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15.0 OBJECTIVES

When you have read this unit you should be able to

- describe the concepts of *dharma, karma, artha* and *moksha* and their relevance to Hindu social structure
- list and describe some aspects of Hindu marriage and family
- describe *varna, jati*, caste councils and associations and *jajmani* system among the Hindus
- explain and describe some Hindu festivals.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

In Blocks 2 and 3 of ESO-12 you learnt about social institutions of our society. In this Block, you will learn about social organisation of different religious groups in India. In this unit, we deal with the social organisation of the Hindus.

Generally speaking, the process of doing things in an orderly fashion is called organisation. When we speak of social organisation, we talk about the arrangement of actions which conform with the norms and values of society. Thus, to understand the social organisation of a particular society, in this case Hindu society, we need to study the systematic ordering of social relations, including changes that have taken place over time in them.

In any description of social organisation of a people we need to refer to the ideological basis of the way the people act. In this unit also, in section 15.2 we introduce you to some fundamental concepts of Hindu religion upon which Hindu social institutions and collective activities are based. The religious concepts of the Hindus give us the ideological basis of the ways they organise their socio-economic activities, their festivals and rituals. We have, therefore, discussed some of the major ideas of Hinduism. In section 15.3 we give a demographic profile of the Hindu community in India. In section 15.4 are discussed aspects of its basic social institutions, namely, of marriage and family.

In section 15.5, we describe the arrangements of Hindu social categories which operate within a well-ordered Hindu social system across regions. As examples of collective behaviour of the community, the festivals and pilgrimage among the Hindu are discussed in section 15.6. Thus, our description of social life around marriage, family, inheritance, caste and festivals gives us a comprehensive picture of Hindu social organisation.

15.2 RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS AND HINDU SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It is a religion followed by several racial and ethnic groups. The Hindu sacred texts deal with the ethical behaviour of an individual of a family and of society in general. They also discuss and prescribe rules of administration, politics, statesmanship, legal principles and statecraft. The rules of conduct apply to personal and social life. Here, we will discuss only some religious concepts, which provide an understanding of the ways in which Hindu society is organised.

15.2.1 Concepts of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*

A life of righteousness for a Hindu is possible through the fourfold scheme of practical endeavour. It comprises the concepts of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*.

- i) *Dharma* is honest and upright conduct or righteous action.
- ii) *Artha* means a righteous and honest pursuit of economic activities.
- iii) *Kama* is the fulfillment of one's normal desires.
- iv) *Moksha* is liberation, that is absorption of the self into eternal bliss.

Related to these four concepts are the concepts of *karma* and *samsara*. Depending upon one's deeds (*karma*) one is able to reach the stage of *moksha* or liberation. The stage of *moksha* or liberation is a term for describing the end of the cycle of birth and rebirth. The cycle of birth and rebirth is known as *samsara*. The Hindus believe that each human being has a soul and that this soul is immortal. It does not perish at the time of death. The process of birth and rebirth goes on until *moksha* is attained. This cycle of transmigration is also known as *samsara*, which is the arena where the cycle of birth and rebirth operates. One's birth and rebirth in a particular state of existence is believed by the Hindus to be dependent on the quality of one's deeds (*karma*). For a Hindu, the issue of liberation is of paramount significance (Prabhu 1979: 43-48). Let us discuss a little more about these two concepts, i.e., *Karma* and *Samsara*.

15.2.2 *Karma* and *Samsara*

The concepts of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* are related to tenets of *karma* and *samsara*. *Karma* is a word used for all activity or work. *Samsara* is the term used for the arena where the cycle of birth and rebirth continues to operate until one attains liberation. This is also called the theory of reincarnation or *punarjanma*. Actions are divided into good or bad on the basis of their intrinsic worth. Good deeds bring fame, merit and are the path to heaven. Bad deeds bring notoriety and lead to punishment and life in hell. It is recognised that an individual's overall position in a future life depends on the way he or she lives the present one. This belief, which gave a positive or negative value to certain actions, developed into a general theory of actions and is called the *karma* theory. The concept of *karma* is fully developed and woven into the belief in re-birth, which in turn is related to the belief concerning heaven, hell, and *moksha*. An individual's fate after death is determined by the sum total of grades and attributes of his or her actions or deeds (*karma*) during his or her life. Better birth and status is obtained if there is a surplus of many good deeds in a person's life. Otherwise one's status falls in the next life. Another related belief-is that the world moves in a cyclical process (birth and death follow one another). By following one's *karma* prescribed within the fourfold scheme of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha* an individual strives to get out of this otherwise infinite cyclical process of birth and death. Depending on one's previous and present *karma*, one prospers or suffers in this world. Later after death he either gains heaven or is punished with life in hell. Thus a human being after death may become a denizen or inhabitant of heaven or hell, may be reborn as an animal, or even be reborn as a tree. All this depends on one's *karma*. An individual usually wanders through many births till he or she finds final release or *moksha*.

