# UNIT 5 SOCIO HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE - I

## Structure

## 5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will discuss the structure of Indian society through the historical times. After reading this unit you will learn about the:

- the structure of Indian society during ancient period

- the social structure during the medieval period

- the evolution of major social institutions during the above stated periods,

- the important phases of social transformation in Indian society.

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Units 5 & 6 of this Block we have discussed a structure of Indian society in the historical perspective. Unit 5 focusses on the evolution of Indian society upto medieval period and Unit 7 will cover the subsequent period of history.

In this Unit i.e. Unit 5 you will learn about the social life during the early Rigvedic period of ancient India and its different phases of change through the later Vedic period. You will see how the social institutions which emerged during this period were later transformed and became more rigid due to changes in the economy and the political organization of society. This took place during the post-Vedic period when social codes were more rigidly defined through the composition of the Epics and Puranas. The great epics such as the **Ramayana** and the **Mahabharata** composed, during this period contain prescriptions about social, cultural and political norms of society.

The social rigidity and orthodoxy which developed in society during the period of the Epics soon led to protest and reform movements in society. It gave rise to religious and cultural movements such as Budhism and Jainism which revolted both against the Vedic cultism and the rigid caste hierarchy. They also opposed social and cultural exploitation inherent in these institutions. The reform movements ushered by Budhism and Jainism were, however, limited in their spread. Their influence weakened over time and Hinduism once again revived. You will learn about how this revival of Hinduism was introduced and how it reinforced the rigid social norms of caste and occupation. It was about this time that Manu is attributed to have authored **Manava Dharmashashtra**, the law-code of the Hindu social organization. You will learn about the major social and economic changes taking place during this period, such as the rise of mercantile groups, expansion in trade and its links with the growth in handicraft and urban settlements.

This Unit will also offer you a perspective on how this period of Indian social history underwent new phases of transformation due to regionalisation of the Indian polity and disintegration of empires (of the Mauryas during the Budhist period and of the Guptas during the period of Hindu revivalism). It was during this transitional period that political and

cultural contact with Islam began to take place. Slowly it led to the establishment of kingdoms of the Muslims e.g. the Turks and the Mughals. You will learn about the nature of impact that this historical development had upon the social, cultural and economic institutions of society.

## 5.2 INDIAN SOCIETY DURING THE VEDIC PERIOD

We will discuss the Vedic society in two sub-sections i.e. the early Vedic and the later Vedic society.

### 5.2.1 Early Vedic Period

The early Vedic society was largely based on pastoral economy and lineage mode of social organization. It comprised groups of households linked by descent or kinship bonds. Sets of different lineages comprised a social community. It represented an interdependent network of clans. This community being a pastoral economy had to move about. In this sense it functioned like roaming tribal bands. The key elements of social organization were: **household, lineage, and tribal band**. The members of this society were of fair complexion, skilled in the art of cattle raising and worshiped natural elements, primarily fire. They are called **Aryans**. and being a migratory people, they often clashed with the native inhabitants where they migrated. The Aryans seem to celebrate predatory power; they were prone to attack and often decimated their enemies of the native stock whom they characterize as the dark-complexioned **Dasas**. They used to capture them through warfare and used them as slaves.

Many Indologists are of the opinion that the **Dasas** were descendants from the Harappan civilization which was urbanized and consisted of urban settlements. The fear of the Aryans drove these people to take shelter in Vindhyachal areas. The **Aryans** characterized the **Dasas** as dwellers of caves in darkness. The social structure of the early Vedic society which resulted form this contact got divided between the **Aryans** and the **Dasas**. The Aryans during this time did not seem to have developed internal social stratification or rigid division of labour. The **Aryan** society was more egualitarin. The occupations, either of priesthood or that of warrior or a commoner, could be adopted by choice and were inter-changeable. A priest could become a warrior and **vice versa**. But rigid social gradation did appear to have existed between the **Aryans** and the **Dasas**. It was of domineering and exploitative character.

