings of all the family members are pooled together.
- **Common Residence:** The members of joint family usually live under the same roof. They may also live in separate houses in close proximity to one another. They eat the same food and wear the same type of clothes.
- **Cooperative Organization:** The basis of joint family system is cooperation. A joint family consists of a large number of members and if they do not cooperate with one another it is not possible to maintain the organization and structure of the joint family.

- **Common Religion:** Generally the members of a joint family believe in the same religion and worship similar deities. They perform jointly the religious rites and duties. They celebrate all the festivals and social functions jointly. They also hold themselves jointly accountable for participating in social ceremonies like marriage, death and other occasions of family sorrows and rejoicing. They all share the family burden together.
- **A Productive Unit:** This feature of joint family is found among agricultural families. All the members work at one and the same field. They do the sowing and harvesting of the crops together. Even in the case of artisan classes, all the members of a joint family do one and the same function.
- **Mutual Rights and Obligations:** The rights and obligations of the members of joint family are the same. None except the head of the family has special privileges. Every member of the family has equal obligations if one female member works in the kitchen, the other does the laundry work, and the third one looks after the children. There is rotation of duties as well.

## Functions of Joint Family System

- **Ensures Economic Progress:** It enables economic progress of the country since everyone in the family is guaranteed bare subsistence, which is considered as primary condition of economic progress. Unless people are assured of food and shelter, they would not devote themselves sincerely to the work of country's progress. It is an essential condition of national progress that the citizens must at least get two meals a day. Joint family provides this to its members and thus enables them to devote themselves to nation's progress.
- **Division of Labor:** It secures the advantages of the division of labour. Every member in the family is given work according to his abilities without being taxed unduly. Every phase of family's life is managed by all members including women and children. Thus, during the harvest season every member of the family helps in harvesting the crops.
- **Economy:** It secures economy of expenditure. Since things are consumed in large quantities they are secured at economic prices. Within small means a large family can be maintained if it lives jointly.
- **Opportunity for Leisure:** It provides opportunities for leisure to the members. The female members divide the household work and finish it within a little time spending the rest of it in leisure.
- **Social Insurance:** In the joint family the orphans find a comfortable asylum instead of being thrown out. Similarly, widows are assured of their proper living for whom remarriage in India is unthinkable. The joint family acts as a social insurance company for the old, sick and incapacitated.
- **Social Virtues:** It fosters great virtues like sacrifice, affection, cooperation, spirit of selfishness, broadmindedness among its members and makes the family a cradle of social virtues. Under the care of elders the undesirable and anti-social tendencies of the young are checked and they are prevented from going astray. They learn to exercise self-control. All members learn to obey family rules and respect their elders.
- **Avoids Fragmentation of Holdings:** It avoids fragmentation of holdings and the evils inherent therein. It prevents property from being divided.
- **Socialism:** The joint family is like a corporation where trustee is the father. Everyone in the joint family works according to his capabilities but obtains according to his needs. Thus, it realizes the socialistic ideal-from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.

## Disintegration of Joint Family

- **Industrialization:** The joint family system is most suited to agricultural families. India today is on the way to industrialization. With the establishment of new factories in urban areas workers from the villages move to the cities which breaks the joint family.
- **Extension of communications and transport:** Because of the improvements in the means of communication and transport, family members have become mobile in search of jobs etc.; it is no longer necessary for men to stay with the family. Now they move out to cities and take up any other occupation.
- **Decline of agriculture and village trades:** The joint family system in India flourished in ancient times when agriculture and trade in the villages were in a sound position. With the migration of people from the villages to the cities, the Hindu joint family system breaks down. Besides, the decline of agriculture and cottage industry, there are other causes as well which induce people to move to the city. In the villages, there are fewer facilities for entertainment and recreation, less opportunities for employment for the educated and inadequate opportunities for the education of children.

- **Impact of the west:** India has been greatly influenced in her social outlook by western thought and ideology. The modern laws relating to marriage and divorce have been enacted on western pattern. The impact of West is felt in the domain of education, polity, legislature, bureaucracy and judiciary.
- **New social legislations:** The joint family system in India has been influenced by a series of new social legislations like Civil Marriage Act (1872). Hindu Marriage Act (1955) and Hindu Succession Act (1956) The Civil Marriage Act enabled the adult boys and girls to marry against the wishes of their parents. The Hindu Marriage Act enabled the women to seek divorce under certain conditions. The Hindu Succession Act gave the right of equal inheritance to women. All these acts have influenced the solidarity of the joint family and relationships between brothers and sisters, parents and children and husbands and wives.
- **Enlightenment of women:** The increasing enlightenment due to education and employment has made women empowered. They are not ready to accept things uncritically. They refuse to accept inequality, exploitation and subordination in the family on irrational grounds. Conflicts in the family are endemic.
- **Over population:** India has witnessed a phenomenal growth of population, which has led to a tremendous pressure on land. As a result of this pressure, the land holdings of many families have become un-economical and many farmers have joined the ranks of landless laborers. The situation in the villages has come to such a pass that agriculture no longer provides employment to the ever-increasing number of people depending on it.
- **Problem of accommodation:** Another factor adversely affecting joint family structure in India is the problem of accommodation. This problem is so acute in the large cities that members of a joint family find it difficult to live together in spite of their desire to do so.

## Kinship

Man does not live alone in society. From birth till death he is surrounded by a number of people. Some of these people are his relatives, some are friends, and some are neighbors' while all others are strangers and unknown to him. He is bound to all those people who are related to him either on the basis of blood or marriage. The relations based on blood or marriage may be close or distant. The bond of blood or marriage which binds people together in group is called kinship.

### Kinship is of two types:

**Affinal Kinship:** The bond of marriage is called affinal kinship. When a person marries, he establishes relationship not only with the girl whom he marries but also with a number of other people in the girl's family. Moreover, it is not only the person marrying who gets bound to the family members of the girl but his family members also get bound to the family members of the girl. For example, after marriage a person becomes not only a husband, but he also becomes brother-in-law and son-in-law. Here it may be noted that in English language a number of relations created by marriage are referred by the same term. Thus, the same term 'brother-in-law' is used for sala, jija etc. Thus, marriage creates a host of relationships which are called affinal kin.

**Consanguineous Kinship:** The bond of blood is called consanguineous kinship. The consanguineous kin are related through blood whereas the affinal kin are related through marriage. The bond between parents and their children and that between siblings is consanguineous kinship. Siblings are consanguineous kinship. Siblings are the children of the same parents. Thus, son, brother, sister, uncle, elder uncle, nephew and cousin are consanguineous kin. i.e., related through blood.

### Functions of Kinship

- Kinship usages accomplish two major tasks.
  - ▶ First, they create groups: special groupings of kin. Thus marriage assigns each mother a husband, and makes her children his children, thereby creating a special group of father, mother and children, which we call "family".
  - ▶ The second major function of kinship usage is to govern the role relationships between kin; that is how one kinsman should behave in a particular kinsman's presence, or what one kinsman owes to another. Kinship assigns guidelines for interactions between persons. It defines proper, acceptable role relationship between father and daughter, between brother and sister, between son-in-law and mother-in-law and between fellow lineage members and clansmen.
- Kinship thus acts as a regulator of social life and maintains the solidarity of social system.