Activity 1

Make a list at least six of the Hindu sacred books, which mention the four concepts of *dharma*, *artha*, *karma* and *moksha*. Compare, if possible, your list with those prepared by other students in the Study Centre.

15.2.3 Relevance to Hindu Social Structure

The belief in *karma* and *dharma* has direct relevance to Hindu social organisation, which is based on an arrangement of castes into a graded order.

This hierarchy, in turn, is linked with the quality of one's *karma*. One can say that if one's actions are good, one will be born in a higher caste in the next birth. Hindu society is supposed to be governed by rather strict rules of caste behaviour. There are, on the other hand, some general rules governing the behaviour of all members irrespective of caste. Castes coexist with different norms of behaviour and a continuity with the past in terms of one's actions in the previous birth. Whatever position one may be born into, one must fulfil the functions, without attachment, without hatred and resentment. Whatever may be one's *dharma*, its performance through one's *karma* brings blessings.

Each person has a duty (*dharma*) appropriate to one's caste and one's station in life. As mentioned before, the term *dharma* refers to honest and upright conduct or righteous action. *Dharma* has two aspects; one normative and the other naturalistic. The normative aspect refers to duty or path to be followed. The naturalistic meaning implies the essential attributes or nature, for example, the *dharma* or nature of water is to flow. The Hindus believe that one must follow one's *dharma* to achieve ultimate liberation from the cycle of births and deaths in this world. An individual belongs to a family and a caste group and has to perform his or her *dharma* (in the sense of its naturalistic aspect) accordingly. The main aim of following one's *dharma* is to eventually achieve *moksha* or liberation. *Dharma* relates not only to the caste but also to the different stages in one's life. As part of following one's *dharma* a Hindu goes through the life cycle rituals which are carried out in the context of marriage, family and caste. Let us now look at the size and spread of the Hindu community in India.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Describe briefly the concepts of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) How is the belief in Karma relevant to Hindu social organisation? Use two lines for your answer.

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15.3 PROFILE OF HINDU COMMUNITY IN INDIA

Hinduism is one of the most ancient religions of the world. Its earliest literary productions were the four Vedas. These comprise hymns and ritual ceremonies of the early Aryan settlers, who were a pastoral and agricultural people. The

Vedic period covers about 2500 B.C. to 600 B.C. The Upanishadic teachings, also of this period, contain philosophical reflection of human life. The period of the Epics succeeded that of the Upanishads. In the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* philosophical doctrines were often presented in the form of stories and parables. Many other doctrines followed including the *Bhakti* movement of Ramanuja, Vaishnavism, Saktism, Brahmo and Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna, and Aurobindo. Thus, Hindu doctrine developed in several stages.

Demographically the Hindus are the largest percentage of the population of India comprising 82.64 percent in 1981 (G01 1984). Even though the absolute number of people who follow Hinduism increased from 549 million in 1981 to 672 million (82.4 percent) in 1991, there was a marginal decrease in terms of percentage points (Census of India 1991). We find that in some states of India the percentage of Hindus is somewhat higher or much lower than the national average. In 1981, those above it included Himachal Pradesh (95.4), Orissa (95.4) and Madhya Pradesh (92.9). In 1991, in ten States the percentage of Hindus was above the national average. Himachal Pradesh (95.8 percent) has the highest concentration of Hindus. In 1981 those below the national average included the States of West Bengal (76.9), Sikkim (67.2), Manipur (60.0), Kerala (58.1), Punjab (36.9), Jammu and Kashmir (32.2), Meghalaya (18.0) and Nagaland (14.4). In comparison, a total of four States had Hindu population less than 50 percent in 1991 with the lowest being in Meghalaya (5.04 percent). The low figures are due to other religious denominations being higher. The percentage increase for 1971-81 among Hindus was highest in Nagaland (88.4) followed by Sikkim (47.2). Total population rose by 24.69 per cent during 1971-81 and for Hindus the rise was 24.15 per cent. This was in keeping with high fertility and low mortality rates found in this community.

15.4 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY AMONG THE HINDUS

Before we discuss specific institutions of the Hindus in India, let us emphasise how widely spread this community is. Consequently, in the areas of marriage or family, there are regional variations. What you will read in these pages is a generalisation covering the common elements and mentioning in passing about the variations. By and large, to marry and raise a family is a sacramental activity for the Hindus. Let us first look at the institution of marriage and then at the family in the Hindu community.

15.4.1 Hindu Marriage

Marriage is a sacred duty for all Hindus. It is an obligatory sacrament because the birth of a son is considered by many Hindus as necessary for obtaining *moksha*. In order to perform important rituals towards gods and ancestors, the sacred texts decree that it is obligatory for a Hindu to be married and have male descendants. Today, a large number of Hindus may, however, not believe in and practice these traditional ideas and associated customs.

