

INDIAN SOCIETY: IMAGES AND REALITIES

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

**School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University**

EXPERT COMMITTEE

Prof. Abhijit Dasgupta Delhi School of Economic Delhi University, Delhi	Prof. TribhuvanKapur Discipline of Sociology, SOSS IGNOU, New Delhi	Dr. Archana Singh Discipline of Sociology SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi
Prof. Maitrayee Chaudhary CSSS, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi	Prof. Nita Mathur Discipline of Sociology, SOSS IGNOU, New Delhi	Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi Discipline of Sociology SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi
Prof. Nilika Mehrotra CSSS, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi	Prof. Anu Aneja School of Gender and Development Studies, IGNOU, New Delhi	Prof. Rabindra Kumar Discipline of Sociology SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi
Prof. Abha Chauhan Department of Sociology Jammu University, Jammu	Dr. Pushpesh Kumar Department of Sociology Hyderabad University, Hyderabad	Dr. R. Vashum Discipline of Sociology SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi
Prof. Debal Singha Roy Discipline of Sociology, SOSS IGNOU, New Delhi	Dr. Abhijit Kundu Department of Sociology Venkateshwara College Delhi University	Dr. Shubhangi Vaidya School of Inter and Trans-disciplinary Studies, IGNOU, New Delhi

COURSE PREPARATION TEAM

Block	Unit Writer
Block 1 Ideas of India	
Unit 1 Civilization and Culture	Ms. Kanika Kakkar, Delhi University
Unit 2 India as Colony	Dr. Uzma Azhar, Independent Scholar, Delhi
Unit 3 Nation, State and Society	Dr. Kusum Lata, Jamia Millia Islami Univeristy
Block 2 Institutions and Processes	
Unit 4 Village India	Dr. UzmaAzhar, Independent Scholar
Unit 5 Urban India	Dr. UzmaAzhar, Independent Scholars
Unit 6 Language and Religion	Ms. Geetanjali Atri, Reasearch Scholar, JNU
Unit 7 Caste and Class	Prof. Rabindra Kumar, IGNOU
Unit 8 Tribe and Ethnicity	Prof. RabindraKumar, IGNOU
Unit 9 Family and Marriage	Prof. Rabindra Kumar, IGNOU
Unit 10 Kinship	Prof. Rabindra Kumar, IGNOU
Block 3 Critiques	
Unit 11 Class, Power and Inequality	Ms. Kanika Kakar, Delhi Univeristy
Unit 12 Resistance and Protest	Ms. Kanika Kakar Delhi University

COURSE COORDINATOR: Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi and Prof. Rabindra Kumar,
SOSS, IGNOU

GENERAL EDITOR: Prof. Subhadra Channa (Unit 1-6 and 9, 10) and
Prof. Ehasan Ul Haq (Unit 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12)

Cover Design: Mr. Sandeep Maini

Print Production

Mr. Manjit Singh Section Officer (Pub.), SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi	Mr. Suresh Kumar JAT, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi
--------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------

January, 2020

© Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2020

ISBN:

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeography or any other means, without permission in writing from the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Further information on the Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's Office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110 068 or visit our website: <http://www.ignou.ac.in>

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, by Director, School of Social Sciences.

Laser Typeset by : Tessa Media & Computers, C-206, A.F.E.-II, Okhla, New Delhi

Printed at :

Course Contents

		Page No.
BLOCK 1	IDEAS OF INDIA	7
Unit 1	Civilization and Culture	9
Unit 2	India as Colony	22
Unit 3	Nation, State and Society	35
BLOCK 2	INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES	47
Unit 4	Village India	49
Unit 5	Urban India	62
Unit 6	Language and Religion	75
Unit 7	Caste and Class	88
Unit 8	Tribe and Ethnicity	102
Unit 9	Family and Marriage	117
Unit 10	Kinship	130
BLOCK 3	CRITIQUES	145
Unit 11	Class, Power and Inequality	147
Unit 12	Resistance and Protest	161
GLOSSARY		176
FURTHER READINGS		181

COURSE INTRODUCTION: INDIAN SOCIETY: IMAGES AND REALITY

This course aims to introduce the students to various aspects of Indian society. Indian society has had a long history, dating as far back as 2000 BCE. In this long span of its chequered history, India witnessed many upheavals and periods of calm. There were shifts in political formations, as well as new economic conditions, technological interventions, infusion of new ideas, people and culture. All these influences and confluences make Indian society what it is today. India is also a diverse land of many ethnicities, linguistic groups, religions and other social formations and categories, all of which contribute to making Indian society a complex one. Capturing this complexity of Indian society has always been a challenge and thus there have been many varieties of explanations from varied vantage points. In this course we examine many such perceptions of Indian society and also relate these conceptions to the picture available on the ground. In doing, so we have taken into consideration the continuities and discontinuities through its various institutions and processes. The course is divided into three themes, which we call blocks. Each block addresses a certain aspect of Indian society.