The **Rigveda** also has a mention of a people called the **Pani** who are portrayed as rich cattle-breeders and traders. These were non-**Aryans** and are mentioned as having dark-complexion or proto- Australoid features. They were probably of the Phoenician (Syrian) origin. They did not observe the **Aryan** rituals, or sacrifices. They conducted trade and commerce through exchange. The **Aryans** used to plunder the **Panis** and set fire to their settlements. They used to enslave them and called them also as **Dasas**. They usurped Panis's wealth and cattle. Since both **Dasas** and **Panis** are reported to have proto-Australoid features, one could envisage similarities between the two categories of people. It seems that the interacction between the **Pani-Dasa** social segment with the **Aryans** slowly began to give rise to the elementary features of social stratification. it was based on distinctions of **Varna** (colour), which had racial characteristics. The institution we know today as the **jati** system had not yet fully emerged.

### 5.2.2 Later Vedic Period

Significant changes in social structure, cultural rules and division of labour came into existence during the later-Vedic period. The four-fold division of castes (**jatis**): the **Brahamana** (priest), the **Rajanya** (rulers) or **Kshatriyas**, the **Vaisya** (traders) and **Sudra** (peasants) is referred to have originated from the body of the **Purush** (the great Being) in the **Purusasukta** of the Rigveda which is of a much later origin. The **Purusasukta** says: "the **Brahamana** was his (**purasa's**) mouth, the **Rajanya** was made of his two arms; his thigh became the **Vaisya**. From his feet was produced the **Sudra**". Thus a relative differentiated social hierarchy seems to have emerged during the later Vedic period which got further consolidated during the Epic period. Social disabilities of the lower strata, particularly of the **Sudra** in regard to the access to sacred texts or their recitation were strictly imposed. The inter-changebilty of occupations by voluntary choice was restricted to the upper segment of

the social strata. The priest also lost his generic role in society, based on voluntarily charitable roles such as exponent of military strategy, crafts or literary works. Their role was confined to presiding over rituals and sacrifices. The rationalisation of the Varna hierarchy was achieved through the sacrament of initiation or **Yajnopavita** (sactred thread) ceremony. It was allowed only in cases of the first three **Varnas**. The codification of rigid norms of social and ritual practices which romed the basis of discrimination by the upper **Varnas** of the **Sudras** took place during the later-Vedic period. The composition of the **Grahasutra** (household sacraments) and **Dharmasutra** was completed. It debarred the **Sudra** and members of the lower **Varnas** from any privileges available to the upper **Varnas**. The process of **Varna** turning into **Jati** (caste) taking most out of the **Jati** feature of exclusion in respect of social, cultural and economic domains, had thus begun.

### Family and Lineage:

The Vedic society had family and lineage as the two basic elements of its social organization. Most rituals and religious activities of the **Aryans** such as, the household sacraments related to life cycle (birth, initiation, marriage, death etc), the sacrificial rituals to appease gods for acquisition of magical powers to meet with challenges of nature, enemies and of rivals etc. were centred around the household, the lineage or the clan. The **Grahyasutra** and **Dharmasutras** prescribe and illustrate the varied rituals and sacrifices and their normative principles. The head of the household had a very special role in performance of these rituals over which he often used to preside.

The term used for family in the Vedas is **grha**, and the head of the household is called **grhapati**. God **Agni** (fire) had a pre-eminent place in the sacramental rituals of the household, so much so that some times **Agni** or the God of fire was called the **grhapati**, and the sacred fire in the household was named as **grhapatya**. Most sacramental rituals in the family had the god of fire as the main deity and **Grahasutra** illustrates this relationship.

The structure of the family during the early period was of the nuclear or 'elementary' type having members not of more than two generations. The family had its network with the lineage of the clan. During the later Vedic period, however, there is evidence of the existence of the joint family. This may be indirectly related to the more settled agriculture and pastoral economy and the changing social composition of the process of production. The authority system in the family used to be largely partrilineal but without clear evidence of the supremacy of patriarchy. It implies greater degree of gender equality and participation in family rituals and processes of production.