# Marriage

Every society regulates the sexual behavior of its members. Some sort of regulation is necessary, if the children born of such sexual unions are to be well cared for and properly trained. Therefore, in every society we come across norms governing “what persons, under what conditions and in what manner, may establish a marriage relationship; what they will be expected to do once they are married and how they may dissolve this relationship and under what conditions.” This complex of norms constitutes the institution of marriage.

## Hindu marriage

### Hindu marriage as a Religious Sacrament

Hindu marriage can be defined as a religious sacrament in which a man and a woman are bound in permanent relationship for physical, social and spiritual purpose of dharma, procreation and sexual pleasure.

The aims of Hindu marriage are said to be dharma, praja (progeny) and rati (sexual pleasure). Sex is given third place in regard to the functions of marriage. Dharma is the first aim of marriage. Procreation is given the second place. Marriage also aims at begetting a son to save the father from going to hell. On the marriage the sacred fire is enkindled to offer panchamahayagyas. A man with his wife is supposed to offer puja throughout his life. Thus, marriage is primarily for the fulfillment of duties, his dharma.

Marriage is a social duty toward the family and the community, and as such there is little individual interest. Husband-wife is not individual persons, but they are part of extended family and caste (community). However, the husband and wife have never been equal in regard to their obligations and privileges.

The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, socio-cultural awakening, education and urban employment etc. have weakened the sacred ethos of Hindu marriage. Divorce is becoming quite acceptable. The incidence of widow-remarriage has also increased. Women are claiming status equal to men. Despite these changes, religiosity remains attached to marriage to a large extent.

### Types of marriage among the Hindus

Basically, there can only be two types of marriage, namely monogamy and polygamy. In Hindu society both the types of marriage were found to exist.

**Polygamy:** It is a type of marriage in which a man or a woman is allowed to marry more than one wife or husband at the same time. Polygamy is of two types, such as, polygyny and polyandry.

**Polygyny:** It is a type of marriage in which a man is allowed to marry more than one wife at a time. This pattern of marriage persisted in Hindu society since Vedic times. In fact, it was regarded as one of the natural forms of marriage.

All the Hindu law givers discouraged its practice. For example, Apastambha remarks that a man should not marry a second wife, if his wife is willing and able to perform religious rites and bears a son for him. Manu says that ‘a barren wife may be superseded in the eighth year.

**Polyandry:** Polyandry as a form of union in which a woman has more than one husband at a time in which brothers share a wife or wives in common”. A classic example of this type of marriage in Hindu society is that of Draupadi marrying the five Pandava brothers. It appears that polyandry was once an approved form of marriage for Yudhishtira, while justifying the marriage of Draupadi with the five Pandava brothers, says, “we follow the path which has been trodden by our ancestors in succession”.

However, polyandry has later come to be a despised and discredited practice in the entire Hindu society with the exception of the Nayar community in which the practice was universal until recent times.

**Monogamy:** The ideal form of marriage among the Hindus is monogamy i.e., the union of one man and one woman. The Vedas proclaim monogamy as the highest form of marriage.

In the Manu Smriti, it is stated, “Let mutual fidelity continue until death. This may be considered as summary of the highest law for husband and wife.” According to Kautilya, a second marriage, unless it is intended for securing a male child, is punishable by a fine of 23 panas.

Apastambha says, “A man forsaking his wife should put on the skin of an ass with hair turned outside and beg alms from seven houses saying ‘give alms to him who forsook his wife.’ This disgraceful punishment is said to last for six months.

### Recent changes in the Institution of Hindu Marriage

The institution of Hindu marriage in modern times is undergoing wide ranging changes due to several factors. To begin with, there have been changes in the rules regarding mate selection. Exogamy and endogamy are the traditional rules regulating mate selection in Hindu society.

- ▶ Endogamy is when one marries someone within one's own group. Exogamy is when one marries someone outside one's own group.
  - ◆ Exogamic rules forbid marriages between members of the same 'gotra', 'pravara' and 'pinda', as they are supposed to be closely related to one another. Today, these rules, though not totally rejected, are increasingly being violated by the Hindus. It is in line with this modern trend that the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 has completely abolished the rules regarding 'sagotra' and 'sapravara', marriages. Even 'sapinda' marriages, in the form of cross-cousin marriages, are allowed by this Act, wherever such marriages are customary. Thus, the exogamic rules have socially as well as legally been relaxed.
  - ◆ Endogamic rules, on the other hand, require the Hindu to select his life-partner from within his or her varna, caste and sub-caste. Till recently, the rule was so strictly observed that any violation of it usually entailed punishment not less than excommunication from the caste. Even now, people, by and large, conform to this rule.

But, what is novel today is the fact that inter-caste marriages, which were, not long ago, un-thinkable, are now not only permitted but also encouraged. A number of Acts have been passed to facilitate and give legal sanction to inter-caste marriages. In fact, the sub-caste endogamic barriers have already been broken.

- Secondly, there are changes relating to rites and rituals performed at the time of marriage. Traditionally, Hindu marriage is a sacrament involving a number of religious rites and rituals. In fact, Hindu marriage was regarded valid only when certain rites and rituals like "homa", "panigrahan", "saptapadi", "kanyadana" etc. were duly performed with the accompaniment of vedic 'mantras'. Today, most of these rites and rituals are not strictly adhered to. Marriages can be performed even in the civil courts according to the Special Marriage Act of 1954. As such, Hindu marriage has, to great extent, lost its sacramental character and instead, acquired secular nature.
- Thirdly, there is an increase in the age of marriage for both boys and girls. But, at present, owing to certain changed social conditions, child marriages are almost non-existent. There is an appreciable increase in the average age of boys and girls in this respect.
- In the fourth place, there is a considerable decrease in the control of parents over the selection of mates in marriage. Traditionally, it was responsibility as well as the prerogative of the parents or guardians to arrange marriages for their children. But, due to the influence of western ideas like liberalism and individualism and also as a result of the economic independence, young boys and girls are now increasingly asserting themselves in the choice of mates for them.
- The fifth change in the institution of Hindu marriage is related to the problem of widow remarriage. Widow Remarriages were generally forbidden by the Hindu Dharma Sastras. Today, there is a marked change in this respect. The Hindu Widows Remarriage Act of 1856 allows widows to remarry.
- Sixth, there are changes in the stability of marriage. Earlier, dissolution of marital tie or divorce was generally not allowed in Hindu society. Divorce was permitted only in some rare cases. As such, Hindu marriage was a more or less permanent bond. But, as a result of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, getting divorce has become relatively easy and therefore, there is a considerable increase in the number of divorces in Hindu society.
- The emergence of the dowry system may be viewed as the seventh change in the institution of Hindu marriage. In the past, parents of a girl used to bedeck their daughter with ornaments and jewels and give her in marriage to a worthy person as a gift. This evil is spreading like a wild fire in Hindu society in spite of the legal provisions against it.
- In 8th place, there is a decline in the importance of morality in marriage. Hitherto, premarital chastity of boys and particularly of girls was strictly insisted upon. Virginity of the maiden was the highest value in marriage. But, today, there seems to be less emphasis on this value.
- In the ninth place, marriage has ceased to be universal and compulsory in Hindu society. Universality of marriage was a special feature of Hindu society. Marriage was absolutely necessary for a Hindu since; in the first place, a son was essential for attaining heaven and in the second place, a wife was necessary for performing his dharma.
- The last important change in the institution of Hindu marriage is the abolition of polygyny. Formerly, a Hindu husband was allowed to have more than one wife for one reason or the other. But, this privilege of Hindu husband has been abolished by the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955.