Marriage is considered to be one of the sacraments sanctifying the body, mind and soul of the groom and bride. Therefore at the proper age and time, every Hindu woman and man is expected to get married. A wife is considered to be instrumental in helping her husband fulfil the four kinds of *purushartha*,

namely, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* (see Section 15.2). According to this view of marriage, a man is thought to be incomplete without wife and children. Figure 15.1 demonstrates the traditional Hindu marriage.

When we discuss Hindu marriage, we should also speak of the eight forms of marriage, which describe the ways marriages are traditionally consecrated among the Hindus.

15.4.2 Eight Forms of Hindu Marriage

Before enumerating these eight forms, let us make it clear that here we are not talking about the usual usage in sociology regarding the forms of marriage. In sociology we discuss monogamy, polygamy and group marriage etc. under the topic of forms of marriage. In that respect, it will suffice to note here that monogamy (i.e., a man is married to one woman at a time) is the usual form of marriage among the Hindus. But various forms of polygamy are also found in the Hindu community. A widow is allowed to remarry among lower castes.

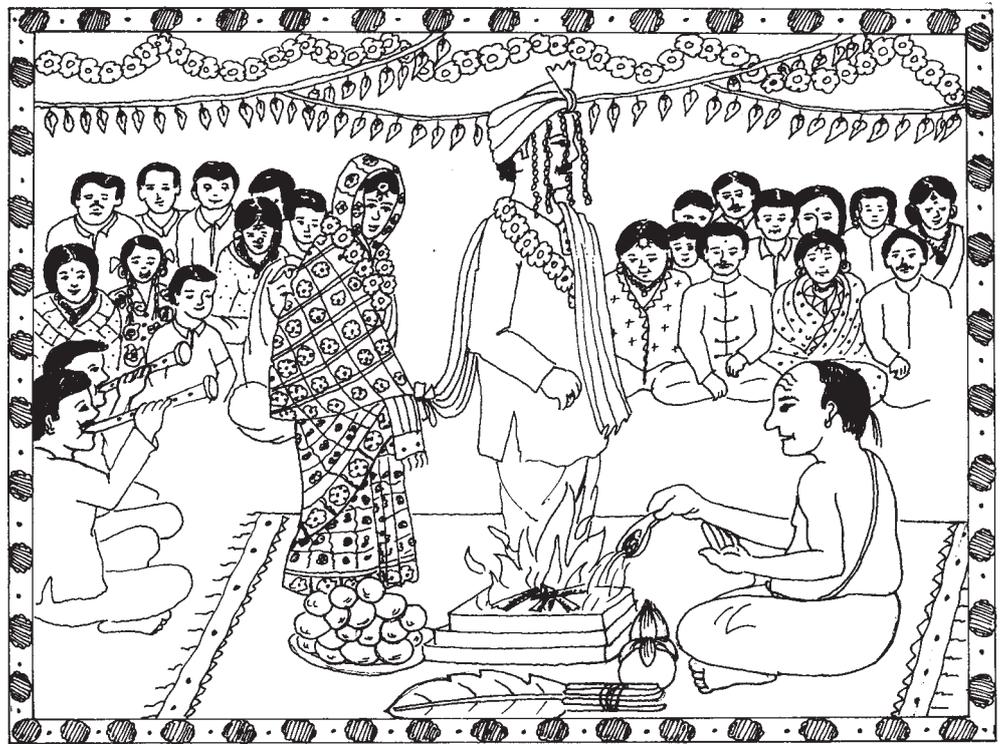


Fig. 15.1: A Hindu marriage

Higher castes usually prohibit widow marriage. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 permits divorce on the grounds of insanity, leprosy, adultery, etc. A detailed discussion on these points has already been given in unit 7 of Block 2 of this course. Coming back to the forms of marriage among the Hindus, only the first four of the following eight forms bring purification to ancestors on the sides of father and mother, the remaining four forms produce no such value (Pandey 1976: 159-169). The eight forms are given below.

- i) **The *Brahma* form:** It comprises the gift or giving away of the daughter by the father to a man, who has learnt the Veda.
- (ii) **The *Daiva* form:** It involves the giving away of the daughter by the father to a priest, who duly officiates at a sacrifice, during the course of its performance.

- (iii) **The Arsha form:** It consists of the daughter being given away by the father to a man after receiving a cow and a bull from the bridegroom, not with an intention of selling the child, but in accordance with the requirement of the *dharma*.
- (iv) **The Prajapatya form:** In this form of marriage, the father gives away his daughter to the bridegroom and addresses the couple to perform their *dharma* together.
- (v) **The Asura form:** It involves a payment by the bridegroom to the bride's father for obtaining a wife.
- (vi) **The Gandharva form:** Here the bride and the bridegroom agree to marry at their own consent. Such a decision to marry is consequently consecrated by going through the sacred rites of marriage.
- (vii) **The Rakshasa form:** This is described as a marriage, through force.
- (viii) **The Paishacha form:** In this form, a man first seduces a woman (who may be intoxicated or mentally retarded) and subsequently marries her.

