UNIT 1 INDIAN SOCIETY: HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- describe the evolution and growth of Indian culture
- explain the present structure of Indian society
- describe the caste system of India; and
- analyse the communication needs of the Indian people.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we have divided Indian history into three periods: The Ancient, The Medieval and The Modern. The ancient period begins with the Indus Valley civilization and ends with the Turkish raids on Northern India in 1000 A.D. The medieval period continues up to the coming of the British during the mid-18th century. From the arrival of the British till the present, this period is considered as the Modern period. This division usually equates the ancient period with the Hindus and the medieval period with the Muslims. We shall discuss religion as one of the primary factors in moulding the Indian culture. In the ancient period the Hindu religion played a significant role in the development of Indian culture and tradition. In the Medieval period Islam had relatively strong influence in our culture and tradition. Later on, during the Modern period the British culture and literature brought about a reform in our religious traditions and beliefs. This reformation played a primary role in our tradition and culture in the Modern period.

In this introductory unit, the focus is on the Modern historical events of the critical periods of India, which largely shaped the evolution of Indian society and the distinct Indian way of life.

We shall also discuss how different invasions shaped the Indian culture, tradition and values. We will discuss the caste system and why it is still operating in various places in our country, and the great role women have played in our society. You will hence understand the ethos of our civilisation.
We shall try to understand the importance of women in our society and at the same time we shall focus on their plight.

The discussion will help you to understand the other elements of the modern Indian society, so that you will be in position to grasp the essence of the subject matter of this course and analyse it to make a meaningful intervention in our day to day life. Without this grasp on the evolution of our society, we may fail to develop a perspective on the role of media in our society.

1.2 CULTURAL EVOLUTION: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This unit is intended to acquaint you with a brief description of the Indian society from the historical and sociological perspectives. This would assist you to understand the values, traditions, and attitudes that shaped the distinct Indian way of life; and the cultural legacy that is retained by all Indians within and outside the country even today.

The understanding of the social structure, institutions, the beliefs, the vision and the perceptions of the Indian mind is necessary to grasp the relationship between Indian society and mass media. Mass media do not operate in isolation. They are shaped by the people, and in truth influences the people. Hence, it is imperative to understand the social context, the social milieu and the environment in which human beings share communication.

The Indian civilisation can best be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization (Harappan culture) in 2300 B.C. The antecedents of the Harappan culture were the most extensive of ancient civilizations were spread over in the Indus plain covering Punjab and Sindh, and also Rajasthan and Kathiawar region of Gujarat. It is not known who the builders of the Indus civilization were. In all probability they were a Mediterranean race, allied to the Dravidians of India, the latter being the original inhabitants of the Indo-Gangetic plains. With the ingress of the Aryans, the Dravidians crossed the Satpura range into peninsular India. Archeological excavations reveal that Harappans were Phallus worshippers reflecting many elements of the religion of the Dravidian inhabitants of India. The citadels of Harappa and Mohenjodaro stand even today as symbols of a highly developed urban culture, revealing the deep knowledge of the inhabitants in town planning and management of excellent drainage system.

The Indus people were also the earliest people to develop farming. They cultivated wheat and barley and produced cotton and wore cloth. The alloy of bronze mixing copper with tin was introduced by the Harappans. The people of Harappa and Mohenjodaro invented the potter's wheel. The Harappan used an atypical script which had no resemblance to the early Egyptian or Mesopotamian scripts of the contemporary period. Evidences of trade links both within the northern and western areas of the subcontinent, as well as between people of Indus valley and those of Sumeria (Persian Gulf) and Mesopotamia exist.

In the following paragraphs we shall discuss how the Aryans came to India and settled down. The Aryans brought a distinct culture with them. This culture enriched the local culture. And slowly the unique culture, customs and traditions of India evolved. We will try to outline this evolution in the following pages.