## Dowry: the dark side of Indian weddings

Like the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, the new bride is considered to be the guarantor of the home's prosperity- but one symbolized by material assets. Though asking for dowry has been officially declared a crime in India, the greedy have found an indirect way of asking for it.

### ■ Why People Practice Tradition

It is a traditional practice that has been passed down for many centuries. Over time the significance and reason for practicing has changed.

### ■ Religious Factors

The significance of dowry is present in many of the religions found in India.

### ■ Hinduism

In Hinduism during the wedding, the father does a Kanyadan which is the giving away of the daughter. Kanya means girl and dan means to give, so the meaning of kanyadan is daughter gift, therefore a dowry is a gift for the groom because he is taking the responsibility of their daughter, thus providing him with resources.

### ■ Sikhism

In Sikhism, the dowry is called a Dehaj. It started off as being a spiritual dowry; it meant a woman should carry the name of the Lord with her when she starts her new life. However, with social influences and with the influence of greed, the significance of dowry changed.

### ■ Islam

In Islam, a type of dowry called a Mahr is given from the groom to the bride. The Mahr is paid by the husband to honor his wife and is now taken on her responsibility.

Overtime the concept of Mahr changed and became Jahaz. Jahaz is not part of Islam but it is becoming more common among Muslims, especially those living in India. Jahaz is the giving of dowry from the bride to the husband. The change of Mahr to Jahaz can be due to various social factors.

### ■ Socio-economic Factors

In many occasions, parents give dowries for their daughter's financial security. Although the groom and his family may take advantage of it. There is an expectation of a dowry. A marriage is arranged more on the interests of the parents than the couple. Parents generally try to wed their daughters in higher status families. A dowry increases with the level of education, a job title and any future prospects for the groom.

### ■ Why is the Practice of Dowry an Issue?

#### Patriarchy

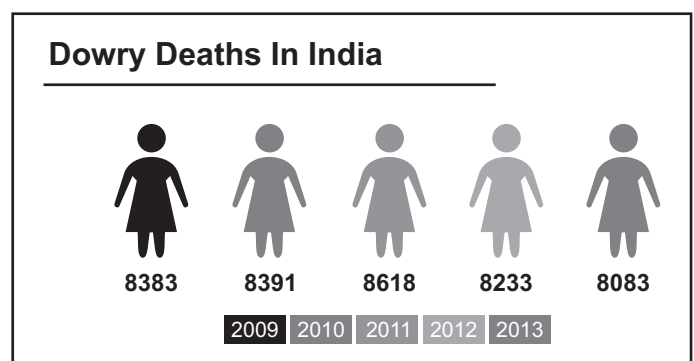
The tradition of the dowry system was something that was given out of joy and for the betterment of a female's life. However throughout centuries it became a method of taking advantage of women.

The definition of patriarchy is when in a society or government, men hold the power that women are excluded from. Patriarchy can be seen in the dowry system, because even though the dowry is from and for the bride, the bride is excluded and the men get the power.

### ■ Domestic Violence, Dowry Deaths, and Bride Burning

Due to dowries, many women suffer from domestic violence. Women are murdered or compelled to commit suicide by endless torture by their husbands and in laws in order to extort remaining or increased dowry.

The methods of suicide are self-immolation, hanging, or poison. If they do not receive the dowry and the bride



fighters back, she is then murdered. Bride Burning is one of the most common methods used to murder brides.

Bride burning is when the husband and/or the in-laws burn the bride and make it look like an accident or a suicide. In other cases, a bride is hung or poisoned and made to look like a suicide.

## Other Conflicts or Crimes

Females do not only face issues of dowry during marriage, instead females and their families deal with dowry issues before they are even born.

### ■ Sex Selective Abortions

In order to avoid future dowries, parents undergo sex selective abortions and abort any female fetuses.

### ■ Female Infanticide

Infant females have been murdered for centuries for several reasons. One main reason is to avoid future dowries.

### ■ Education

Many females are deprived of education. However a very common reason for not educating females is dowry. Parents believe instead of spending that money on an education, they can later find their daughter a higher status and educated husband.

Studies reveal that when a woman is educated, a higher dowry is paid in order to attract a higher educated male. Many times the groom's family may feel like that the bride will not know or help in house work if she has a career; therefore they need more resources to take care of the household. This could be the reason many families do not educate their daughter; instead they save that money for dowries.

### ■ Laws against Dowries

#### **The Indian Penal Code-498A**

The IPC-498a is a criminal law that was passed by the Indian Parliament in 1983. The law states that treating a woman cruelly in order to extort dowry will be punished with imprisonment for a term of three or more years and a fine.

#### **Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961**

The 1961 Act prohibited the practice of dowry in many states. Anyone who practices the giving or receiving of dowry is punishable. The punishment includes imprisonment not less than five years and a fine that should not be less than fifteen thousand rupees or should equal to the amount of the dowry, depending on which one is more.

#### **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005**

The Protection of Women Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2005 to protect women from domestic violence. This law helps in the cases of dowries because many times the reason for domestic violence is an unpaid dowry. This act is a civil law, which means that it is not set to criminalize or penalize individuals; however it is set to protect women from domestic abuse caused by their husbands and/or in-laws.

## Muslim Marriage

In the Muslim social system, marriage is governed basically by 'Shariat', the Muslim personal law. The norms and injunctions of Shariat are widely followed, despite regional differences in subsidiary customs in respect of Muslim marriage.

The Muslim marriage is considered as a very happy occasion of pomp and joy. It is performed in accordance with the socio-economic status of the family. In Islam, marriage is an established system. In pre-Islam society, the prevalent form of marriage was polygamy.

Meaning of Muslim Marriage: Marriage among the Muslims is considered more a social rather than religious institution known as 'Nikah' in Muslim law; marriage is purely a civil contract.



According to Mohammedan law, marriage is an unconditional contract made between two persons of opposite sexes for mutual enjoyment, procreation and legislation of children.

### ■ Essential Conditions of Muslim Marriage:

Before a marriage takes place among the Muslim there are prerequisites or essential conditions which must be fulfilled. These conditions are essential to make the marriage legally valid.

**Capacity:** Both the boy and the girl must have marital capacity. The first essential condition is that parties to the marriage should be healthy and mentally sound. They must have attained the age of 15. Consent of the parents will be necessary to make the marriage valid, if parties to it are below the prescribed age of 15. Similarly marriage cannot be performed when one of them is minor and also when there are no witnesses.

**Forms of Marriage:** Free consent of the parties is necessary. There must be proposal and acceptance of one meeting in the presence of two male witnesses or one male and two female witnesses. The consent must be stated in express words. An agent may be appointed to make the contract. Fraud or force vitiates a marriage. Witnesses to the marriage are considered essential among the Sunnis but not among the Shias.

**Relative Capacity (Prohibitions and Disabilities):** There are certain limitations or prohibitions among the Muslims. Marriage among Muslims can be declared null and void due to the following prohibitions:

- ▶ Prohibition arising out of relationships: Marriage among very near relations such as real sisters, brothers, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother etc. is invalid. A person is prohibited to marry another who is related to him by consanguinity, affinity or fosterage.

**Unlawful Conjugation:** A man is forbidden to marry two persons at a time, who are related to each other by consanguinity, affinity or fosterage.

**Plurality of Marriage:** Marriage is invalid in the event of a woman marrying another person, especially when her first husband is alive. The husband is also not allowed to have his fifth wife.