Of these eight forms of marriage, the giving away the daughter by her father described in the first four is considered as the ideal form. The right to give a maiden in marriage is held by the father, the grandfather, the brothers, the kinspersons and the mother, in that order.

The Hindus lay stress on pre-marital chastity on the part of both the male and the female (Prabhu 1979: 153-154). The marital bond is also to be respected through mutual fidelity. There are also forms of endogamy (marriage within a certain group) and exogamy (marriage outside the group) for which rules are laid down. These rules are designed to regulate the Hindu marriage in the sense of specifying the choice of spouses within specific groups (see sections on Rules of Marriage in units 8 and 9 of Block2 of ESO-12).

15.4.3 Endogamy

The widest category of endogamy for a Hindu is his or her *varna*. Within each *varna* are several castes and sub-castes which are considered to be the categories for endogamy in the region. We do also come across some inter-caste/ inter-subcaste marriages in contemporary times. Yet, these are few and far between. The rule of caste/ subcaste endogamy is the prescribed mode followed by most of the Hindus all over India.

15.4.4 Exogamy

As regards the rule of exogamy, a Hindu is enjoined not to marry within his own gotra. The word '*gotra*' in this context denotes one's extended family or the clan. The *gotra* of a family is usually named after the ancestor who founded the family. People with a common ancestor are not allowed to marry each other. At present, the rule of exogamy is usually defined in terms of prohibition of marriage within five generations on the mother's side and seven generations on the father's side. However this rule can be circumvented by letting someone of a different *gotra* do the *kanyadaan*, that is the rite of giving the daughter away in marriage (Madan 1965). There is a clearly defined limit upto which persons are considered to be related in such a way that their marriage cannot be permitted.

There are marked differences in north India and south India in this regard. In north India, a marriage between both the cross and parallel cousins is prohibited while in south India, cross-cousins are allowed to marry. Thus, the *gotra* rule, as understood in north India, does not apply to the Hindus of south India.

The most common form of marriage is that the bridegroom and his group goes to the bride's home. There the bride is given away by the father or her guardian with due rituals and ceremonies. Variations, of course, occur according to the region and caste. The salient features of the marriage rites and their significance are described in unit 7 of Block 2 of this course.

The continuity of the family is one of the objects of marriage. We will now examine the family in the context of the Hindu community.

15.4.5 The Hindu Family

For a Hindu, the event of marriage signifies the completion of the *brahmacharya ashrama* i.e., the stage of a celibate-life. Marriage heralds the beginning of the householder stage (*grihastha*). Now, begins the process of the preservation and continuity of the *kula* or the family. A Hindu home symbolises the continuity of its living members, past members that are no more and future members that are yet to come. The living members are considered to be the trustees of the home. It is supposed to belong to the ancestors and includes the interests of the male descendants of the family. The individual as such does not belong to the home. One only performs one's *dharma*. The home is the place where *dharma* and *karma* are practised by the people who are enjoined to remain detached yet conduct the affairs of the world (Prabhu 1979: 216-217). For a Hindu, his or her life in the stage of a householder is lived and regulated in terms of *dharma* and *karma*. In performing these two activities, one also performs one's *artha* and *kama*. This process leads one towards the final goal, *moksha*.

15.4.6 The Form of Hindu Family

The most striking feature of a Hindu family is its jointness. That is to say the unit of residence is often not confined to the parents and their children only. It usually includes three generations living under the same roof and sharing the family property in common. Concerning the joint family and the nuclear family among the Hindus, unit 6 of Block 2 of ESO-12 gives a fairly detailed description. What we need to emphasise again is that the joint family (in India in general, and among the Hindus in particular) is believed to be the ideal form of family. In practice, we find many combinations and permutations of family living among the Hindus.

Whether living in a nuclear or a joint family most Hindu families prefer that each member goes through some basic life-cycle rituals. These sacraments have been prescribed by the sacred texts and are meant for purifying body and mind. The sacraments are supposed to help make the human being into a social being. Some of them purify a human being in the present life and others help in the life-after-death. From birth to death, the sacraments (rituals) help in organising and disciplining the life of the Hindus, and enabling them to perform the *dharma* in accordance with their status. There is diversity in the observance

of the sacrament. Depending on the region and caste, different numbers of sacraments are observed. There are rituals from which women are excluded. Yet other rituals have special significance for them. Thus for a female the nuptial ceremony is regarded as being of equal significance to the sacrament of *upanayan* (the stage when a male child is initiated into the study of the Veda).

Activity 2

If you live in a nuclear family then stay for some days in the joint family of one of your close relatives.

If you live in a joint family then arrange to stay with relatives who live in a nuclear family for some days.