Block 1: Ideas of India deals with various conceptions about India throughout its history. The first unit of this course focuses on India's early civilizational heritage and diverse culture. The unit discusses various ways in which India was conceptualised: in terms of the institutions and traits, through capturing of the cultural essence or by trying to understand the way the civilizational core or essence is transmitted or diffused. This unit captures the richness and diversity of India in terms of geographical variations, the social structures and cultures. Also the religious, socio-political and historical past are significant to understand the evolution of Indian society. The unit further highlights the fact that no society can be properly understood without reference to its history. In our second unit, therefore, we look at India's colonial past to see how the rich tradition of thoughts and practices of India before the British was substantially transformed under the influence of western philosophy, culture and practices during the colonial period. European travelers had been visiting India since long and their accounts describe Indian society in glowing terms. When Europeans came to India, India's economy was one of the wealthiest. For the Europeans, ruling India was at a different level as compared to other colonies. Trying to understand India therefore becomes significant for colonisation of the subcontinent. Various studies were undertaken in this period that try to unravel the mystery that was India for Europeans. These European perspectives on India are critically analysed in this unit. The third unit of these block deals with relationship between nation, state and society. Existence of state is generally associated with the nation. It is an erroneous understanding to assume that state and nation are the same. The transition from stateless to state societies in India did not coincide with the emergence of nation-state. For a long time India had state formations in which the idea of 'Indian' nation-state was not present. It was during British colonial rule and the struggle against it that this idea of India as a unified nation-state took shape. So in a way when we discuss the relationship between nation, state and society in India, we are narrating colonial and post-colonial histories of India.

Block 2: Institutions and Process attempts to look at Indian society through its various institutions. We examine social formations of villages and urban centres. The block examines various aspects of social categories and formations in terms of religion and language, caste and class, tribe and ethnicity. This block also looks at the institution of family and marriage and how they are organised through the kinship systems. The first two units of this block look at village and urban India. In both these units we examine some essential elements and dimensions of village and urban India. Following this, we try and examine some misconceptions about Village India and Urban India and examine these conceptions against the ground realities. Both language and religion are one of the main aspects of Indian society that have significant influence on the socio-cultural practices, as well as on political and economic life of Indian society. We take a brief overview of religious and language diversity in India and how language and religion influence each other. The unit also talks about the issues of language and religion which came up during different periods of history and after India becomes an independent country. Caste is another crucial aspect of Indian society and unique to Indian system of hierarchy. Caste system also has interface with class, which unit 7 examines in detail. This unit discusses features of caste system and mobility through the concept of sanskritisation. Finally, it deals with classes in rural and urban India, its uneven growth and relationship between caste and class. Unit 8 deals with the definition of tribe in the Indian context. The definition of tribe is examined both from the point of view of the government dealing with them (British and Indian) and that of the academics. Besides this, the unit also discusses the concept associated with ethnic relations, relationships between tribe and ethnicity and the manifestation of ethnicity. Unit 9 discusses family and marriage. It discusses the nature of the institution of family and marriage in India. Then it looks at the factors responsible for changes in these institutions and finally, it also mentions the emerging patterns of family and marriage in India. Unit 10 defines the kinship system and also focuses on major aspects of patrilineal kinship systems in north and south India. Finally, it gives a brief account of kinship organization of matrilineal communities in north-east and south-west India.

Block 3: Critiques. In this block, there are two units that focus on inequality and resistance. The units discuss how resistances and critique have come about due to inequality and hierarchy in Indian society. Unit 11 deals with relevance and implication of the class. It also focuses on conceptual framework and finally it discusses continuity and shift to a new conceptualisation. The last unit of this course deals with resistance and protests. The unit captures the Hindu social universe and also discusses early critiques and struggles against the hegemony i.e. patriarchal and cultural. Finally it discusses the post independence Scheduled Castes (Dalits) activism.



Block 1
Ideas of India

P. N. Dhanoo

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Approaches to the Study of Indian Civilization
 - 1.2.1 The Cataloguing of Traits
 - 1.2.2 The Reading of Cultural Essence
 - 1.2.3 The Study of Cultural Communication
 - 1.2.4 Analysing Indian Civilization as a Type
- 1.3 Understanding the Geography of India
 - 1.3.1 The Perennial/ Nuclear Zones
 - 1.3.2 The Route Zones
 - 1.3.3 The Zones of Relative Isolation
- 1.4 Viewing India from a Structural and Cultural Perspective
- 1.5 Discourses on India's Civilizational Unity
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 References
- 1.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- elaborate on different approaches to the study of Indian Civilization;
- give an account of India in terms of its cultural and historical geography and how these contribute to its diversity and plurality;
- explain how despite the underlying plurality, India is an all encompassing civilization; and.
- examine the various elements that have played a role in unifying Indian civilisation.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world and home to half a billion people. It's known for its cultural diversity and plurality. It is beyond the scope of one discipline to capture all the diversity as they are in every dimension of life, in the population, in the geography, environment, modes of livelihood and above all in its cultures. There are four broad approaches to study Indian civilization. The first section of the unit focuses on these approaches.