**Marriage during Iddat:** Remarriage of woman is considered invalid, if contracted during the period of iddat. The period of Iddat lasts for three months after the dissolution of a former marriage either by death or by divorce. If the woman is already pregnant, the period of iddat lasts till the delivery. Marriage with pregnant women and while on pilgrimage is also not considered valid.

**Interreligious Marriage:** A woman cannot marry any person who is not a Mohammedan. The male may, however, marry any Kitabi, i.e. a person who believes in religion revealed through a Book (but not in idolatry or fire-worship), for example a Christian or a Jewess. Defects such as absence of witness, marriage with a person of different religion, marrying a fifth wife, or violating the rule of unlawful conjugation, etc., render a marriage irregular.

### ■ Divorce under Muslim System

Muta is a system of temporary marriage, whereas marriage through Nikah is a permanent one. In a permanent marriage there is also the provision.

Under the Muslim law it is easy for a man to get divorced whereas a woman finds it difficult to divorce her husband. Under the dissolution of the Muslim Marriage Act, 1939, a Muslim woman can seek divorce on the following grounds:

- ▶ When the whereabouts of husband are unknown for a period of at least 4 years
- ▶ When the husband has failed to provide maintenance for a period of 2 years
- ▶ If the husband has been awarded a sentence of 7 years or more
- ▶ When the husband is not performing his marital obligations for the last 3 years
- ▶ If the husband is impotent
- ▶ If the husband has become insane
- ▶ If the husband is suffering from leprosy or venereal disease
- ▶ If the husband is cruel
- ▶ On the other hand a husband can divorce his wife at any time he likes.

### ■ The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019

- ▶ The Act makes all declaration of talaq, including in written or electronic form, to be void (i.e. not enforceable in law) and illegal. It defines talaq as talaq-e-biddat or any other similar form of talaq

pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.

- ▶ **Offence and penalty:** The Act makes declaration of talaq a cognizable offence, attracting up to three years' imprisonment with a fine. (A cognizable offence is one for which a police officer may arrest an accused person without warrant.) The offence will be cognizable only if information relating to the offence is given by: (i) the married woman (against whom talaq has been declared), or (ii) any person related to her by blood or marriage.
- ▶ The Act provides that the Magistrate may grant bail to the accused. The bail may be granted only after hearing the woman (against whom talaq has been pronounced), and if the Magistrate is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for granting bail.
- ▶ The offence may be compounded by the Magistrate upon the request of the woman (against whom talaq has been declared). Compounding refers to the procedure where the two sides agree to stop legal proceedings, and settle the dispute. The terms and conditions of the compounding of the offence will be determined by the Magistrate.
- ▶ **Allowance:** A Muslim woman against whom talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek subsistence allowance from her husband for herself and for her dependent children. The amount of the allowance will be determined by the Magistrate.
- ▶ **Custody:** A Muslim woman against whom such talaq has been declared, is entitled to seek custody of her minor children. The manner of custody will be determined by the Magistrate.

## Evolution and Change in the features of Indian Society

Change is a significant domain of sociological analysis. Every society undergoes changes. No society is static. Indian society is no exception. The important processes of social change in India include Sanskritization, Westernization, Secularization, Industrialization, Urbanization and Modernization. We shall confine our attention to these processes of social change in reference to the Indian society during the last and present centuries.

### Sanskritization

Sanskritization is a culturological concept which means the process of endogenous change in the culture-structure of Indian society. It is a process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, frequently "twice born caste".

Sanskritization has historical as well as contextual meanings. In its specific historical senses, Sanskritization refers to those processes in Indian history which led to changes in the status of various castes or their cultural patterns in different periods of history. History tells that in this process the lower castes could move to the rank of the higher castes as a result of their chivalry, rise in economic and power status and political alliance.

This type of vertical mobility (change in position in the upward direction) was legitimized by the consensus of the dominant castes and kings through royal decrees and other formal means as recognized by the priestly castes. Thus, Sanskritization in its historical connotation conveys a wider implication.

### Factors facilitating Sanskritization

Some factors have been singled out as contributory to the process of Sanskritization in modern India. Some of them are discussed below:

- **British Rule:** With the establishment of the British rule in India, the lower castes got more opportunities to Sanskritize themselves and subsequently raise their status as the Britishers were unmindful to this phenomenon and were least involved in the dynamic of caste system.
- **Development of Communication:** Development of road and transportation in the areas previously inaccessible accelerated the process of Sanskritization. The railways and other improved means of communication enabled people to visit religious centers like Mathura, Dwaraka, Gaya, Kashi, Puri etc.
- **Development of the Mass Media of Communication:** The radio, the cinema, the microphone, newspaper, religious journals have been contributing to the popularization of Sanskritic values and ideologies.

- **Political Factors:** The political institution of parliamentary democracy in free India has contributed to increase in Sanskritization. Prohibition, a Sanskritic value, has been endorsed in our constitution. The ideal of equality of all men before the law and the abolition of untouchability have sprung up a culture which was the monopoly of the higher castes beforehand.
- **Educational Factor:** As a result of western education, socio-religious movements like the AryaSamaj, the Brahma Samaj and the PrathanaSamaj came into being and which, in turn, contributed much to the process of Sanskritization. Besides, spread of literacy among the low caste groups made Sanskritization feasible.
- **Cultural Institution:** Every temple and pilgrim centre also acts as a source of Sanskritization. During the periodic festivals and other occasions when pilgrims gather at the centre they get opportunity for the spread of Sanskritic ideas and beliefs. Several other cultural institutions such as the sanyasis and other religious mendicants also help spread ideas and beliefs of Sanskritic Hinduism.
- **Economic Factor:** Better economic conditions also facilitate enhancement of the status of a caste in the local caste hierarchy. But acquisition of wealth is not always a necessary pre-condition to Sanskritization. Srinivas has rightly cited the case of untouchable caste of Mysore who got itself sanskritized even though its economic position remained almost fixed. However, the fact is that Sanskritization becomes easy if economic power is acquired.
- **Sectarian Movements:** Sectarian movements also acted as agents of Sanskritization and when they attracted members from the low castes, they helped raise their status. For example the Bhakti movement geared by the saints embraced all people into its fold ignoring diversities of cults and castes and thereby proved a great sanskritizing force.

## Westernization

Like Sanskritization, the term Westernization is a culture-logical. Unlike any previous period in Indian history, the British brought with them new technology, institutions, knowledge, beliefs and values.

The term 'Westernization' conveys two meanings. One is global and the other is exclusively relating to the Indian society. From a global perspective, westernization refers to the process of social change brought about in non-western countries as a result of their prolonged contact with Western culture. In the Indian context, Westernization refers to changes brought about in Indian social life as a consequence of its contact with the British.

For a thorough understanding of the term, it is necessary to distinguish between westernization and Sanskritization. Sanskritization and Westernization are linked processes in modern India and it is not possible to understand one without a reference to the other. This does not mean that both are synonymous. No doubt, they are complementary to each other. Westernization is not hostile to the process of Sanskritization rather it contributes to the spread of Sanskritization. Western technology in the form of the railways, the internal combustion engine, the press, the radio, and the telephone has aided Sanskritization.

In spite this complementarily, Sanskritization differs from Westernization in certain respects. Sanskritization implies mobility within the caste system whereas westernization implies mobility outside the frame work of caste. Compared to Sanskritization, westernization is a simpler concept. Sanskritization occurs among the lower castes, whereas it is the high castes that first turned towards western culture.