In either case make comparisons, in terms of the following points, between the two types of family life in your notebook: i) size, ii) range of kin relationships, iii) pattern of authority and iv) division of labour.

Write a note of 1000 words on comparisons observed by you.

15.4.7 Relations among Family Members

As the concepts of *dharma* and *karma* are so much a part of the Hindu way of life both at normative and behavioural levels, we find that each member in the family has his or her prescribed *sacred duty*. General principles of differentiation on the basis of age and sex regulate the relations within the Hindu family, in terms of precedence, obedience and subservience.

Males are more respected than females, and members senior in age command more respect than the younger members. For example, the father is respected more than the mother and has greater authority. The father's mother by virtue of her age, is respected by all members who are younger to her. It is considered ideal for a man and wife to live with all their married sons in a joint family. They are to be respected and cared for by the sons and their wives and children. It is expected that the sons and their wives will perform their duties to the satisfaction of the parents, and thereby earn their blessings and religious merit.

The sons have a right in their fathers' ancestral property. The age old rules of inheritance which are still customary gave ownership and inheritance rights to males, while they give only maintenance rights to females. These customary rules continue to prevail even today. The Hindu Succession Act and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, however, introduced some changes. The Act makes the husband legally responsible for the maintenance of his wife and children. According to this Act (which is also applicable to Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs), the property of a Hindu comes down to his sons, daughters, widow and mother. Daughters legally have a share equal to that of sons in their father's property. In actual practice customs and tradition continue to be so powerful that very few women are able to take advantage of their rights. From being a member of the primary group, such as the family, one goes on to being a part of one's lineage and subcaste/caste. The largest category of this belongingness for a Hindu can be expressed in terms of the idea of *varna*. Let us now understand the *varna* system among the Hindus.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Describe the rule of exogamy among the Hindus. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Discuss family interaction among the Hindus. Use about six lines for your answer.

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15.5 THE VARNA SYSTEM

The broader aspects of activities in the sphere of economy and polity form a very important part of social life. For a Hindu, these activities take place within the context of a Hindu view of life. A Hindu is born into a *jati* (caste) and follows his *dharma* in this birth to improve the future birth. A discussion of the four stages, called *ashrama*, of a Hindu’s life, and the divisions of the Hindu community into the *varna* categories and caste groups, would provide us a framework to look at the bases of the politico-economic activities of the Hindus.

15.5.1 The Four Varna

The Hindus are divided into four *varna* namely, Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. These four categories are ranked from higher to lower in the order mentioned here. This means that Brahman is ranked as the highest and the Sudra the lowest. The *varna* system of dividing the members of the Hindu society is an ideological construct which is mentioned in their religious texts. Each *varna* is also associated with particular occupations. A Brahman is supposed to be a priest by profession, a Kshatriya to be a warrior; a Vaishya to be a trader; and a Sudra to be a worker. All Hindus recognise this system and can place their identity in terms of one of the four *varna*. Most of the basic ideas on *varna* system and its links to the concepts of *karma* and *dharma* are generally present in the thinking of Hindus (Prabhu 1979: 321). Village studies carried out by Marriott (1959), Dube (1955), Srinivas (1977) and Carstairs (1957) also confirm this view. This division of society into four categories is however better visualised in terms of caste groups into which the

Hindu society is divided. Before we proceed to the discussion of caste groups, let us also briefly talk about the four stages of a man's life, which provide us an understanding of the Hindu view of the various socio-economic and political activities, to be performed at different stages.

15.5.2 The Four Stages of Life

The Life of a Hindu is considered to be divisible into four stages, namely

- i) *brahmacharya ashram*
- ii) *grihastha ashram*
- iii) *vanaprastha ashram*
- iv) *sanyasa ashram*

It is the *dharma* of a Hindu to pass through these stages in one's life. The male members of Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya *varna* pass through four different *ashram* (stages) in their life. The first *ashram* is called *brahmacharya ashram* (the educational stage) from which the fourth *varna*, viz., *Sudra* and women of the first three *varna* are barred *Brahmacharyashram* ends (after studentship) at marriage. Celibacy is prescribed till marriage.

The second stage of life is called the *grihasthashram*. During this a man rears a family, earns a living and performs his daily personal and social duties. Following this a man gradually enters the third stage of life called the *vanaprashthashram*. During this stage the householder relinquishes his duties in the household, and devotes his time to religious pursuits. His links with his family are weakened. During this *ashram* a man retires into the forest with or without his wife leaving behind the householder's cares and duties. The final phase of a Hindu's life begins with the stage known as the *sanyasashram*. In this stage one attempts to totally withdraw oneself from the world and its cares by going to the forest and spending the rest of life in pursuit of *moksha*. The four stages of a Hindu's life just described are together called the *varnashrama* system. There is an ideal scheme, which correlates the *vamashrama* phases to ages at which a particular *ashram* begins. However, it is the endeavour that is important and not the age at which this begins. Thus Hinduism permits young unmarried sanyasi, as well as those who never go beyond *grihasthashrama*. Thus there is nothing compulsory about living life in the *varnashram* scheme. It is, however, highly recommended (Prabhu 1979:73-100).