Indian population represents a variety of historical migrations that has resulted in racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. The populations concentrated in different regions, speak diverse languages and have a distinct way of life that sets them apart from each other. The ecological and physiographic variations of different

*Contributed by Kanika Kakkar, Delhi University

regions of India explain its richness and diversity. The Section 1.3 elaborates on the cultural and historical geography of India.

In the Section 1.4 the social structure and cultural diversity of Indian civilization is examined. The religious and socio-political historical past are significant to understand the evolution of Indian society. It highlights the fact that no society can be properly understood without reference to its history. Section 1.5 reflects on the significant elements that contribute to the unity of Indian civilization. It highlights that regionalism was never a significant threat to Indian civilization's unified identity in spite of internal conflicts and almost continuous warfare.

1.2 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF INDIAN CIVILIZATION

The term civilisation comes from the Latin word *civis*, meaning “citizen” or “townsman.” Thus a semblance of complexity is evident in the definition of civilisation. The term assumes some agricultural practices, trade, some evidence of planned dwellings, multiple cultures, art, religion and some administrative and political structures. Civilization is a complex of human grouping/ society with cultural-material and non-material/ideational traits and a defined polity. Thus the Indus Valley Civilization whose society is revealed to us through its artefacts and monuments is considered a civilisation. India is considered one of oldest continuing civilizations because its origin is traced back to the Harappan civilization.

There have been innumerable scholarly accounts focusing on the Indian civilization devoted to understanding of the nature of Indian society and culture. In doing so, these accounts illuminate diversity and richness of India as a civilization and provide multiple conceptual tools/methodology used to study it.

Cohn (1971) points out that four broad approaches/directions to understand Indian civilization can be derived from these accounts. They are:

- Catalogue Approach
- Cultural Essence Approach
- Cultural Communication Approach
- Approaching India as a Type

The ensuing sub-sections provide their elaborate account.

1.2.1 The Cataloguing of Traits

This approach entails recording of traits, institutions and qualities that are assumed to be essentially Indian. The variations and deviations that India may represent are examined in terms of statistical measures of mean or mode. India and its population reflect diversity which may be explicable in terms of geographical, ecological, regional, class or religious differences. However, the emphasis of the approach is to list out traits or qualities that are distinctly Indian or contribute to Indianness. This, of course, is primarily based on assuming the notion of what it means to be Indian and these may vary from scholar to scholar.

Activity 1

Make a list of traits or institutions or qualities that are unique to India. Compare your list if possible with the others students at your study centre.

1.2.2 The Reading of Cultural Essence

This approach entails discovery of essential style and process — the cultural essence as truly representative of Indian civilization since its inception, but not trait or content. The cultural essence reflects India in its true spirit, which it has imbibed over the years in the wake of historical and various other exigencies. It indicates India is not statistically measurable. Rather, its essence may be understood in terms of concepts like ‘unity in diversity’, tolerance and brotherhood, respect for the spiritual and divine. The concept of ethos is essentially abstract and deductive in nature. It again is highly subjective as a concept.

1.2.3 The Study of Cultural Communication

The cultural communication approach entails focusing on the ways and processes through which the content of the civilizational system are transmitted and communicated through different levels of society. It draws attention towards the structural integration of the Indian civilization. The works of social anthropologists, McKim Marriott (1955) and Robert Redfield (1956) provide a significant basis to understand the unity and interdependence of various parts of a civilizational entity. Marriott highlights cultural synthesis and interaction between ‘Great Tradition’ and ‘Little Tradition’ while focusing on festivals celebrated in a small north Indian village, Kishangarhi in Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, Redfield’s analysis reflects constant interaction and communication between great tradition and little tradition in the form of folk-urban continuum, which stands for symbiotic and interdependent relationship between the two. You can read more about views of Marriott and Redfield regarding the unity of a civilizational entity, society and culture in Box 1 and 2

Box 1: Parochialization and Universalization

McKim Marriott’s work *Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization* (1955), proposes the twin concepts of Universalization and Parochialization for explaining the cultural exchange between great tradition and little tradition in India. Universalization is the process of carrying further the great tradition by encompassing the elements of little tradition. In other words it relates to the systematisation and standardisation of local rites, values and cultural ideals by universal Sanskrit belief system. To explain his point he takes the example of the *diwali* — the Festival of Lights celebrated locally, in Kishangarhi village to propitiate goddess of wealth and prosperity Saurti. He elaborates that goddess Lakshmi may be a universalised form of Saurti of the little tradition as the former is also symbolic of wealth and prosperity. In contrast to the universalization process is parochialization. It stands for the downward spread of rites, beliefs and cultural ideals of universal appeal to suit the local environs. It reflects the creativity of little communities within India’s indigenous civilization. Marriott explains this process by citing the example *Naurtha* festival in Kishangarhi, pointing it as a parochialized version of *Navarathri* in which nine different consecrates of the Sanskrit goddess Durga is propitiated for nine successive days.