1.2.1 Arrival of the Aryans

Originally, the Aryans lived in the areas east of the Alps, in the region known as Eurasia. They spoke Indo-European languages, which are still used with some variations throughout Europe, Iran, and a major part of the Indian sub-continent including Pakistan, and the Northern and Western regions of India. The people of northern India speak Indo-Aryan languages (Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Bengali) and are of predominantly Mediterranean (Europoid) racial stock.

Very little research has been done regarding the ethnic origins of the Indian population. The fact is that the Indian population is polygenic and is a confusing mixture of racial strains. Very few can claim to belong to any particular racial stock.
The Dravidians, who comprised the pre-Hellenic racial types, originated the city civilization of the Indus valley. They were spread over the whole of India prior to the advent of the Aryans. The latter encountered the highly civilized Indus valley with its big towns. The Indus valley people were essentially city people, the Aryans were a pastoral race.

Though it is not known what happened to the Indus people, it may be assumed that they moved away into interior India beyond the Vindhya and the Satpura ranges. It is possible that some intermingled with the incoming Aryans, who adopted the Indus culture as their own.

The earliest Aryans settled in the area covered by Eastern Punjab, Afghanistan and Western Uttar Pradesh. As migrants, Aryans came in several waves and clashed with the local inhabitants, to establish their supremacy. The success of Aryan invasion in India is attributed to their possession of trained horses, horse-drawn chariots, and better weaponry. The Aryans were also very knowledgeable about climate and agricultural operations like ploughing, sowing, harvesting and threshing.

**Check Your Progress 1**

Note:  
- Use the space given below for your answer.
- Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

1) The Indian population is a mixture of Dravidians and Aryans—Briefly explain this.

The Indian Society: Historical and Sociological Perspectives

1.2.2 Advent of the Vedas

The Rig Veda which is considered to be the oldest of the four Vedas (Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, Atharva Veda are the three later additions) is a collection of prayers in Sanskrit language offered by the Aryans to Gods of fire and rain. Rig Veda is believed to have been composed around 1500 B.C. The four Vedas together constitute a rich repository of the Aryan culture. They were preserved mostly in oral tradition throughout India with reverence. The Rig Veda also mentions artisan communities like those of the carpenter, the weaver, the potter and the leather-worker.

Social Distinctions

Varṇa in the Rig Veda essentially denotes skin colour and Aryans were described as fair complexioned, while the native inhabitants were stated to be dark. This colour distinction seems have contributed to the creation of social divisions. The Dasas and Dasis conquered by the Aryans were treated as slaves and sudras. The society was divided into four principal groups—priests, warriors, traders and the common people.

In ancient India, the people used to communicate through oral tradition. The dominant form of worshipping gods was through the recitation of prayers and offer of ritual sacrifices. Both individual and collective prayers were recited loudly. The prayers were offered to gods in chorus by all the members belonging to individual tribes. The students of communication should take note of this aspect. It is vital to know that this oral pattern of communication is responsible for forming a distinct method of communication in India.

Later Vedic Period

For purposes of singing, the prayers of Rig Veda were set to music and this modified collection was known as Sama Veda. The Yajur Veda contains not only hymns but also rituals which have to accompany their recitation. These reflect vividly the sociopolitical milieu in which the post-Rig Vedic Aryans lived. The Atharva Veda elaborates on the weapons and also deals with charms and spells to ward off evils and diseases. An elaborate description of non-Aryan modes of worship is given in the Atharva Veda.
Atharva Veda

The later Vedic texts have been compiled during 1000-600 B.C. The two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata are concerned with the events which took place in India between 1000 and 700 B.C. The Mahabharata as it survives today is the longest single poem in the world. The epic revolves round the war fought by the descendants of the Kuru clan over land rights at Kurukshetra in the Indus basin (presently in Haryana). The epic is held in high esteem by all Hindus for its message of Dharma.