At present most Hindus do not systematically go through the *varnashrama*. They do, however, accept these stages to be the ideal ways in which a Hindu should spend his life. Like the four *varna*, the four stages of life are models. In real life, we find that occupations associated with each *varna* are not followed precisely in accordance with what is written in the sacred texts. Today a Brahman may be employed in a shoe company, selling shoes to all the customers irrespective of their *varna* or caste. As we said before, the Hindus are divided into castes or *jati* which are hereditary groups.

15.5.3 Jati

Jati or castes are hereditary groups in **hierarchical** relation to one another, similar to the hierarchy among *varna*. Brahman castes are the highest while

untouchable castes are the lowest. Those between these two extremes are placed according to regional hierarchies.

A caste group can be seen as an extended kin group because members of a caste marry among themselves. Caste endogamy is also explained by the term *beti vyavahar* as against *roti vyavahar*. *Beti vyavahar* refers to the practice of giving and taking of the daughters (*beti*) of different families within a caste. *Roti vyavahar* means only the giving and taking of food (*roti*) with certain categories of people. It is possible to have *roti vyavahar* with people of castes other than one's own. Lower castes accept cooked food and water from higher castes but the opposite is traditionally not permitted. There are certain rules and conditions which regulate the type of food which is accepted when offered to a person of higher caste. The caste groups claim their superior status by showing the evidence of their dietary practices in terms of acceptance/non-acceptance of food and water from particular castes. Besides food, there are also customary discriminatory practices related to different caste groups. For example, the untouchable castes were not permitted to enter certain parts of upper caste streets or houses and temples. This is a typical example of the idea of purity and pollution on which the ideology of caste is supposed to be based. When we consider a caste to be high or low on the basis of its purity or pollution level, we refer to it as a ritual hierarchy of castes. The level of purity/pollution is judged by the prevalent practices relating to acceptance/non-acceptance of food, entry to sacred places and widow-remarriage. In all these hierarchically arranged caste-groups, the scheme of *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* is followed without hatred or resentment towards the lower or the higher group. In other words, people born into a caste accept the sacred duty (*dharma*) of their caste and do not question the right to the higher caste-people to social privileges. Within their own caste they organise themselves for fulfilling several purposes. Let us say a few words about caste councils, which have specific functions in regulating the behaviour of their caste members.

15.5.4 Caste Councils and Caste Associations

Generally each caste has its council. The leaders in the council are usually the elderly members of the caste. Caste councils act as a judiciary for caste groups and help settle disputes related to marriage, separation, divorce or any other untoward behaviour of their caste members. The caste councils are localised covering many villages.

Caste associations are recent phenomena. They are engaged in various activities. For example, they run educational institutions, cooperatives, hospitals, old age homes and orphanages. From time to time they print and distribute among their members pamphlets containing information about new rules of behaviour regarding marriage ceremonies, gifts, widow remarriage, etc. They also publicise the nature of punishment to be meted out to defaulters. These associations are generally regional. They also act as political pressure groups. The caste councils and caste associations regulate the behaviour of caste members.

15.5.5 Interdependence among Castes

There is interdependence among caste groups. A member of a caste not only interacts within his own caste but also with other castes. Both aspects are very important for the socio-economic and political organisation of the Hindus. We shall now discuss a little about the inter-caste relationships.

For the Hindus, the caste system is a coherent and comprehensive system with rituals and occupational hierarchy. The occupational division of castes also helps to maintain equilibrium in the economic sphere. Being religiously oriented, members of different castes accept their rituals and occupational position. Within the framework of caste ideology, they perform their *dharma* and *karma* and endeavour to improve their present and future life. In both the ritual and economic spheres, members of different castes are dependent on one another. Members of different castes are vertically organised which is more manifest in the rural society. The context of Hindu social organisation is to be seen as a system of interdependence among the members of different caste groups. The *jajmani* system is an important aspect of this interdependence.

15.5.6 *Jajmani* System

In rural areas of India, it was found that a village generally comprises several Hindu castes, each living in different clusters. These castes have relationships of giving and taking of services among one another. Usually the peasant castes are numerically preponderant. Due to their numerical majority and also their economic power they have been called dominant castes by sociologists. The dominant caste needs services of the carpenters, blacksmith, potter, barber, washerman for various farming and ritual activities. The peasants pay in cash and kind for these services from other castes. The castes providing these services depend for their livelihood on the patronage of the dominant caste. In turn, the servicing castes also give support to their patrons in matters of political group formation. The relationship of patron and client among these interacting caste groups usually continue from generation to generation. Thus, the villagers are bound in a system of the exchange of services. Without this exchange the normal day-to-day life may not run smoothly. This is why this aspect is a very important part of Hindu social organisation.