Lineage is yet another important social institution of the Vedic times. **Lineage is defined as a corporate group of kins in unilineal relationship having a formal system of authority**. These unilineal descent groups constitute a clan when several of them come together under a specific institution of authority. The authority can be of a 'chief', a **Rajanya** for whom also the term **Grhapati** has been used. The lineage and clan, therefore, constituted the political system of the Vedic society. Its constituents were: **household, lineage** and **clan.**

### Upanisads and Protest Against Brahamanic Ritualism:

It is probably inherent character of society that over-emphasis on ritualism and perpetuation of command over privileges by a closed group leads sooner or later to protest. The **Upanishads** and **Aranykas** which were composed in-between the periods of the early and late Vedic society exemplify protest. These texts exhort that cumbersome and expensive sacrifices do not lead to real knowledge. They challenge the supremacy of **Brahamanas** and the **Varna** hierarchy. Interestingly, the authorship of the **Upanishads** is attributed primarily to the **kshatriyas**, members of the lower **Varnas** and women. They are also written in relatively simpler language and therefore, attained more popularity. Instead of ritualism they emphasize abstract metaphysical principles and mystical meanings of reality. In some **Upanishads** (e.g. **Chandogya Upanishad**) there are derogatory references about **Brahmans** and they are portrayed as greedy self-serving people.

The Upanisadic protest, however, was not enduring. its influence could not sustain itself and the ritualistic Veda-ism soon re- asserted itself with the composition of the **Sutras** (**Grahasutra** and **Dharmasutra**) whose intimate relationship with the household and lineage ritualisms and sacrifices we have already analyzed.

## 5.3  POST-VEDIC SOCIETY

We get historical records of the post-Vedic society from 600 B.C. onwards. It seems that by this time lineages and clans which in the past were emerging as nascent political institutions had assumed the forms of either republics or monarchies. The institution of hereditary kings, who were mostly **kshatriyas**, was still flexible but the formation of state, as a political body, had emerged. It soon consolidated itself into the Mauryan empire which ushered in many significant changes in the social structure of society. The changes got further impetus with the new revolutionary cultural and religious accompaniments of Buddhism and Jainism. Both these religious movements constitute the core of the social and cultural protest against orthodox Brahamanical emphasis on rituals and animal sacrifices. The incipient seeds of such protest, as you have learnt already existed during the period of the Upanishads. But both Budhism and Jainism led to a radical departure on the perspective on religion and society as never existed before.

Exponents of both Budhism (Gautam Budha) and Janism (Mahavir) were **kshatriyas**. Both placed great emphasis on nonviolence and universal piety or compassion. Both rejected the Brahamanical orthodoxy on caste, its social and cultural discriminations and ritualism which had assumed expensive and exploitative proportions. Unlike Brahamanism both Budhism and Janism had atheistic worldview. The origin of these two radical religious and social movements had its linkages with economic, political and social structural changes in the post-Vedic society.

### Social and Structural Changes:

The evidence regarding the post-Vedic society suggests that by this time social structure had already undergone changes as a result of processes of social assimilation and interaction with a host of communities, both alien and native. The scale of integration and stratification of the **Aryan** and non-**Aryan** groups into caste and class had very substantially been enlarged. it was also rendered more complex and rigid in terms of hierarchy and inequality. In addition to the four-fold **varnas** a fifth category of 'untouchables' had now sprung up. The untouchables were probably aboriginal tribals who lived by hunting and food gathering and were treated as the lowest stratum of society. It also implies the existence of the notions of pollution-purity in a rigid form in the caste hierarchy. The notion of **Varna** which was relatively an open social system in respect of inter-**varna** mobility got by this time converted into caste (**jati**) as a closed system (membership only by birth).