The events described in the Ramayana are believed to have occurred at a much later date in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Ramayana also reflects the Aryan penetration beyond the Vindhyas into peninsular India and the conflict with the local Dravidian communities to establish Aryan supremacy. The organisation of Hinduism is the main achievement of the later Vedic period. The literature of the period reveals the development of higher philosophical and religious texts. The later Vedas, the Brahmastras, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads are important contributions to Sanskrit literature. In the Upanishads we have the Hindu philosophical thought in its developed form. The doctrines of Karma, Maya, Punarjanma, Mukti and other special features of Hindu thought are fully elaborated in the Upanishads. These teachings have taken deep root in the minds of Indians.

The later Vedic period was remarkable for great intellectual activity. Literary knowledge was systematised and documented in the form of six Vedangas. Among the Vedangas, the Kalpa is a significant contribution. It contains the Sutras; Grihya and Dharma sutras. While the grihya sutras deal with domestic rituals, the Dharma sutras explain the social customs and usage.

The most important social doctrine propounded during this period was Varnashrama Dharma. The concept of varna stands for the division of society into occupational groups. The doctrine of the four castes: the Brahmans (the learned and the guides), the Kshatriya (warrior), the Vaishya (the trader) and the Sudras (the common man, the tiller, the worker) came into being. The fifth category—the panchamas—was added at a much later stage.

Check Your Progress 2

Note:  i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

1) You are now acquainted with various Vedas, the varnas and literature of ancient India. Please comment on the communication pattern of that time.

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Sangam Age: Literary Contributions

The Sangam age is considered to be a landmark in the history of South India. An academy of Tamil poets and bards flourished at Madurai between 500 B.C. and 300 A.D. This academy produced classical literary works in Tamil language under the patronage of Chola, Chera and Pandyan kings.

1.2.3 Advent of Jainism and Buddhism

The Varna system generated many tensions specifically in the areas of Hindu religion. The ruling and trading communities reacted to the domination of the priestly class of Brahmans. The upper castes which stressed the accumulation of wealth and luxurious living during the later period, received stiff resistance from those belonging to the
lower castes suffering social inequalities. It is in this context we observe the introduction of Jainism as a distinct religion by Mahaveera during the 5th century B.C. He preached liberation from worldly bonds and adoption of the path of non-violence (Ahimsa) for acquiring such liberation. Gautama Buddha, who was a contemporary of Mahaveera, also preached and propagated the simple, puritan, ascetic life. Buddhism appealed to the masses who suffered due to the social inequalities and the supremacy of higher castes. Buddhism particularly attracted people where the hold of the upper caste Aryans was marginal. Thus, the monarchies in eastern U.P., Bihar and foothills of Himalayas (Magadh, Kosala and Kausambi) adopted Buddhism and made sincere efforts to spread the religion of equality and a classless society based on love and respect for all creatures. The Pali (a variant of Sanskrit language) which was the spoken language of the common people contributed a lot to the spread of Buddhism. But, Buddhism could not survive for long in India because the Buddhist monks at a later stage became corrupt and accumulated wealth which Gautama Buddha had condemned. However, Buddhism had spread into Sri Lanka, China, Japan, the far-east, Laos, and Cambodia.

Check Your Progress 3

Note:  
1) Please indicate whether the following statements are true or false.
   a) The Sangam age is considered a landmark in the history of Telugu literature.
      [ ] True  [ ] False
   b) Mahaveera and Gautama Buddha are contemporaries.
      [ ] True  [ ] False
   c) The caste system created a lot of bitterness among the lowly and weak population during Mahaveera's time.
      [ ] True  [ ] False
   d) Pali language was used by the Brahmans.
      [ ] True  [ ] False
   e) Buddhism did not flourish in India because it was suppressed by the kings.
      [ ] True  [ ] False

1.2.4 External Invasions

Later on, around the 5th century B.C. several principalities fought among themselves in North-Western region. Taking advantage of this disunity and political chaos, the
The Greek invasion provided the occasion for ancient Europe to come into closer contact with ancient India. Alexander added to his empire a vast Indian territory much larger than Persia. His invasion opened up land and sea routes to India and paved the way for Greek merchants, craftsmen to extend their trade.