Sanskritization puts a ban on meat eating and alcohol consumption whereas westernization promotes meat-eating and consumption of alcohol, Sanskritization promotes a sacred out-looks whereas westernization promotes a secular world view. Lastly, Sanskritization would mean a process of endogamous change while westernization would mean exogamous change.

### ■ Types of Westernization

On the basis of influence on the little and the great tradition, westernization can be categorized into two: **primary westernization and secondary westernization.**

- ▶ **Primary westernization** means changes induced by the western impact on Indian little tradition. Such changes generally are of two types:
  - ◆ First, the emergence of a westernized sub-cultural pattern through a minority section of Indians who first came into contact with western culture. This includes the sub-culture represented by those Indian intellectuals and scholars who not only adopted many western cognitive patterns and styles of life but also supported its rapid expansion. Thus westernization in its first stage was sub-cultural in nature. It existed only in the marginal sphere.
  - ◆ The second type of primary westernization in the little tradition refers to the process of general diffusion of western cultural traits such as the use of new technology, dress, food and changes in the habits and styles of life of people in general resulting from the cultural contact with the British.

- ▶ **Secondary westernization** is linked with the great tradition of India and it refers to the changes which have contributed to the growth of various forms of cultural structure extending over the whole of the country. Some examples of such cultural structures are education, law, science, technology, new forms of politicization, urbanization, industrialization and finally new media of cultural transmission through the press, printing and facilities of transport and communication. This form of westernization has all Indian character and has contributed to the emergence of a new Great tradition of Modernization in India.

## Impact of Westernization on Indian Society

The encounter between the Indian tradition and western culture was of immense sociological significance. The western tradition had a meaningful impact upon the cultural, political and social systems of India to such an enormous extent that it has been told that such a contact had initiated a new era of change in the Indian cultural tradition. The following are some of the areas in which the western impact was visibly noticed:

### Growth of a Universalistic Legal System:

The process of westernization brought in its wake new legal norms which contributed to the growth of a universalistic positive form of law in India. Formerly the legal system was founded on the principles of hierarchy and holism. Accordingly justice was meted out on the basis of the status of various castes and classes in the local hierarchy. Thus, following the prescription of Manu, a Brahmin slandering a Kshatriya had to pay a fine of fifty Panas, but for slandering a Vaishya or Shudra he had to pay twenty five and twelve panas respectively. If the lower castes slandered the high castes, the penalties were more severe.

The principle of hierarchy was strictly followed in matters of dispensing justice. Our traditional legal system continued to be group-oriented and non-equalitarian. With the establishment of the British power in India, there came a new turning point in the legal system of the country.

Various forms of legal innovation based on the principles of universalism, rationalism and individualism were introduced and thereby to making the new judicial system individual oriented and universalistic. It established the principle of equality and generated a consciousness of positive rights among the down-trodden castes.

### Impact of Westernization on Education:

Contemporary education is of western origin. Traditionally, the content of education was metaphysical. The roles of both the teachers and the taught were qualitative ascriptive. But Modern education has a fundamentally different orientation and organization. Its content is liberal and it preaches scientific world-view. Freedom equality, humanism and denial of faith in dogmatism are the major themes of modern education. Its professional structure is not ascriptive. It can be achieved by merit by anyone in the society.

### Impact on the Communication network

The media of communication have been introduced in India through the western contact. Printed newspapers came into existence only after India's contact with the West. The Britishers introduced the telegraph, railways and modern postal system in India. Similar improvement has also been made in the other media of communication and transport. The expansion in transport by the railways, roadways, airways and waterways has contributed to the intensification in the volume of interaction and contact between one region with another.

### Growth of Nationalism:

Both Nationalism and democracy in the contemporary form are the gifts of westernization. Nationalism implies consciousness of one's nationhood. Its sociological manifestation is the idea of nation-state. The feeling of nationality and respect for democratic norms is a consequence of westernization. It was the fervent patriotic zeal of the western people that made our leaders think of developing India as a united country. Indian nationalism, however, was not modeled completely on the western pattern.

## **Impact on Food habits and Mode of eating:**

Westernization has reached the level of food habits and way of eating. Traditionally, Indians ate their meals sitting on the floor. Food was served either on the leaves or on brass, bronze or silver plates. Among the upper castes, and especially among Brahmin, eating was a religious act. The food had to be cooled while the women in charge of cooking and serving it must be in a ritually purer state. Changing food habits has brought people nearer to modern food technologies. The use of ghee has increasingly been replaced by vegetable oil both in rural and urban areas. Eating meat and eggs by higher caste members is on the increase. Poultry farms which were previously considered polluting are opened in large numbers.

## **Impact on the Dress Pattern**

Under the influence of westernization even people living in villages have opted for factory-made clothes like nylon, Terylene, terycot etc. in place of home-spun clothes, readymade garments have become popular. The mode of dress has also undergone a drastic change. The old style of shirt has been replaced by the modern style shirts.

## **Change in Language**

Many terms from the English language have entered the dialects of the rural folk. The expansion of civil administration popularized the terms like court, collector, judge, barristers etc. similarly the expansion of transport facilities has rendered the terms like rail, station, signals etc. matters in daily usage.

## **Weakening of Traditional Culture**

Modern education and increased utilitarian and rational values of the Indian elite led them to make sharp criticisms of their own culture. They began casting aspersions on the evils of our traditional culture which used to make submissive. Indians today are more individualistic, free thinking and lead relatively a more free life. Modernization of the tradition is taking place in India today under the impact of the process of westernization.

## **Impact on Marriage**

Westernization has also brought about noticeable changes in matrimonial relationship. Marriage today is no longer seen as a relationship between two families rather it has transformed to the relationship of two individuals i.e. husband and wife. Husband and wife do not treat each other as superior or inferior but as friends and companions. Love and marriage has sidelined religion. Even marriage ceremony itself has changed.

## **Impact on Family**

Western culture preaches the individualistic ideology of family which is diametrically opposite to the collective ethos on which the joint family system is founded; This has cut the joint family from its very root for which it has started crippling down. Members in a family today prefer freedom to enjoy marital life. Today's brides do not like to remain under the control of laws. New democratic conventions find their place in household affairs too.

## **Impact on the Status of Women**

A strong influence of the west is tangible on the status of women today. The medieval period in Indian history is witness to the status of women sinking to the nadir and if we find today women getting their due in almost all the fields, a major part of the credit goes to westernization. Education on the one hand generated and encouraged liberal ideas among men while on the other hand it prepared women to strive for natural status of equality.



## Impact on Religion

Impact of science and western education did bring about a significant change in our perception of religion. Uncritical acceptance of religious ideas is being replaced by logical interpretation and acceptance. There was a time when social, economic, political scenes were all dominated by religion but now it is evolving more or less as an independent institution.

## Eradication of Social Evils

Social evils which had plagued the society and in a way were responsible for making Indian society so much vulnerable to foreign annexation, could only be given a determined fight after the process of westernization took its root. The practice of widow burning, infanticides, stealing of children for slavery, child marriage, ban on widow marriage, untouchability are some of those social evils which are still being fought. Science and technology from the west have done some demystifying effect on these types of practices.