The complexity of the caste system was also accompanied by differentiation between the agricultural and industrial mercantile economies. The surplus generated by these economies were channeled by state into urban centers which had emerged by now. It also contributed to differentiation among intellectual and cultural elites and groups involved into arts, crafts and trade etc. It contributed to emergence of cultural elite which could challenge established Brahamanical-Vedic orthodoxy. Long before the rise of Budhism and Janism which provided this challenge to orthodoxy many philosophers and thinkers of radical dissent were spreading their ideas. **Charvaka** offered an atheistic worldview supporting total materialism.

Budhism and Janism, however, had a systemic impact ideologically as well as socially. In the first instance they rejected Vedic beliefs and rituals. Secondly, their exponents as well as followers came from non-Brahamanical strata. The **kshatriyas**, the **Vaisyas**, the **shudras** and the untouchables comprised their following and their leadership. It is possible that the process of economic diversification, urbanization and increased social differentiation formed the positive contributory factors in the growth of these dissent ideologies. The negative factors were of course social and economic deprivations arising out of rigid caste norms, ritualistic segregation and exploitation of non-Brahamanical segments of society and imposition of inequalitarian norms.

Impact of these changes led to the elaboration of the occupational categories and probably the numbers of castes and classes. We get some insight into this process through Kautilya's **Arthashastra** and Megasthenes's (ambassador to Mauryan court) **Indika**. Megasthenes refers to seven castes to have existed at this time. These are: philosophers, farmers, soldiers, herdsmen, artisans, magistrates and counselors. These are of course occupational rather than caste categories. But these give us insight into the level of social differentiation in society at this time. Similarly, **Arthashashtra** also offers a variety of castes and occupational categories. It also mentions the existence of the institution of slavery whose existence is denied by

Megasthenes. It is possible that some form of bonded relationship existed (which even now prevails in some parts of Indian) between master and servant quite akin to slavery. In **Arthashashtra** we also get an insight into the development of corporate, administrative, commercial, military and economic- fiscal institutions. These further reinforce the evidence about the existence of elaborate urban centres as the hub of economic, administrative, cultural and political activities. We also have some evidence of urban-rural migration and reciprocal cultural and economic interaction during this period.

**Family, Lineage and Caste:Some Aspects of Change:**

With the increased levels of social differentiation between the rural and urban and agricultural and industrial-mercantile occupations significant changes also took place in the nature of caste − **Varna** relationship and also in the social composition of castes. This had an inevitable impact upon the traditional lineage-clan related social organizations both in the rural and urban communities. In the urban centres industrial and mercantile guilds came into being which were largely caste based. These guilds not only functioned as economic institutions for production and trade but also as political and cultural pressure groups when occasion arose. This had also the effect of emergence of strong business castes in cities which were mostly followers of the Jainism. In an incipient form this period also marks the beginning of the over-lapping relationship among the categories of caste-class and occupation in India which continues even to this day.

In the rural areas, where still most of the population resided, castes had begun to undergo changes with new economic and political implications. Caste lineages and clans had probably begun to take upon themselves more and more economic and political functions rather than serving as units of ritual and cultural reciprocities. Here the combination of the factors of ritual-occupational and political functions in the caste organization served the same purpose in the rural economy as the guilds did in cities. It may be presumed possibly that caste panchayats, in the process of formation were responding to such domains of requirement.

In this process of change lineages and clans were subsumend in caste organization or a beginning in this direction had started. It marked a transition from tribal-segmentary mode of social organisaiton to caste-based organic social organisaiton in which reciprocity of functional division among castes constituted the foundation of social organisation.

The structure and function of family system did respond to these changes. Corresponding to the rise in the economic surplus both in the agrarian and mercantile-industrial economies the tendency towards maintaining larger households (joint family) received reinforcement. The land-owning peasants (formerly **shudras**), mercantile households, urban and rural aristocracy came in this category. The position of women also changed particularly among those professing Budhism and Jainiswm where the scope of their cultural and religious participation was expanded.