Box 2: Little and Great Traditions

Robert Redfield's work *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (1956) is based on his experiences with Latin American peasants. However, like McKim Marriott he too discovered that the peasant-based societies were not isolated and bounded. Peasants' way of life is influenced by tribes, towns and cities people. He viewed peasant society as a system of social relations, with relationships extending outside it to wider communities. His emphasis was to highlight the interdependence of peasant community as bearers of little tradition on townsfolk and populace who represented great tradition.

1.2.4 Analysing Indian Civilization as a Type

This approach is predominantly popular with comparative sociologists. According to this approach Indian civilization is seen as a distinct type in juxtaposition with other societies and culture. The emphasis is to view Indian society as a traditional society, which is experiencing processes, such as modernisation that illustrate cultural, social and historical principles. The aim is however, not to read distinct values or aspects that are unique to India's structure, but typify it on the basis of what it has in common with other societies and culture and then to examine variations. For example, India may be seen as a type in being a village society or an agrarian society as this allows comparisons with other societies and cultures which may display a similarity in terms of presence of a rural life and community. However, to view India as a caste society will be a futile exercise as the concept/phenomenon of caste is unique to India. This rules out the possibility for making India's cross-cultural/societal comparisons. The unique is thus 'scientifically incomprehensible' in view of this approach (Cohn 1971:4).

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Complete the following Sentences
 - a) The cultural communication approach involves
 - b)and.....are two eminent social anthropologists associated with the cultural communication approach to the Indian civilization.
 - c) Classifying Indian civilization as a type implies focusing on making..... rather than examining aspects that are distinct and unique to India's social structure.
- ii) How is cataloguing of traits different from cultural essence approach to understand Indian civilization? Elaborate in three sentences.
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.3 UNDERSTANDING THE GEOGRAPHY OF INDIA

Indian civilization has complex and deeply rooted historical traditions, with a wide variation in custom and behaviour regionally and with the social structure of a particular region (Cohn 1971:7). Much of the diversity and regional variations in India may be explained on the grounds of variations in her geography. Further, it is the basic physiography of India that has provided a broad framework for a persistent historical, cultural and political pattern. It therefore, becomes significant to take an account of its (historical) geography.

Cohn lists out three zones into which India may be divided in a broad geographical way. These are:

- The Perennial or Nuclear Zones
- The Route Zones
- The Zones of Relative Isolation

A description of these zones is provided below:

1.3.1 The Perennial/Nuclear Zones

The perennial zones are the fertile river basins, plains and delta. Historically, they have been centres/nucleus of human settlement, high population density, political activity and a stable state system. They have settled agriculture practices. They are known for being trade centres of agricultural and craft commodities. Various pre-modern and modern cities have emerged in nuclear zones. India is marked by such zones both in north and south India.

Historically, the river basins and plains around Peshawar led to the emergence of first nuclear zone in northern India which is Gandhara, a town that is now in Pakistan. This region played a pivotal role in spreading the influences from western and central Asia to India. The Sutlej-Jamuna doab and the Ganges-Jamuna doab formed the major nuclear zones of north. These comprised of cities like Kurukshetra-Panchala, Kanauj, Panipat, Delhi, Agra, which have had a vibrant politico-historical past. Kosala, the present day Central Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Saurashtra, the contemporary Gujarat are other examples of nuclear zones of north. Each of these zones have distinct linguistic traditions and owing to topographical and climatic variations have evolved a distinctive cropping pattern.

There are five major nuclear zones in south India. These are –Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Mysore. Andhra is the home of Telugu speaking people. It is constituted by the rich agricultural delta areas of Godavari and Krishna river. Tamil Nadu is the site of the Chola and Pandyan kingdom, and inhabits Tamil speaking people. It comprises of fertile plains of Pennar river and Kaveri delta and is densely populated. Maharashtra is the Marathi speaking area. It bears similarity with Mysore, the home of Kannada speaking population in agricultural practices. Both the zones are known for dry agriculture with millet, maize and gram being prominent crops. Also, unlike Tamil Nadu the two zones display a dispersed settlement pattern. Kerala/Malabar forms the south western part of India. It stands distinct from other zones in the south owing to its height due to the Niligiri ranges and the rain it receives. The Western Ghats isolate it from

other zones in south and render it a distinct culture and social structure, visible in the practice of matriliney by the Nayar community. However, similar to Andhra and Tamil Nadu, Kerala displays agriculture based on wet rice cultivation.