In 321 B.C. Chandragupta Maurya, under the guidance of his mentor Chanakya, annexed Punjab driving away the Greeks. Subsequently, he extended his empire to Magadha, Gujarat and South India. The accounts of Megasthenes, the Greek Ambassador in Chandragupta’s court, are a valuable source of knowledge of the social events of the time. Chanakya’s treatise Arthasastra is considered to be a valuable contribution on politics and economic administration. The most significant contribution of the Mauryan period, was made by Ashoka, the grandson of Chandragupta, who in 274 B.C. embraced Buddhism and propagated the doctrines of social equality, justice and non-violence.

A series of invasions from various foreign power along the north-west frontier took place from 200 B.C. onwards. The first to cross the Hindukush were the Indo-Greeks. They contributed to the growth of Sanskrit and Prakrit languages. The Parthenians who originally lived in Persia, then penetrated western Jia. The Parthenians were followed by the Kushans—from Central Asia. The Kushan king Kanishka built a large empire extending from Central Asia to Uttar Pradesh.

The Indo-Greeks, the Parthenians and the Kushans became an integral part of Indian society adopting the local and language script. They also contributed immensely to the enrichment of Indian culture. The Kushans, who controlled the silk route passing through central Asia to the Mediterranean from China, were enterprising traders in addition to being great art lovers. The Buddhist sculptures found in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are valuable art treasures of the Kushan period.

It was during the first century A.D. that Christianity came to India through trading sailors from the West. St. Thomas is believed to have arrived in Malabar in about 52 A.D. The Arabs and the traders from many middle east countries and Egypt established trade links with western and southern period of India during this time. The relationship was mainly confined to trade. However, some Indian embraced Islam religion. This continued for a long time. Later, attracted by the wealth of India, Arabs organised a number of military expeditions from the north-western frontier of Indian kingdoms after the 7th Century A.D. Those expeditions were mainly to plunder the country’s rich stock of gold and other valuable assets. These expeditions were not aimed at territorial expansion. The attacks were confined to Sindh and upper Indus region. However, the Turkish invasions during 1000 A.D. were not only confined to plundering of wealth but also to destroying the military power of the local kings. Mahmud of Ghazni’s occupation of Punjab served as a key to unlock the gates of the rich hinterland of India. His frequent attacks disturbed the basic foundations of Indian polity. During the 11th century A.D. Mohammed Ghori defeated a number of Hindu Kings and laid the foundation for continued Muslim rule in India.

The Delhi Sultanate under the rule of the Slave dynasty, Khiljis and Tughlaks consolidated Muslims rule not only in north India but also in the south, extending upto Kanara (present Karnataka).

### Activity 1

A map of India is given below. Indicate various invasions which took place in ancient time.
Impact of Muslim Rule

The mingling of the Hindu and Muslim cultures led to the growth of new religious movements, and new styles in arts, architecture, and music. (Urdu language, an amalgam of Persian words and Indo-Aryan grammar, became the court language of the Moghuls. The Bhakti movement, propagated by the exponents like Meerabai, Chaitanya, Ramanuja, Vallabhacharya, Kabir, and Guru Nanak, was greatly influenced by Islam. It emphasised simple devotion and faith and protested against the domination of priests and upper castes. While the compositions of Kabir are a great contribution to Hindi literature, Guru Nanak preached in the Punjabi language and Meera Bai's Bhajans are in Brij bhasha of Mathura. Bengali literature was enriched by Chaitanya and his followers of the Vaishnava cult. The Indo-Islamic architecture got amply reflected in the monuments like Qutub Minar and the exquisite forts of the Mughal emperors.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
    ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the reasons for various invasions of India? Give at least 4 reasons.