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| **Check Your Progress - 1** |

1) Write a short note on Aryans.

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2)  What was the four fold division in later vedic society?

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3)  Give a brief account of social impact of Jainism and Budhism

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## 5.4    GUPTA AND POST GUPTA PERIOD

The period of Indian history which followed the disintegration of the Mauryan empire (200 B.C. A.D.300) brought many changes in society and culture. There was decline in the influence of Budhism and Jainism. Budhism's preachings, however, got a wider reach outside the country during this period. Within the country both Budhism and Jainism had always had a concentration in some areas and flourished due to patronage from kings. Its decline took place due to extreme routinization of its cults in monastic orders and also because of the renaissance in Hindu philosophy, epics, code-books and saintly traditions. The weakening of the empire was marked also by incursions from central Asia of a host of invading groups such as the Kushans, Indo-Greeks and Shakas etc. They established their kingdoms, though short-lived, and were mostly followers of Budhism. This incursion of out-side groups also led to proliferation of new communities which had to be integrated within the caste-fold. It also contributed to fragmentation of castes into sub-castes. Despite the fluidity of polity the economy and its social organization through guilds and business houses in cities and the peasant castes in villages flourished. This brought about  ultimately the renaissance in literature, architecture, art, philosophy, and Hindu thought. It also consolidated social codes and laws governing Hindu society known as the **Smritis**.

This renaissance happened during the rule of the Guptas. This dynasty came to power with the enthronement of Chandra Gupta I (about A.D.319-20) who ruled over Magadh and eastern Uttar Pradesh. During this time and part of the period preceding it there was a spurt of literary, architectural and philosophical contribution. For this reasons historians also name this period as the **classical period** of Indian history.

**Social and Economic Changes:**

The Gupta period led to the consolidation and expansion of social and economic institutions. Economically, there is evidence to suggest that revenue from land increased substantially, and their was expanded investment in business, commerce and production of artefacts. The social organization of guilds and their function was also reinforced. Socially, encoding of social laws through Manu's **Dharmashashtra** and consolidation of the positions of both **Brahamana's** and **Shudras** created more rigid caste hierarchy. The notion of **dwija** (twice-born) comes into vogue about this time although its nuances did exist in the past. This increased the caste discriminations and disabilities in society. The Budhist **Sangha** (monastries) continued, although their influence shrunk more and more to some regions and

urban centres. Also Budhist rituals, despite their frontal opposition to Hinduism began to incorporate many of the elements of Brahamanical religion.

Multiplicity of castes and subcastes increased because of continual migration of new communities, proliferation of occupational categories due to expansion of administration, intellectual activities, rise in professions and also due to social mobility among castes through conversion and reconversion route between Hinduism and Budhism. Jainism also gave rise to a host of caste and subcaste categories due to occupational specialization of different lineages. Prosperity in agriculture led to increase in the rural division of labour giving rise to a number of sub-categories of caste and subcastes.

Yet another distinctive feature of this period is the renaissance in intellectual productions such as literature, philosophy, art and architecture. Aryabhatta made his basic astronomical contribution. Varahmihir's astronomical work **Panchsiddhantika** (five schools of astronomy), Kalidasa's famous sanskrit plays **Shakuntalam** and **Meghaduta** and the enunciation of six philosophical systems e.g.**nyaya vaisheshika, sankhya, yoga, mimansa** and **vedanta** took place about this time. The **puranas** were also composed and popularised. In addition, this period marked the distinctive contributions in temple architecture, the construction of Budhist **Chaitya** and **stupa** (worshipping hall and its complex) and many other artistic creations.