## Modernization

The word 'Modernization' derived from the Latin root 'Modo' meaning just now. In chronological sense it means, the latest. The term modern refers to anything which is new or latest in the style of dress, art or thinking. There are three senses in which we may comprehend the idea of modernization. The first one is most general and synonymous with all kinds of progressive social change when society moves ahead along with some accepted scale of improvement.

Modernization as such means attaining modernity. It refers to the process through which a traditional or pre-technological society passes as it is transformed into a society characterized by machine technology, rational and secular attitudes and highly differentiated social structures. Finally, there is the most specific meaning of the term 'Modernization' referring only to the backward or underdeveloped societies and describing their attempts to catch up with the most developed countries, coexisting with them in the same historical period within the world society.

## Modernization and Social Change

The process of modernization has brought forth some significant changes in the structural and cultural spheres of the Indian society. These changes can be discussed under the following heads:

### • Structural Change

Modernization has introduced typical forms of social change in the structure of Indian society. By structural change we mean the growth of new roles and group structures. It analyzed at two levels: the macro-structures and micro-structures. Micro-structures are autonomous in nature. They provide a social space for primary relationships. Their organization is less formal; the relationships are more affective and particularistic. The net-work relationship is limited. Family, community, clan, tribe, caste or sub-castes are examples of the micro-structures of the Indian society.

Modernization has also brought forth eye-catching changes in the micro structural phenomena such as caste, family, and village communities. Under the impact of modernization, caste has given up its traditional occupation and dissociated itself from traditional obligation, for example, jajmani relation. Caste endogamy has crumbled down and the incidences of inter-caste marriages are on the increase. Caste activities are gradually expanding. The power structure of caste is also changing. As the modernization proceeds, the transition from the extended or joint families to conjugal forms or nuclear families has become much more accelerated.

Village communities are another important micro-structure of the Indian society. Villages are changing in respect of economic institutions and power structures and inter-caste relationships. The jajmani system is disintegrating. The introduction of statutory Panchayat has transformed the structure of village leadership. The emerging leadership consists of young people. It has to face the factions and opposite interest groups. There has been a break in the world-view of the castes and classes. There is a rising motivation for education, status mobility and share in local, regional and national power structures.

## Cultural Change

Modernization has initiated a profound change in the Indian cultural tradition. Broadly, we can categorize the Indian cultural tradition into two: the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition. The Great Traditions refer to those traditions which grow because of outside contact and are found at national level whereas the

little traditions are local in origin and are found at the folk or peasant level. Some examples of the Great traditions are industrialization, urbanization, expansion of modern education, growth of universalistic legal system, transportation and mass communication, mass politicization and science and technology.

## **Industrialization**

Industrialization in India has been the cause and consequence of modernization. After independence the real process of industrialization has started. The process of industrialization has changed the whole social system based on the principle of ascription and a subsistence agricultural economy. As a result, the economy, the politics, the social institutions, the system of stratification of the country and the way of life of people and their standard of living have changed appreciably. Industrialism has fostered rational and secular attitudes. Traditional thoughts and actions gradually lose their hold.

## **Urbanization**

Modernization leads to urbanization and urbanization also leads to modernization of culture. The higher is the degree of modernization in a society, the higher is its degree of urbanization. Urban centres are the centres for the diffusion of modern values to the villages. Urban returnees carry the ways of life and habits from the cities to the villages. Urbanization brings about transformation in various social institutions such as the family, social stratification, patterns of social interactions, value preference of the people etc. In the context of Indian society urbanization not only fosters modern values but also reinforces traditional values and institutions.

## **Expansion of Modern Education**

Modernization in Indian society brings about a radical change in the orientation and organization of education. Contrary to the traditional education, its content becomes liberal and it propagates modern scientific world-views. It imbibes modern themes like humanism, liberalism and secularism. It incorporates the courses in sciences, medicines and engineering. The organizational structure of education also has undergone a significant change. By educating the people, a sense of unity, the feeling of nationalism, liberalism and freedom and an urge for effective political participation have been created in the mind of people.

## **Change in Legal Structure**

Modernization also brings changes in the customs and laws of the Indian society. It leads to the emergence of a universalistic legal system based on the principle of universalism, rationalism and individualism. New legal system challenged the traditional system of hierarchy and holism. It contributes to the growth of multiple legal professions and establishment of rule of law.

## **Spread of Transportation and Communication**

Modernization has led to the growth and expansion of nationwide net-work of transport and communication. As a result of transportation and communication, the barriers between regions have broken down. The large-scale circulation of newspapers and periodicals and other easy means of communication have a double edged impact on the Indian society. On one side, it has modernizing effects on the other, traditionalizing effect. Mass communication has accelerated the process of industrialization and urbanization and the same time it has strengthened primordial ties like caste, religion, race etc.

## **Mass Politicization**

Only due to the process of modernization in India, the enlightened Indian elites could think of introducing political institutions based on values of democracy, equality, liberty, freedom and justice. As a result, the government of India could set up a constitution based on the democratic system. The decision making, no more, remains an elite affair, but masses also become politicized. They are politically very much conscious; they participate in political gatherings, hold political discussion and evaluate the decisions of authority.

Undoubtedly, the process of modernization has brought in significant changes in political, social, economic and cultural spheres of the Indian society. But, it is not without stresses and strains.



### Historical Background

Ambedkar a great Harijan leader met the franchise committee in 1917 and pleaded for direct representation of the depressed class in Bombay legislature through separate electorate. He, as the leader of his 'Mahar' community, took many steps to reform their way of life. He urged them not to remove dead cattle from the village community and to give up drinking alcohol and begging. On the other hand, he asked them to send their children to schools dress well and develop good habits. Above all, he taught them self-respect. On a few occasions, he attempted forcible entries into temples. That's he did to establish the rights of the untouchables as Hindus. But at the first round table conference he maintained that untouchables constituted a distinct group separate from the Hindu community and wanted a separate electorate for them. He also spoke and complained about the miserable condition of the untouchables and succeeded in getting the Government's attention to their plight.

At the second round table conference, Ambedkar and Gandhi failed to reach an agreement on the problem of political status of untouchables. The British Prime Minister, however, announced the communal award according to which the untouchables were granted separate seats in provincial assemblies. Ambedkar wanted a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus as far as untouchables are concerned. He, as the chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution, was greatly responsible for the inclusion of many special provisions for the uplift the untouchables in the Constitution and for the abolition of untouchability.

Gandhiji also made relentless efforts for the welfare of the 'Harijans'. As far back as 1920, Gandhiji wrote "untouchability cannot be given a secondary place in the programme". Without the removal of the taint, Swaraj is a meaningless term. Through his Vykom 'Satyagraha' he tried to persuade the Government and the caste Hindus of Travancore to open the temple streets for the untouchables. In December 1932, he declared that there could be no rest for him until untouchability became a thing of the past. So he made removal of untouchability one of the planks of his political platform. The present-day position of the Harijans owes much to the efforts of this great leader.

## Scheduled Castes

The expression 'Scheduled Castes' was first coined by the Simon Commission and used it in the Government of India Act-1935 to refer to certain castes. The framers of the constitution adopted the same expression and embodied it in the constitution but did not try to define it clearly.

Article 341 of the Constitution empowers the President, in Constitution with the head of the particular state, to notify by an order "the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which for all the purposes of the constitution be deemed to be scheduled castes in relation to that state".

- The second clause of the same article empowers the parliament to pass a law to include in or exclude from the list so notified by the President "any race, caste, tribe or part of or group within any caste, race or tribe".