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1.3 SALIENT FEATURES OF THE INDIAN SOCIETY

Ethnic Plurality

Plurality is the hallmark of Indian society. Ethnological studies reveal the existence of six main racial stocks in India. The earliest was the Negrito, who are found even today in Andaman and Nicobar islands and in some of the primitive tribal groups of South India. They were followed by the Proto-Australoids, the Alpine, the Mongoloid and the Mediterraneans whose skeletal remains were even found in the Harappan sites. The last to come were the Aryans.

The Proto-Australoids constitute the basic element of the Indian population and they are found in many of the tribal communities in Central India, Eastern India, Bihar and Orissa. The Mediterranean race is associated with the Dravidian culture. The concentration of the Mongoloid people is in the North-Eastern and Northern fringes of India.

Linguistic Plurality

Four major languages are identified in the country: Dravidian, Austro, Sino-Tibetan and Indo-Aryan. The Indo-Aryan language was originally the archaic Sanskrit introduced by the early Aryans. This has great similarities with Latin and German languages. Prakrit, which was allied to but different from Vedic Sanskrit, became popular as the spoken language of the Aryans. The alphabets of many of the Indian languages were actually derived from Brahmi script, which came into being during 4th century B.C.

Telugu, Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam, which constitute the Dravidian group of languages, are purely of Indian origin. Some of the allied Dravidian languages are spoken by the tribals like Todas, Kotas and Kodugs of South India and Gondi, Kui, Naiki of M.P. and Malto and Kurukh (Oroan) of Bengal or Bihar. The Austro languages are: Mundari, Kol, Santal, Korku and Khasi. These languages are spoken by the tribal in Central India, Eastern India and parts of North-Eastern region. The Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken by the tribals in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and the people in Himalayan ranges.

The Indian constitution now recognises eighteen major languages but as many as 1650 mother tongues are spoken throughout the country. Despite this great linguistic diversity, all Indians feel that they share together the rich literary and cultural heritage of Sanskrit.

Religious Plurality

A religious orientation of outlook is one of the basic characteristics of Indian culture. Religious tolerance has been the essence of all religions of Indian origin. Hence, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism could flourish without much interruption in the country. Contemporary Indian thinkers and saints have pointed out the contributions of each great religion to humanity and emphasised their underlying unity of thought. Spirituality and Sadhana constitute two distinct dimensions, of Indian culture, enabled the Indian culture to retain its originality and uniqueness.

1.4 CASTE SYSTEM

1.4.1 Varnas

The cultural, religious and racial diversity of India is attributed to the caste system
and its variations. These social stratification have divided the Indian society into thousands of small societies. Although, fundamentally Varna and Jati are distinct from each other, they are often confused as identical. The Bhagavadgita also gives a classification of the society into four Varnas in terms of Gunas (Psychic traits).

The post-vedic period, reflects a very rigid stratification of the varnas. Each varna was regarded as a distinct unit, almost complete in itself for its social life. It may be noted in this context that while the varna system is uniform throughout the country, the caste (jati) system evolved gradually with many regional variations.

The development of caste system is generally attributed to two doctrines: (i) doctrine of the religious unity of the family; and (2) doctrine of Svakarma and Svadharna, enjoining a way of life to be pursued by the individual according to the community/caste in which one is born.

Caste is defined by noted sociologist M.N. Srinivas as a hereditary, endogamous, usually localised group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed, among other things, by the concepts of pollution and purity and generally maximum commonality occurs within the castes.

Activity 2

Go around the locality/village/street you live in and try to identify people as per their caste from their names/dress etc. (Do not ask anybody any questions). Write down your findings.

On the basis of your findings, do you think that there is a need to have caste system in your locality?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No

If yes, why? If no, why not? Mention five points to support your argument.