1.3.2 The Route Zones

Malwa provides a typical example of a route zone. It connects north India with the western coast and Deccan. It acts as a passage for invaders and traders to reach nuclear zones of attraction. It is a distinct cultural region, lying towards south of Aravali ranges. It is a semi-arid region.

The route zones have no unified and persistent political tradition. Socially and culturally, they are mosaics rather than having distinctive culture and social structure (Cohn 1971: 26). They are areas of settlement of migrant population.

1.3.3 The Zones of Relative Isolation

The zones of relative isolation are relatively inaccessible and geographically lesser conducive areas for human settlement. Ladakh for instance is not only icy cold but relatively cut off due to high mountain ranges. And therefore has sparse settlements.



A village in the Ladakh region is relatively isolated due to high mountain ranges
(Photo credit : Kiranmayi Bhushi)

The northern part of the country is hilly and mountainous and represents several zones of relative isolation like:

- a) The area in the northern arc. This is constituted by the regions adjoining the borders of Baluchistan and Afghanistan. It is inhabited by loosely organised tribes who have been Islamised.
- b) The areas around Gilgit and Jammu and Kashmir having a unique cultural tradition, assimilating Hindus from the plains.
- c) The areas along the Himalayas in the plains extending through Nepal border, Bhutan and Sikkim and place where the Brahmaputra River enters Assam

plains. These represent dual cultural influence that of Tibetan-Buddhism and Hindu beliefs transmitted from the plains.

- d) In the hilly and forested tracts of north east, the area between Burma and India. The area is home to various tribes reflecting south-eastern influence.
- e) The Rajuptana/ Marwar is a region of relative isolation in the north west India. Since, the 10th century it is inhabited by the Rajputs and other refugees from Muslim invaders who established their culture over the scattered tribes of the region.

In addition, there are two significant zones of isolation in central India. These are:

- a) This is the area running through Vindhya mountains, eastern Gujarat, Narmada River, eastern Banaras from where Kaimur hills are visible.
- b) The mountainous terrain south of Vindhya range, northern Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, north western Orissa and south eastern Bihar.

Activity 2

What do you think are the sources that contribute to diversity of the three geographical zones discussed above? Note down your thoughts in a notebook.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Complete the following sentences
 - a)are inaccessible and geographically lesser conducive areas for human settlement.
 - b) The perennial /nuclear zones include
 - c) Malwa provides a typical example of a
 - d) Socially and culturally route zones are a

1.4 VIEWING INDIA FROM A STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The social structure and culture of Indian civilization is deeply influenced by its past. The history of Indian civilization reveals that religion, economy and politics played a significant role in shaping its social structure and culture. It is the mythic-religious past and direct political past (strongly dependent on the economy) , which provide a basis to understand mutual alliances and tensions between the various regional political entities that existed in pre-colonial India. The mythic and religious are intertwined with the political and myths, such as those of sacred kingship are often invoked to justify present political hierarchies and relationships. Numerous invasions, migrations and a porous and accepting religion has added diversity to the Indian population and given it an essentially pluralistic content.

However, this does not imply India may not be perceived as a singular entity/unit, a nation.

Structurally and culturally Indian civilization is highly segmented and stratified. The previous section illustrated India as regionally segmented. Hinduism is not a doctrinal religion and more of a way of life. The sub-continent has allowed the flourishing of religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism and accepted outside religions like Islam and Christianity. Thus the religious past of India manifests a high level of differentiation and absorption of diverse elements. The great tradition of India in terms of the hierarchy of *varna*-order and the prolific *jati* system is an all-encompassing system of social order that has so permeated the Indian sub-continent that incoming religions such as Islam and Christianity have also accepted this social order in practice if not in ideology. The present day social and political order draws significantly from the past in letting the caste system of *varna* and local *jatias* play significant role in the arena of power dynamics and formation of social networks and groups. Even in contemporary India a person's identity is linked to his/her *jati* and *varna* identity and legitimized by reference to some imagined and mythical past.

Activity 3

In addition, to Hinduism what are the other major religions practised in India? List them out in your notebook.

The connections with religious past also provide a crucial means for identification with a distinct kinship group and particular ancestry. Thus, Hindus visit Gaya and Haridwar to perform rituals for their dead, where priests maintain books tracing the genealogical history of their clients.

The *varna* and *jati* systems rule the social world by its superimposition on the kinship system by the rule of *jati* endogamy. There is also the concept of generational or blood feuding that is a derivative of kinship and practiced in societies where kinship still plays a key role. Thus, we could come across households and clans whose members may not enter into marital alliances or inter-dine with each other as their ancestors in the previous generations had disputes or quarrels. The influence of kinship and the *jati* system as an extended kin group restricts the social mobility and confines people to groups identified by the past more than the present.