These Scheduled castes are the lowest castes of the Hindu society and are mostly untouchable castes. Untouchable castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by higher castes.

These castes suffered from various social, economic, religious disabilities for centuries. Their touch, even their sight was considered to be polluting and therefore, they were not allowed free movement in a village or a town. They were treated as communal slaves and so their position was worse than that of a slave.

Efforts are afoot to bring about radical changes in the position of these castes. The Constitution abolishes untouchability and contains a number of special provisions for the promotion of the interests of these castes. As a consequence of these constitutional provisions, a certain number of seats, roughly in proportion to their population, are reserved for them in both central and state legislatures. A convention has been developed to include at least one member of these castes in the central and state cabinets. Their representation is assured at all level of the Panchayati Raj system. Besides, a fixed percentage of jobs are being reserved for them in the central and the state services.

In order to give a boost to their education seats are reserved in the various educational institutions and scholarships are liberally given to them. Above all, the Government has been spending huge amounts of money for their upliftment. The Government of India enacted the Untouchability Offence Act 1955, which delegitimizes all the disabilities suffered by these castes and made the practice of untouchability in any form an offence punishable by a fine of five hundred rupees or imprisonment for a period of six months or both. The Protection of the Civil Rights Act contains more severe punishment for the practice of untouchability.

## Scheduled Tribes

The government of India without clearly defining a tribe simply prepared a list of tribes for special treatment and called them scheduled tribes. But every year more and more communities claimed tribal status and applied for their inclusion in the list. Consequently, the list was revised and according to the scheduled tribes list modification order 1956, there are 414 tribes in India. It is, therefore, necessary to define a tribe as clearly as possible.

A tribe is an indigenous, homogenous unit speaking a common language, claiming a common descent, living in a particular geographical area, backward in technology, preliterate, loyally observing social and political customs based on kinship.

Territorially, tribal India can be divided into three main zones and a small zone in the Bay of Bengal. They are the North-North-Eastern Zone, Central Zone and Southern Zone on the main land and a small zone comprising Andaman and Nicobar Island in the Bay of Bengal. The tribes found in the North-North Eastern Zone mainly belong to the Mongoloid race and mostly speak language belonging to Sino-Tibetan Speech family.

In Central zone we find the bulk of the tribal population of India. They are mainly of Australoid race and speak languages and dialects belonging to Austric speech family. In the Southern Zone we find some of the most ancient tribes of India such as the Kadar. The Kadar are said to be of Negrito race. The tribes of this zone generally speak languages belonging to the Dravidian speech family. Besides there are a few tribes in the small and isolated zone of Andaman and Nicobar islands, which belong to the Negrito race. The tribes of India are at different levels of socio-economic development.

Some of the tribes like the Kadar and the Malapantharam are food gathers and hunters. The economy of some other tribes like the Kamar and Baiga is mid-way between food gathering and primitive agriculture. However most of the tribes in India primarily depend on some form of agriculture with forest product as secondary income.

The Oraon, the Munda, the Bhil, the Santhal, the Gond and the Ho may be cited as a few examples. They mostly practise shifting cultivation. Tribes like the Toda are pastoral. Some other tribes depend upon handicrafts like basket making, spinning, weaving, pottery etc. of late there are tribal people who work in the tea plantations and modern industry.

Over the last hundred years, the tribes in India have actively come in contact with more advanced cultures. As a result of the cultural contacts, some drastic changes have taken place in the tribal way of life.

### **These drastic changes have however given rise to new problems.**

- First, religious conversions to Christianity or Hinduism have produced religious cleavages in many of the tribes. These differences based on religion have shattered their unity and increased social conflicts and dissensions.
- Second, because of the contact with other cultures many tribal people are adopting alien customs and modes of life which often contradict tribal ways of life. This has led to cultural conflicts in many tribes of India.
- Third, contacts with other cultures have given rise to many social problems like increase of bride price, incidence of child marriage, increase of premarital and extramarital sexual relations, increase in the number of divorces and the incidence of prostitution and venereal diseases.
- Finally, these cultural contacts have led to the disintegration of economic system of most of the tribes. As a result, most of the tribal people are working as labourers in plantations, agricultural farms, mines, factories etc. The employers exploit these ignorant tribal people. Traders, contractors and religious missionaries also exploit them in many ways.

On the whole it may be said that contacts with other cultures have led to the disintegration of tribal social organization and way of life. Therefore, the major aim of tribal welfare programme should be to solve these problems arising out of uncontrolled, haphazard and sometimes disastrous culture contacts. There was a school of thought which advocated for a policy of isolation of the tribes to solve these problems.

The policy of integration stresses on the need of integrating tribes with the larger society in such a way that they will be active parts of Indian society while retaining their former tribal identities.

### **According to this policy the principles to be followed are:**

- The tribal people should be allowed to develop along the lines of their own genius. We should avoid imposing anything on them, instead we should encourage their own way of life.
- Tribal rights to land and forests should be respected
- We should train and develop a team of their own people to man their administration and development programmes. There should not be too many outsiders.
- We should not over administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should work through and not in rivalry to their social and cultural institutions
- We should judge results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by quality of human character that is evolved

The Indian Constitution has made a number of special provisions for the welfare of the tribal people. In accordance with the constitutional provisions, the central and state governments have taken measures for their upliftment. A number of research institutes are established for the study of their culture and problems.

At the central level, a commissioner, attached to the home ministry, looks after their welfare and he is assisted by several regional assistant commissioners. In the states there are special directorates of tribal welfare to take care of the tribes. In order to encourage education schools are being established in tribal areas. A number of seats in medical, engineering and technical institutions are reserved for the tribal people and scholarships are liberally given to them.

Besides, a number of seats in both the central and state government services are reserved for them. Reservations are also made for the tribal people in the central and state legislatures. Some of the tribal representatives have risen to the rank of ministers.

The government has enacted law to protect their rights on land in tribal areas. In addition crores of rupees are being directly spent on tribal development. Special multipurpose tribal blocks have been created for their all-round development. But, in spite of all these efforts their conditions are far from satisfactory. The solution of tribal problems is not so simple. It requires a multisided planning.

## **Other Backward Classes**

The Britishers in India introduced schools and colleges where education in secular subjects like medicine, engineering, law etc. was imparted through English medium. The higher castes and classes especially the 'Brahmins', owing to their tradition of education, successfully utilized the new opportunity to their own advantage and got themselves educated. The lower castes and classes which had no such tradition lagged behind in getting themselves educated. The members of the higher castes and classes could get into government services and other professions and further enhanced their prestige. This resulted in widening the cultural, social and economic distance between the higher and lower castes.

The lower castes and classes found themselves at a disadvantageous position and they also realized that mere Sanskritization could not provide them the avenue for social mobility. Therefore they desired to get themselves educated and enter into government jobs and professions and thereby enhance their social positions.

The backward class movement was started in the early part of the 20th century. The aim of the movement was mainly to limit the monopoly of higher castes and classes especially the Brahmins in the south, in the fields of education and government jobs. The opposition did not come from the lowest class; it came from the rich and powerful higher caste like Reddis, the Kammas, the Vellalas, and the Nayars etc. Muslim, Christian and other communities also joined them. Therefore, the movement was known as the Backward Class Movement rather than Backward Caste Movement.

In 1953, the Government of India appointed a commission to determine the criteria for the selection of Backward Class.