1.4.2 Jajmani System

Tradition, customs and rules of behaviour differ from one caste group to the other: but each caste tries to maintain its influence over its members and regulates inter-caste and intracaste social interactions. Although different castes are arranged in hierarchical order and social distances are maintained, there are many situations in which one caste secures services from the members belonging to other castes. Such dependence among the castes is traditionally known as Jajmani system, referred to by sociologists like M.N. Srinivas as vertical unity of the castes.
Under the Jajmani system, each caste group within a village, provides certain social, religious and economic services to the other castes members. For illustration, the brahmin performs various religious and ceremonial rituals like marriages, death ceremonies, etc., for other castes. In return for his services, the brahmin is paid in cash and kind. Similarly, other service castes like carpenter, blacksmith, barber, washerman, cobbler, etc., perform their caste-based occupational services for the members of the other communities.

One of the distinctive aspects of the Jajmani system is that service relations between the Jajman (Producer) and the Prajman (Client) are regulated on a hereditary basis, according to the law of inheritance. Thus, the relations between producer and client are permanently maintained to provide continuity of service. The payment for the service is based on the barter system (in terms of grain at the harvest time); and cash is seldom paid. But the relation between the patron-client is not like the master-servant relation. The Jajman is expected to meet the needs of his dependent and look after his family. Thus, the system provides security of occupation for sustenance.

The system, however, suffers from the evils perpetuated by the caste system. It has led to the exploitation of the lower castes by the elite land-owning higher castes. In spite of this weakness, the Jajmani system continues to have a stronger hold in rural India, where the social interactions are mostly governed by caste rules.

For understanding the caste disparities, one must live among the people and watch the day-to-day activities and the inter-personal relations of the people from close quarters, because caste has many inter-linkages with the communication behaviour of the people.

Despite the high degree of interdependence at the village level, different caste groups function as distinct socio-cultural entities. The caste system, in the recent past, has been exploited for (acquired) political patronage leading to caste rivalries and social tensions. In view of this, the social diversity projects an image of a broken society. However, at the conglomerate level, many of these diversities become submerged to reflect in united society, bound by common ethos, values and beliefs.

Check Your Progress 5

Note:  
   i) Use the space given below for your answer.
   ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

1) Please mention 3 advantages and 3 disadvantages of Jajmani system.

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1.4.3  Tribal Communities

In India, we have about 52 million people belonging to one tribe or the other. It is estimated that there are more than 400 tribal groups scattered in different parts of the country. Most of them live in remote areas, particularly in the forest and hill tracts. A minority of them, however, are settled in industrial belts, tea-gardens, mines and collieries as non-agricultural labourers. Among the states, a very high concentration of the tribals is found in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and Maharashtra while the states of Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir have a very low per cent of tribal population. In the North-eastern region, in states like Nagaland and Meghalaya, we find a high concentration of tribals accounting for more than three-fourths of their total population. Similarly, Tripura, Manipur, and Sikkim also have a very high concentration of tribal people.
Activity 3

I am sure, you must be aware of the movement for Jharkhand. Read on this problem and movement and prepare an argument for or against it.

Do you consider it as a communication problem?

[ ] Yes    [ ] No

Give reasons for your answers.

1.4.4 Unity in Diversity

India is a vast country with nearly 900 million people. It has a land frontier of 15,200 km and a coastline of 6100 km. Despite its spread, the country reflects unity in diversity. The Indianness of the people gets exhibited clearly irrespective of the region to which they belong—from Kashmir in the North to Kanyakumari in the South, from Gujarat in the West to Manipur in the East. The Indian way of looking at life—the psyche of the people—is deep rooted in the Dharma and Karma doctrines propounded by the ancient scriptures and sages. Another distinct quality of Indian culture is manifested in the sacredness of the bonds of family life. People of all regions, irrespective of caste and creed, respect age and wisdom.

Another important contributing factor for diversity of life pattern is the striking difference between the prosperous elite and the deprived poor. In terms of material living as well as social development, the mass of the common people living mostly in villages, exhibit a different image from the elite. The rural-urban dichotomy conspicuously persists despite the initiatives taken by the government for bridging the gulf between the rich and the poor.