In terms of social and cultural changes we witness during this period a continual interaction between the people of northern and southern kingdoms. Migration of scholars, artists, trading and banking communities increased to a very significant level. This was because during this period export of artefacts, agrarian products and textiles necessitated this interaction. There was significant level of maritime trade, export and import. This also increased interaction between north, south and western regions. The mercantile communities of **Shreshtins** (financiers) in north which had already emerged during the Budhist period could be compared with **Chettis** and **Chettiyars** of south India. Brhamanical and **vedic** literature and philosophical interpretations flourished in south India. The southern kingdoms of Chola, Chalukya and Satvahanas brought about new impetus to economic, cultural and religious creativity which attracted people from other regions. Budhism also travelled to the far-east to Java, Sumatra, thailand, China etc. This led to increased interaction within regions in India and also to lands beyond and outside India.

Not only contributions to systematization of philosophy and religion get impetus but also there was resurgence in Hindu religious movements at the level of folk and peasantry. This was particularly so in the period following the classical Gupta era, a time marked by rise of regional forces and feudatories in the process of weakening of the rule of the Gupta's. Many religious Hindu sects such as Vaishnavism of Ramanuja, Virashavism or Lingayat movement founded by Basavraja and several devotional cults sprung up during the period of the rise of the southern kingdoms. Vaishnavism reiterated Brahamanical system of beliefs and rituals but the Lingayats questioned the authority of the Vedas and followed rituals and beliefs which were non-Brahamanical in nature. About this time Tantrism and magico-religious beliefs and practices also developed in some parts of India. Towards the end of the Classical period of the Gupta's not only the southern kingdoms gained ascendancy but there was rapid regionalsation and feudalisation of society and culture. It brought about a greater degree of pluralims of social customs, religious practices and political organisations, but also weakencned the centralized polity which made the transition to the emergence of Muslim kingdoms possible. This development brought about a new era of social and cultural changes in the Indian society.

## 5.5 MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Following the end of the "Classical" period (C.700 A.D.) many regional kingdoms led by different clans came into existence. Chauhans, Parihars, Chandellas etc. established their rule in north and western India. There was much internecine conflict and rivalry among them. By A.D. 977 Mahmud of Ghazni (a principality located in Northern Afghanistan) invaded northern India. He was followed later (twelfth century) by Muhammad Ghori whose invasion eventually led to the establishment of the rule of the Turks and Afghans. It was the beginning of the Sultanate which lasted upto A.D.1526. From this period onwards the rule of the Mughals increasingly settled down ushering in new dimensions of social change.

## Changes in the Caste Structure:

Major changes in the caste structure took place during the reign of the Sultans and the Mughals. Not only were these changes due to an expansion of economic and trade activities or due to forces of internal differentiation but mainly due to the contact between two major traditions and worldviews: that of Hinduism and Islam. The former legitimizing caste hierarchy and cultural and social inequalities by birth and **karma** (deeds in past life) and the latter professing equality of all within Islamic brotherhood or **umma** (the community of the faithfuls). Despite these differences of ideology or worldview, however, we perceive that the institution of caste or caste-like social grouping did come into being among the Muslims in India. This may be explained partly by the adaptive tendencies within Indian Islam to accomodate the converts to the faith groups already having caste divisions. It may also be a result of emergence of new social status graduation through the emphasis on exclusiveness by Muslim aristocracy, literati and upper classes settling down in India from abroad. The rules of endogamy were strictly practiced by these Muslim ruling and aristocratic classes among themselves to the exclusion of the native Muslims or those having lower social occupation.

Another institution which added impetus to the emergence of caste-like structure among the Muslims and which also contributed to the differentiation of caste groups among the Hindus was new agrarian structures. The institution of feudalism had already started coming into vogue during the period of the Guptas but had added depth during the period of regionalisation of the polity during the last days of this empire. During the rule of the Muslim kings it developed in to the system of land grants to the nobility and assignments implied land grants to the noblels by king, graded land rights differentiating between the assignee, land lord of the land and the tenantry, obligation on the part of each to provide services to the king by pre-determined conventions, such as tributes and taxes, providing soldiers and maintaining them on behalf of the king and rendering such other services as demanded by the king. Similarly, the tenants of the feudal lord had obligations towards him by way of offering gifts, man-power for armed forces, paying rents and observing many customary taboos in life style to show respect towards the king. This institutionalised a whole set of cultural and social norms of inequality, with rules of reciprocity in social, economic and cultural domains. The agrarian system contributed to many changes in the function and structure of castes. It led to the economic and social consolidation of peasant castes in most part of the country to protect their interests in relation to their **jagirdars**. There is evidence of a series of peasant protests and revolts during the Mughal rule in which the kings had to mediate upon to maintain social and economic peace.