Nonetheless, this perception of past has been changing over the years, particularly since the end of 19th century when our nationalist leaders started to portray India as a nation and its population as a unit. India is no longer perceived simply as a segment or fragment, divided into several regions/states with its population representing different religious/ social identities. In 1947 following its independence from the British, India was declared as a secular state. The overtly Hindu symbols were avoided and a mix of religions were represented in the formation of the national symbols, to reiterate its secular character. Secularism in India refers to a respect for all religions and not its western counterpart of no religion. Thus, the flag of the country has a Buddhist wheel of law. The national emblem is made of lions, taken from the seal of the Buddhist king, Asoka. Further, *jana, gana, mana* was adopted as the national anthem spelling out peoples and regions of India, clearly reinforcing its unified identity, despite the underlying diversities. In short, the concern of the nationalist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru

had been to portray India as essentially representative of the principle of 'unity in diversity'. The principle of unity and diversity reflects India's ability 'to absorb and reshape what is foreign' (Cohn 1971:57). India's civilization represents assimilation and absorption of elements from long period of several waves of immigrant rule. This has indeed contributed to its socio-cultural richness and pluralism. However, the following section focusing on Embree's account on unity of India's civilizational past, raises questions regarding appropriateness of viewing Indian society and culture in view of 'unity in diversity'.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Complete the following sentences by filling in the blank spaces
 - a) The mythic/ritual past for Hindus relates to
 - b) In addition to the religious past,provides a basis to understand Indian social structure.
 - c) The....., reinforce India's unified identity, despite the prevalence of diversities.

1.5 DISCOURSES ON INDIA'S CIVILIZATIONAL UNITY

The unified identity of Indian civilization is a matter of discussion and debate. Embree (1989) presents three different views. On one hand there are those who deny the unity of the Indian civilization. The second view contrarily, sees India as an all-encompassing civilization and unified entity. The third view is a synthesis of the first, two positions. According to this view India is a land of composite culture, reflective of 'unity and diversity'.

The advocates of the first view are those who fall in line with the geographer Spate's thought that historically India is constituted of 'perennial/nuclear regions', which have played a crucial role in shaping and structuring its regional geography and socio-cultural and political history. The perennial/nuclear regions are areas of high population density and activity and stand in distinction from not only each other but also zones which are relatively isolated. As we have seen in Section 1.2, according to this view Indian civilization is witness to variations in regional geography, which in turn explains the variations in its socio-cultural traditions and levels of political development. This view purports the concept of regionalism.

That regionalism is a force which challenges the idea of an all-Indian civilisation emerges clearly in the colonial works, *Hobson-Jobson* and that of Strachey. These works view unity of India as artificially created by the colonial conquest of the country that would last until the exercise of imperial power. According to these India is a land of numerous regions and hence it would be wrong to perceive people residing here as 'Indians'.

Contrary, to such colonial conceptualisation we find many Indians and nationalist leaders asserting physical, political, social and religious unity of India as a civilizational legacy. The 1885 meeting of Indian National Congress provides a testimony of such claims. The proponents of the second view feel that despite the continued significance of nuclear regions of historical geography there exists reality of an all Indian civilization. They view colonial emphasis on regionalism as a misreading of Indian history.

The third view that pronounces Indian civilization as displaying ‘unity in diversity’ finds one of the earliest expression in the historian, Vincent Smith’s *Oxford History of India*, 1919. This is taken as the most appropriate basis to understand Indian civilization’s uniqueness and distinctiveness from other world cultures. However, Embree rejects the characterisation of India’s civilizational history in terms of ‘unity in diversity’.

Reaffirming the second view, Embree attributes unity of India to the Brahmanical ideology and tradition, which is a pervasive force with the Hindus who form the majority of its population. He contrasts it with Hinduism, which he relates to religious and social practices with innumerable regional and local variants and manifestations that developed in the subcontinent over its long history since the 3rd century BCE. On the other hand, according to him, the Brahmanical ideology represents a uniform and coherent set of statements in the classical texts and inheritance from historical experiences pertaining to philosophy of life and world-view. It provides meaning to the lives of majority of Indian population and hence, may be regarded as the significant force contributing to the unity of Indian civilization. The notions like *karma* and reincarnation, concept of *dharma*, and a sense of a hierarchical social order with respect for Brahmins and rituals are significant contents of the Brahmanic ideology. These ideological canons articulated with political experiences underlying “imperial institutions brought a variety of regions under a central authority”(Embree 1989: 12).

While the unifying role that the Brahmanical ideology played during the Mauryan empire is doubtful, after the latter’s disintegration, it emerged as “an articulated theory of society, with its religious and social sanctions, for political power” (ibid: 17). The deference paid to Brahmanical culture by the rulers regarding the nature of governance and kingship was noteworthy even when India came under Islamic rule.

Activity 4

Collect some information on the Mauryan Empire. Write a note of about two-three pages covering: a) its major rulers, b) its expanse or spread in the Indian subcontinent, c) its role in spreading of religions like Jainism and Buddhism.