Variety, in fact, contributes to the richness of Indian culture. The ethos though rooted in diverse ecologies, religious ideas and values, yet reflects the underlying unity of the Indian people.

1.4.5 Little and Great Traditions

The process of change in traditional societies due to urbanisation and industrialisation has received the attention of many scholars who tried to analyse the dynamics of change in social institutions, organisations, and human relations. Robert Redfield, who pioneered studies in social change among traditional societies, postulated the theory of Folk-Urban continuum. He associated the folk culture of the rural and tribal communities with a relatively small, closeknit, well-integrated society, in which the division of labour is simple, class differentiation is not marked, kinship and family relations are strong and the moral order (even though it is not very rigidly observed) is highly respected. The urban way of life, on the other hand, is associated with a large society, in which behaviour is more rational, more specialised and less group-oriented. The individual is more free, has more choice in day-to-day decision making and is less tied to the past.
According to Redfield, each society experiencing change reflects a set of traditions: 1) the Little Tradition of the illiterate and semi-literate folk community, mostly shared in oral tradition; and 2) the Great Tradition of the urbanised community which is formally articulated. Though the differences in Great and Little traditions are apparent in terms of social organisation, ritual traditions, music and performing arts, a continuity and high degree of sharing of the Great and Little traditions is observable.

Scholars like Milton Singer and Mackim Marriott, who studied the process of social change in India, also observed such continuity and coexistence of the Little Tradition of the rural and tribal communities and the Great Tradition of the more urbanised communities. Such cultural continuity is attributed to the basic similarities in the Indian ethos and beliefs. However, Indian social scientists like S.C. Dube do not agree with this theory of dichotomous division of Indian culture into Little and Great traditions.

1.5 STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Society is a web of social relationships and the cordiality of relationship between men and women is fundamental to the stability of the society. The status of women in a
society is considered to be a critical indicator of the strength of its social organisation.

Literature and historical evidences establish beyond doubt that women enjoyed respect and equality with men during the vedic period. Many women scholars (like Maitrayi, Lopa Mudra, etc.) have contributed to the composition of Vedic literature. Both husband and wife enjoyed equal rights as joint owners of property. They shared equally in sacrifices and religious duties, and attended assemblies to participate in the political affairs. Thus, we observe that the status of women in ancient India was based on liberty, equality, mutual respect and cooperation.

Even in early Buddhist period we come across women who were highly respected for their achievements in education and contributions to Buddhist literature. Sanghamitra, the sister of Ashoka was sent to Sri Lanka to spread Buddhism.

However, in the later period, women slowly lost their ground and were treated as ineligible for Vedic studies and religious rituals. By about 200 AD, the domination of men in political and religious affairs was firmly established, reducing significantly the position and status of women.

During the medieval period, the position of women further deteriorated due to the introduction of Purdah and greater prevalence of polygamy among the kings and chieftains. The revival of Sati, making it obligatory for the women to die on the funeral pyre of the husband, worsened the position of women and reduced their status to the level of helpless dependents. The complete neglect of education of girls and the advocacy of child marriages contributed to further degradation of the status of women. Social reformers, like Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Dayanand Saraswati, took great pains during 19th century to create mass awareness and bring about significant changes in the sphere of education as well as social legislation for the improvement of the position of women in India. Inspired by these reformist movements, Mahatma Gandhi and his followers of the Indian National Movement started a crusade for emancipation of women during the 20th century. Their efforts were directed against eradication of disabilities like purdah, prohibition of remarriage of widows, child marriages etc., Another significant contribution of these leaders was in respect of promotion of education among girls. Spiritual leaders like Swami Vivekananda provided tremendous support to the social upliftment of women. The call of Mahatma Gandhi facilitated many women to come out of seclusion and participate in the political movement during the freedom struggle.

The Gandhian era and the post-Independence period have brought about significant changes in the status and position of women in India. The Constitution has laid down as a Fundamental Right the equality of the sexes. With the spread of education and the enactment of laws against exploitation of women, the social scenario is fast changing. There is greater commitment at politico-administrative levels to provide more opportunities for women to assert their equality with men so that they can contribute to the enrichment of the society.