### **The commission suggested four basic criteria of backwardness. They are:**

- Low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy
- Lack of education in the major section of the caste or community
- Inadequate or no representation in the government services

- Inadequate representation in the field of trade, commerce and industry

On the basis of these criteria, the commission prepared a list of 2400 castes for special concessions to be given in education and government jobs. It also recommended for the inclusion of certain section of the Muslims, Christian and Sikh communities. Every year, the number is increasing as new castes and communities apply for their inclusion in the list.

The commission holds a number of causes responsible for the backwardness of these castes and communities. It states that social, environmental, economic and political causes have operated over the centuries and created this colossal problem of backwardness. The commission also suggests a number of measures to be taken for the uplift of these backward classes.

## Law and Status of Women in India

Law has always been an important instrument to initiate social change in all democratic societies. The Pre-Independent India had experienced the non-interference in Hindu and Muslim laws, which were claimed to be of divine origin. The British authorities did not touch those sensitive aspects of the Indian social system. They, therefore, adopted the plausible and seemingly reasonable attitude of non-interference.

Due to the apathetic attitude of the Britishers towards social legislation aiming at the upliftment of women, there was a complete stagnation in the socio-economic sphere. This policy of stagnation created social tensions, which would have taken serious proportions, but for the untiring efforts of some of social reformers. They hinted at the major social evils which paralyzed the Indian society at that time such as the practice of child marriage, sati and child widow. These 19th century Indian social reformers, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, DevendraNath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and others, did not base their case on the ancient Hindu scriptures but on the intellectual liberal tradition of the west. They met annually at the Indian Social Conference to address the lamentable social crisis of the day.

Finally, as a sequel to their ceaseless endeavor, the British Government responded to these proposals of reform by enacting the following social legislations: (i) The Widow Remarriage Act, passed in 1856, (ii) Civil Marriage Act, passed in 1872, (iii) Married Women's Property Act, passed in 1874.

In 1925, National Council for Women was founded and all Indian Women Conference (AIWC) was set up in 1927. These social welfare organizations projected many issues of social consequence to Indian women-essential questions arising from inheritance and marriage laws. Being pressured by these organizations the British Government passed:

- (i) The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, (ii) The Prevention of Prostitution Act 1923, (iii) The Hindu Inheritance Act of 1929

The participation of women in politics and avenues for employment drew a large number of women from seclusion of their homes. The Government of India appointed a commission to consider such issues as Hindu inheritance and the position of woman in respect of monogamy, dissolution of marriage and property rights. The measure for the enhancement of women's legal status, in the post-independence period mainly related to the regulations regarding polygyny, age at marriage and divorce. The concept of monogamy was based on equality of relationship between man and woman. In India the absence of a uniform civil code permitted various religious groups to follow their personal laws with regard to marriage and family.

Nevertheless, barring the Muslims, probably all other religious communities have accepted monogamy. But this did not undermine the fact that polygamous marriages were completely absent among the non-Muslim communities, under the customary law, the right of Hindu wife to obtain a divorce confronted many more obstructions than that of husband. A daughter's right to ancestral property was not legally ensured.

After achieving Independence, the Congress Government, declared India a welfare state. Article 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution enumerated the Fundamental Rights of People and guaranteed to all citizens equal protection of law and equality of opportunity in employment. With regard to these constitutional provisions the Government made a series of legislations to improve the social status of women. The Special Marriage Act of 1954 made provision for obtaining a decree of divorce by mutual consent on the ground that the parties have lived separately for a year and that three years have elapsed since the date of the marriage.

Despite the social invention of the legal dissolution of marriage, under Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and Marriage Laws Amendment Act, 1976, divorce is viewed with disdain in the Indian scenario and a divorced woman is stigmatized. As a sequel to that, most of Indian women do not think in terms of legal termination of marriage, even though they are subjected to severe torture and all types of harassment.

In the name of the honor or prestige of the family, they silently put up with all kinds of oppression and accept the worst ever injustice meted out of them. This is more so in case of the non-working women who are economically dependent on their male partners for their own maintenance as well the maintenance of their children.

The divorced women also find it difficult to pull on well with their daughters and sisters due to apprehension of loss of family prestige. The non-working divorcee-women also face difficulties in their adjustment with their parents or brothers as they are, in most of the cases, considered as additional burden on the family. Thus, an examination of the status of women in India with reference to the various legal provisions amply reveals that enactment of law alone cannot bring the desired result for uplifting the status.

What is really needed is the changing attitude of people towards women, changes in the belief in the inevitability of marriage, social stigma attached to divorce etc. In the light of the above disabilities faced by Indian woman, the following pre-requisites, for the real upliftment of women's status, may be suggested: (i) Reduction of emphasis laid on wife and mother (ii) Formation of healthy attitude towards the spinsters (iii) Provision of initial facilities for those who desire divorce with minimum expenses and embarrassment (iv) Provision of protective measures to women in regard to their specific disabilities arising out of biological and cultural factors (v) Provision of equal opportunities, especially in respect of economic and political participation of woman (vi) Recognition of women's work in the household (vii) Acceptance of women as part time workers, with parity of wages and salaries with full time male-workers.

It may take decades together to translate these suggestions into action. But serious thinking on the women's issue, recognition of women's role in the household and realization of their contribution towards facilitating the role performance of others will certainly impel all to embark upon quick steps for real equality of status of man and woman.

## Agriculture and status of farmers in the society

"Farmers alone live an independent life. Others worship them and are second to them"

"If farmers stop cultivation, even Rishis (sages) cannot survive" (Thiruvalluvar)

Agriculture plays a vital role in the Indian economy. Over 70 per cent of the rural households depend on agriculture. Agriculture is an important sector of Indian economy as it contributes about 17% to the total GDP and provides employment to over 60% of the population.

Farmers and their families are members of the society in which they live. In any society there are strong pressures on its members to behave in certain ways. For the farmers, some of these pressures will come from within. In all societies there are accepted ways of doing things and these ways are directly related to the culture of the society.

According to the Agricultural Census of 2010–11, there were a total of 138.35 million operational holdings in India. The total area operated was 159.59 million hectares and the average size of an operational holding was 1.15 hectares. Holdings of size 2 hectares or less accounted for around 85 per cent of all holdings and 45 per cent of the total area operated. The number of persons who were part of small farmer households was close to half a billion.

The levels of income received by small farmer households were low, in both absolute and relative terms. The average incomes received by small farmers were not much higher than the minimum wages in agriculture stipulated by State governments. Minimum wage in India is defined as subsistence wage; hence incomes received by small farmer households were inadequate to meet investments or any requirements other than daily consumption needs.

While small farmer households are the worst off among the peasantry, there exist disparities and differences within the class of small farmers on the basis of social identity. The analysis presented in this chapter shows that SC, ST, and Muslim households among small farmers are far more deprived in terms of housing and access to basic household amenities than households belonging to other social groups.

With GDP growth slowing and automation replacing human labour the world over in order to decrease labour costs and boost profit, there are no jobs to cater for the hundreds of millions of agricultural workers who are to be displaced from the land or those whose livelihoods will be destroyed as transnational corporations move in and seek to capitalize food-related sectors that currently employ tens of millions.

While there is no logic to what is taking place, it is clear to many why it is happening. India's development is being hijacked by the country's wealthy ruling elite and multinational corporations. Farmers are being sold out to corporate interests whose only concern is to how secure profits: Monsanto has appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars from small farmers in India, who live on a knife edge.