The interdependence among caste groups is also evident in the ritual sphere apart from politico-economic activities. Pilgrimage, worship, recitation of holy texts, life cycle ritual ceremonies, fairs and festivals are rituals which bring together members of different castes. Without a whole series of interaction among them, these activities are just not possible. The instance of a Hindu wedding (one of the life cycle ritual ceremonies) is a case which illustrates this point. Here, a Brahman priest is needed to perform the sacred rites, the barber is required for the shaving and bathing, the drummer beats the drums, the washerman brings freshly laundered clothes, the untouchable takes the charge of sweeping the floor, the gardeners bring flowers and so on.

We can also look at the temple activities as an example of interdependence among castes. Members of different castes perform their respective sacred duties (*sva-dharma*) for the up-keep of the temple. The priestly castes perform the worship, the goldsmith caste provides ornaments for the idols, other castes provide services like cooking, tailoring, filling water, playing drums and so on. Among the Hindus, temples do not figure as prominently in terms of organised systems, as such institutions as the Mosque and Church of the Muslims and Christians respectively. People belonging to different castes organise and perform their duties to earn religious merit and improve their life after death. Each person considers his or her contribution to the temple as

one's duty and improves his or her *karma*. No task is less or more important when performed in the context of one's caste membership and one's *ashram* in life. This shows that the ritual aspect of social activities of caste groups forms an important part of social organisation. This aspect is most reflected in collective behaviour at festivals, fairs and pilgrimages. This is the reason why we are now going to discuss here the festivals, fairs and pilgrimages among the Hindus.

15.6 FESTIVALS AND PILGRIMAGES

Festivals, pilgrimages and other ceremonial occasions are usually linked with religion. As such they show how both personal identity of the individuals as well as collective identity of the groups are highlighted by the patterns of interaction during these events. Festivals manifest the social cohesion and solidarity of the community. We begin our discussion of this aspect of social organisation by describing festivals, fairs and pilgrimages among the Hindus.

15.6.1 Festivals

Most of the Hindu festivals are linked to the arrival of particular seasons. For example, the festival of *Diwali* marks the arrival of winter season while that of *Holi* signifies the beginning of summer season. Some festivals are associated with eclipses and movements of the heavenly bodies such as the moon and other planets. Many festivals are held in the honour of the deities like Krishna, Siva, Durga, Lakshmi and Rama, e.g., *Dussehra*, *Durgapuja*, *Janmashtami*, etc. Local festivals have their roots in the ecology of the region, celebrating myths associated with plants like coconuts, *tulsi* (*basil*), the sacred tree, or with animals, like elephants, snakes and monkeys. There are regional festivals connected with the agricultural cycle such as the occasion of first ploughing, sowing or harvest. Among the artisans, carpenter, blacksmith and brass-workers, people worship the deity called Vishwakarma.

We shall not go into the ritualistic aspect of these festivals. The emphasis here is on the role these festivals play in social life of the people. During festivals, people in a locality get together and their participation in a common activity enhances their feeling of belonging to a community. These occasions also provide the chance to people for buying and selling special commodities. By preparing special food and wearing special clothes, people bring about the feelings of freshness and change in their day-to-day life. This regenerates them for carrying the routine activities. Recurrence of festivals and associated rituals strengthens their faith in the stability and integrity of their social order.

Festivals like *Holi*, *Diwali* and *Dussehra* are celebrated on a scale, which includes participation of Hindus as well as non-Hindus. They provide occasions for a meeting across religions.

Associated with festivals are fairs, which are held at prescribed times on a holy spot. Sometimes, fairs assume independent significance and attract the participation of cross-section of society. Some famous fairs such as the fair of Sonapur or Pushkar draw people from all over the country. In these fairs, craftsmen bring their special artware, artists come to present their shows, agricultural surplus is brought for selling, brisk trading is carried on in cattle,

horses, elephants. Each fair is both a religious and a secular occasion and people participate in both with equal enthusiasm.

Activity 3

Describe in five pages at least two festivals of your area in terms of the following points.

- i) major social groups celebrating them,
- ii) main events taking place during their celebration,
- iii) time of the year for their celebration, and
- v) special significance of these festivals.

Compare, if possible, your description with those of the other students of your Study Centre.

15.6.2 Pilgrimage

Not very different from a fair is a pilgrimage. The cultural unity of the Hindus is expressed in the institution of pilgrimage. When a pilgrim goes to the southern pilgrim centre at Rameshwaram, he or she also aspires to reach the northern end of the country, at Badrinath. Most pilgrims also aspire to go to Puri in the east and to Dwarikanath in the west.