Check Your Progress 6

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of the unit.

1) Give two examples of each of the following:
   a) The Little Tradition:
      i) .................................................. 
      ii) ..................................................
   b) The Great Tradition:
      i) ..................................................
      ii) ..................................................
2) Mention 3 reasons which were instrumental in bringing down the status of Indian women.

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have described briefly the socio cultural evolution in India in its historical perspective. We have noted that the basic structure of the Indian society and the distinct way of life of the Indians has been influenced greatly by the Vedic Aryan thought and literature. Sanskrit is a rich language and the literature generated by the ancient scholars is held in high esteem by all Indians. Many of the Indian languages have their roots in Sanskrit language. The literature in modern Indian languages is greatly influenced by the ancient literature as well as the scholarly works of the foreigners who visited India.

The plurality of the Indian society has contributed to richness of its culture. We have observed how the assimilation of outsiders like Kushans, Indo-Greeks, Huns, Turks, has enriched the Indian society in terms of racial integration, ethnic, linguistic and religious plurality. Indian society has passed through many turbulent periods, but the ethos, values and traditions have been preserved to a great extent. The oral tradition of teaching, and the socialisation process of grooming the youngsters in the well-knit joint families organised on community/caste basis, have contributed immensely to the preservation of the social and cultural traditions.

We have also covered in this unit, the distinct folk culture shared by the tribal communities in different parts of the country and its influence on the cultural practices of many non-tribal groups.

Lastly, we have discussed the status of women in the Indian society and observed that women enjoyed better status in ancient Indian as compared to the modern period. The low status accorded to women during the medieval period has greatly contributed to the neglect of women's education and welfare. Realising the need to make women equal partners in the nation building activities a number of corrective measures have been taken up during the last two centuries.

1.7 FURTHER READING


1.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Around 2500 B.C. a civilisation flourished around river Indus. The people of this civilisation used various sophisticated instruments and techniques to
manage and sustain their lives. Historians say that these people were Dravidians. The Aryans came from Central Asia and invaded India. Later the Aryans settled down in the northern part of India. It is said that the Dravidians were either pushed down to the southern part of India or were accepted and assimilated by the Aryans. Thus, the Dravidians and Aryans races mixed and gave a distinct identity to Indian population.

Check Your Progress 2
1) Vedas are essentially the records of the beliefs and customs of the people of ancient India. Generation after generation communicated through oral traditions. The vedas were sung. Therefore, music was a very important element in the pattern of communication. Poetry was the mode of expression of the people at that time. Varna gave the structure of the society. The duties and responsibilities were thus divided among various groups of people. This division of labour, duties and responsibilities helped to create the pattern of the society. This pattern of the social structure was reflected in the way the people belonging to different castes used to communicate.

Check Your Progress 3
1) a) False
   b) True
   c) True
   d) False
   e) False

Check Your Progress 4
1) • To expand empires
   • In search of wealth
   • In search of new business and trade routes
   • To preach religion
2) The finer elements of Islam were accepted by the broad-minded people in India. This acceptance caused a fusion of finer elements from both the Islam and Hindu religion and gave rise to new ways of thinking, worshipping and philosophies. These were reflected in art, literature etc.

Check Your Progress 5
Advantages
1) Interdependence makes the community strong
2) The people can concentrate on the jobs they are assigned from the very beginning of their lives.
3) Fast improvement in each profession is ensured.

Disadvantages
Interdependence is interpreted as per the dignity of caste and not the work. People have no freedom to choose their profession. The society become lifeless over a period of time.

Check Your Progress 6
1) a) The little tradition:
   i) Santali Dance
   ii) Ratha Yatra
   b) The great tradition:
   i) The Hindustani Classical Music
   ii) The Mughal art
2) a) Illiteracy