### Changes in Hindu and Muslim Castes:

Many changes took place in the caste system during the Muslim rule (from the Sultanate to the end of the Mughal rule) which had far reaching implication for the society. Among the Hindu castes the contact with the Islamic culture introduced not only adaptive new cultural processes in belief and rituals but also led to changes in the structure of caste. One major. structural change took place by subdivision among castes due to growth of new role or occupational categories. It also led to emergence of new castes. The process itself gave upper caste status to many lower castes because evidence suggests that many **shudras** among Hindus and members from low Muslim occupational groups or castes were accorded offices through land grants. Coming into prominence of the **kayasthas** with several sub-castes during this period marks a significant change. Of course, they had a relatively longer history in the past (**puranas** make a mention of them) but they assumed important administrative and clerical role during the rule of the Muslim kings. Most other Hindu castes underwent subdivisions leading to horizontal proliferation of castes.

Among the Muslim community caste-like structured emerged through the process of differentiation of racial or ethnic divisions, occupational hierarchy and the presence of converts with pre- existing caste ranking. The original migrants like warrior groups and literati form central Asia who had distinctive racial features and constituted the ruling elite made the upper caste rung for the Muslim community. **Sayyeds, Shekhs, Pathans** coming from Turko-Afghan, Persian and Mughal origin made the upper hierarchy. It was followed by a host of middle rank Muslim castes of artisans, weaverrs, cultivators and traders known by many local names in different regions e.g. **julaha, ansar, darzi, saifi**, etc. They had middle rank in the system of graduation. Lowest in hierarchy were those performing menial jobs such as **bhishti** (water carriers), **bahelia** (trappers), **bhands** (bards) etc. There was also a category of **pirs, faquirs** and **dervesh** etc. which emerged through growth in Muslim shrines

of sufi saints as a result of interaction of mystical Islam with Hindu devotional traditions. This led to greater interaction between the Islamic and Hindu traditions at the grass-root levels as also to rapid expansion of the influence of Islam over the Hindu population.

It is interesting to note that most of these changes which took place in the caste system during the Muslim rule have not undergone much structural alteration even to this day except for the processes of rapid vertical social mobility among both the Hindu and Muslim castes in India.

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**Check Your Progress - 2**

1) Give a brief account of social changes during the Gupta period.

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2) How the caste structure was influenced during the rule of Muslim kings?

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# 5.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit a study of Indian society during ancient and medieval period has been undertaken. During early Vedic period there was lineage mode of social organization. During later Vedic period significant changes in social structure took place with the coming of four fold division of castes. Family and lineage played important role in Vedic social organisation.

During post Vedic period the social structure became more complex, rigid and hierarchical. During this period the rise of Budhism and Jainism influenced the social organization in many ways.

The Gupta and post-Gupta periods of Indian history witnessed important changes in social structure. The racial codes also got consolidated during this period.

With the coming of the Muslims Indian society underwent many changes. At the same time the Muslim society which had never known any caste structure also got influenced. The Muslims theoretically did not accept the caste structure but in practice the caste like structures found a place.

In Unit 6 of this Block we will continue our discussion on social structure in colonial and independent India.

## 5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

**Check Your Progress - 1**

1)  See Sub Sec. 5.2.1.

2)  See Sub Sec.5.2.2.

3)  See Section 5.3.

**Check Your Progress - 2**

1)  See Sec. 5.4.

2)  See Sec. 5.5.