Yet, another factor according to Embree that provides unifying linkages to Indian civilization relates to the politico-historical experience that was shaped owing to the intrusion of external powers – the Islamic, and the European. This is contrary to colonial and nationalist imagination of unity of India’s civilization. The nationalists viewed Indian history in terms of great empires created by the Maurya and the Gupta rulers. This was primarily a reaction to the colonial construction that India’s political unity was artificial, and created by imperial power.

In Embree’s opinion both the Brahmanical ideology and the two external intrusions have been significant in restricting the emergence of nation-states and countering the growth of regionalism in India. This is unique from the European experience. In Europe there are around 25 nation-states. Unlike the European Church, the Brahmanical tradition placed the ruler or the king at the centre of universal order, without stressing on the criteria of territorial sovereignty. Further, the intrusion of Islamic and European civilizations had an all encompassing effect

on India, destroying the scope and possibility for different regions to political independence.

According to Embree regionalism has not been a counterforce to unity of India as it has been made to appear in many writings. This however, according to him does not imply India may be characterised in terms of ‘unity and diversity’. The unification of India may be attributed to the two external invasions and the pervasive Brahmanical ideology. The forces that prevented attempts at political unification of India in the historical past should be seen not as instances of regionalism but internal political rivals to imperial institutions.

Check Your Progress 4

i) What are the major forces that unify Indian civilization?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

ii) What do you understand by Brahmanical ideology? (Explain briefly)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

iii) Regionalism has not been a counterforce to the unity of Indian civilization. Elaborate in four sentences.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we saw the composite culture and pluralistic content of the Indian civilization. We first focused on various approaches to the study of Indian culture and civilisation. Next, we elaborated on the cultural and historical geography of India and how this reflects richness and diversity of the Indian culture and civilization. Further, we examined how the structural and cultural past of the Indians have a significant bearing on their present. We saw how the ritual and socio-political past of Indians link them with specific religious and kinship groups.

We saw a reworking of the bounded identity of Indians in the efforts of nationalists, particularly following India's independence, as they wanted to represent the country as an unified political entity, reflecting the principle of 'unity in diversity'. In the last section we examined Embree's understanding regarding the unity of Indian civilization. We observed India as representing two realities: that of various regions and unifying ideology of Brahmanical tradition and external intrusions. Embree's work focuses on the aspect that civilization is not a fixed heritage, handed down from the past, but rather an adaptive mechanisms that permit it to be both a historically determined and continuously renewed in a creative way.

1.7 REFERENCES

Embree, A. Thomas. (1989). *Imagining India*. Oxford University Press. Chapter 1 Brahmanical Ideology and Regional Identities. Pp.9-27.

Cohn, Bernard. (1971). *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*. Oxford University Press. Chapters 1,3, 5 & 8 (1-7, 24-31, 51-59,79-97)

Dube, S. C. (1990). *Indian Society*. New Delhi: National Book Trust. Chapters 1 and 2 (1-46)

1.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i)
 - a) On the ways /processes through which the content of the civilization is transmitted and communicated through different levels of society.
 - b) McKim Marriott and Robert Redfield.
 - c) Comparisons with other societies and cultures which display similarity.
- ii) The cataloguing approach entails listing out statistically measurable traits and institutions that are essentially Indian. Unlike the cataloguing approach the cultural essence approach involves focusing on non-quantifiable or qualitative principles particular to India. For example, principles like universal brotherhood, respect for spiritual and divine.

Check Your Progress 2

- i)
 - a) The zones of relative isolation.
 - b) Basins, plains and deltas.
 - c) Route zone.
 - d) Mosaics rather than having distinctive culture and social structure.

Check Your Progress 3

- i)
 - a) Great tradition of India in terms of the hierarchy of *varna* order.
 - b) Past associations and hostilities.
 - c) The national emblem and national anthem.

- i) The Brahmanical ideology and the two external intrusions—Islamic and European have been central factors contributing to the unity of Indian civilization.
- ii) The Brahmanical ideology represents a uniform and coherent set of statements in the classical texts and inheritance from historical experiences pertaining to philosophy of life and world-view. It provides meaning to the lives of majority of Indian population and hence, may be regarded as the significant force contributing to the unity of Indian civilization. The notions like *karma* and reincarnation, concept of *dharma*, and a sense of a hierarchical social order with respect for Brahmans and rituals are significant contents of the Brahmanic ideology.
- iii) In Embree's opinion both the Brahmanical ideology and the two external intrusions have been significant in restricting the emergence of nation-states and countering the growth of regionalism in India. This is unique from the European experience. In Europe there are around 25 nation-states. Unlike the European Church, the Brahmanical tradition placed the ruler or the king at the centre of universal order, without stressing on the criteria of territorial sovereignty. Further, the intrusion of Islamic and European civilizations had an all encompassing effect on India, destroying the scope and possibility for different regions to political independence.