In these places of pilgrimage, there is often a fair being held during the periods pilgrims arrive in large numbers. Generally, people go to these places in large groups. Such groups are mostly formed on the basis of kin relationships. They may also include neighbours, friends and business partners.

Different sects of Hinduism have acquired pilgrim centres around the whole country over time. Besides the four centres in the four directions, the Sakta sect has more than fifty centres of pilgrimage. There are seven places of pilgrimage, dedicated to the Sun god, Surya. One of them is in Multan, in West Pakistan. Despite linguistic, racial, and cultural differences, most Hindus undertake long and arduous journeys to the many varied pilgrim places. This adds an important dimension to their social life.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Show the difference between a caste council and a caste association. Use about six lines for your answer.

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- ii) Name six pilgrim places associated with Hinduism. Use three lines for your answer.

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15.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied the social organisation of the Hindus. We began with religious concepts like *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, *moksha*, *karma* and *samsara* which are the basis of Hindu social organisation. We discussed marriage and family, among the Hindus including forms of marriage and family, endogamy, exogamy and family relations. We then examined caste groups among Hindus. We discussed the varna system, *jati* and the *jajmani* system. Finally we described festivals and pilgrimages among the Hindus.

15.8 KEYWORDS

<i>Artha</i>	Activities pertaining to the economic aspects of life. e.g., earning a livelihood.
<i>Beti Vyavahar</i>	The phrase refers to a relationship in which social groups can intermarry.
<i>Brahmcharya Ashram</i>	That stage in life, which is associated with studentship and celibacy.
<i>Dharma</i>	Good, upright, and righteous conduct.
<i>Grihasta Ashram</i>	The stage of the householder, earning a living and rearing a family.
Hierarchical	An order of ranking which goes from top to bottom, or vice versa. The caste system is an example of this kind of ranking.
<i>Jati</i>	Caste groups arranged in a hierarchical order. There are very many <i>jatis</i> in India, running into thousands.
<i>Karma</i>	The concept of <i>karma</i> refers to a belief in the efficacy of actions of a person, either good or bad.
<i>Moksha</i>	Liberation from birth and death and regaining of oneness with the Supreme Being.
<i>Roti Vyavahar</i>	The phrase refers to a relation of exchange of food between two social groups.
<i>Sanyasa Ashrama</i>	That stage in life when free from family life one devotes oneself solely to deeds leading to moksha.
<i>Samsara</i>	The process of birth and rebirth, which continues till the soul is finally free.
<i>Vanaprastha Ashram</i>	The life of a forest wanderer who lives a detached life free from all bondages. This is a stage before sanyasa.

15.9 FURTHER READING

Gould, H.A. 1987. *The Hindu Caste System*. Chanakya Publications: Delhi.

Patel, S. 1980. *Hinduism: Religion and a Way of Life*. Associated Publishing House: New Delhi

Prabhu, P.H. 1979. *Hindu Social Organisation: A Study in Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundations*. Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.: Bombay.

Radhakrishnan, S. 1979. *The Hindu View of Life*. Blackie and Son Pvt. Ltd.: Bombay.

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15.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) A Hindu can live a righteous life by following the fourfold scheme of practical endeavour. Thus *dharma* is honest and upright conduct or righteous action. *Artha* means a righteous pursuit of economic activities. *Kama* is the fulfillment of normal desires or cravings. *Moksha* is the culmination of the self into eternal bliss.
- ii) Hindu social organization is based on an arrangement of castes into a graded order. One's birth in a particular caste depends on that person's *karma* in post-life.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) The rule of exogamy among the Hindus is mainly guided by the rule of *gotra* exogamy. This means that persons of similar *gotra* cannot marry each other. Secondly, in north India, relations of certain degree on both father's and mother's side cannot marry each other. In south India, parallel cousins cannot marry each other. Then, there are various rules of exogamy applied in particular regions.
- ii) In the Hindu family, interaction is arranged along the lines of precedence, obedience and subservience. Males are usually more respected than females, and the old are given more respect than the young. A joint family life is considered an ideal form of family. Only sons have a right in ancestral property, while females have only maintenance rights. The Hindu Succession Act and Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956) have made women eligible for inheritance.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Traditionally, each caste has a caste council. Its jurisdiction covers several villages. It acts as a judiciary for settling disputes related to marriage, separation, divorce or any other untoward behaviour of a caste-fellow. A caste association is, on the other hand, a recent phenomenon, arising out

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of the needs of many castes or sub-castes to merge in order to involve in multi-faced activities. Such association covers a much larger area in its jurisdiction. It also acts as a political pressure group.

- ii) The four pilgrim centres of Hindus are in four directions, Badrinath in the north, Rameshwaram in the south, Dwaraka in the west and Puri in the east. The Kashi and Prayag are also considered as holy places, which devout Hindus like to visit at least once in their lifetime. In south India, Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, Guruvayur in Kerala and Mantralaya in Karnataka are famous pilgrim places, which Hindus of all denominations visit.