UNIT 2 INDIA AS COLONY*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Indian Society in the Colonial Period
- 2.3 Perspectives on India during Colonial Period
 - 2.3.1 Indological View of India
 - 2.3.2 Colonial View of India
 - 2.3.3 Nationalist View of India
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 References
- 2.6 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you would be able to:

- discuss colonialism and its effects on Indian society;
- explain the role of colonialism in the emergence of Indian society from fragmented principalities to a unified nation; and
- describe the ‘idea of India’ as imagined by Indologists, colonialists and nationalists.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we discussed the Indian civilization and culture. Indian civilization is one of the oldest and in India’s historical journey colonialism is an important turning point which introduced western modernisation in Indian society. India had a rich tradition of thoughts and practices on society and culture which was substantially transformed under the influence of western philosophy, culture and practices during the colonial period. One of these changes is the shift from agriculture to industry that came during the period of colonisation and brought large scale changes in political, economic and social spheres.

European travelers had been visiting India since long and their accounts describe Indian society in glowing terms. When Europeans came to India, India’s economy was one of the wealthiest. For the Europeans, ruling India was at a different level as compared to other colonies of Asia and Africa. As Cohn points out: ‘in the 18th century India, there was settled agriculture, there was a large variety of craft production; There existed institution of kingship, partially written legal system, record keeping, taxation based on regular assessment, major military force, political and economic professions; like clerks, tax officials, bankers, judges, traders, etc. A complex socio-religious system was practiced based on sacred texts amongst both Hindu and Muslim communities with a range and a hierarchy of priests and scholars of religion.’(1987:137).

In the following section we shall discuss the nature of Indian society during colonial time. In the Section 2.3 we take a look at how 'India' was perceived by Indologists, colonialists and nationalists.

2.2 INDIAN SOCIETY IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Let us now discuss how Indian society was under the British colonial rule.

The period of Enlightenment, the scientific and commercial revolutions, which spanned the period between the 14th and 18th centuries, the French Revolution of 1789, and the Industrial Revolution dealt a deadly blow to the age-old feudal system of monarchy and Church in Europe.

The mass production of goods which was an outcome of industrial revolution, created a need for raw materials that drove the European countries in search of markets and colonies around the world. Many seafaring European countries set sail in search of riches and territories to colonise. The Dutch, Portuguese, French, and the English set up trading posts in India in the 17th century. The weakening of the Moghal Empire and many unstable Indian states made it easy for the British to establish their rule. It was after the Revolt of 1857, that the East India Company was dissolved in 1858 and India came formally and directly under the rule of the British Crown. By the mid 19th century British had control over much of the subcontinent. British rule over India lasted around two hundred years including the rule by the East India Company that had come as traders. The British rule and colonisation of India brought substantial changes in Indian society. We take a synoptic view of some of the changes:

- As the British plundered India by taking away its riches and used it as a market for its goods, economy suffered badly and poverty increased. Indian handicraft industry was ruined as they could not match the machine produced goods of Britain.
- Agriculture based economy went through many changes. Cash crops were introduced and revenue on land was standardised for the colonial masters.
- India also saw severe famines where millions lost their lives, however, modern medicine and healthcare was also introduced by the British.
- Modern Rule of Law in the form of a new Penal Code was introduced by the British. New codes of criminal and civil procedure, mostly based on English law were also established. This meant equality in the eyes of law and no discrimination (in theory) on the basis of caste, region, religion or gender.
- Many social reforms became possible with legal jurisdictions; like Abolition of Sati, raising of marriageable age, education for women, etc. These were led by some of the Indians like Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar and others.
- Modern education was launched as a policy advocated by Lord Macaulay, first put forth in 1835. English as a medium of instruction replaced languages like Sanskrit, Persian in North India and many schools and universities were opened to impart modern education across India to employ Indians in middle and low level, mostly clerical jobs.

- Modern means of transportation and communication (telegraph network) were established. In 1909, Indian railway lines were laid. The railways network established by the British is one of the largest railway network in the world.
- Modern industries were introduced which led to new kind of occupations and rise of a new professional middle class in India bringing in changes in the caste system, in terms of occupation and status.
- Industrialisation also led to urbanisation, rise of modern cities across India.
- The nationalist movement which emerged due to the exploitative rule of the British, influence of modern ideas and education, under the guidance of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, B.G. Tilak, Pandit Nehru and many others led India to its freedom.

Check Your Progress 1

i) What is colonialism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

ii) Mention two effects of colonialism on Indian society.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2.3 PERSPECTIVES ON INDIA DURING COLONIAL PERIOD

Different perspectives have been employed to analyse and interpret Indian culture and society. In this section, we will be looking at Indological, colonial and nationalist views of Indian society in some detail.

2.3.1 Indological View of India

The need to govern people of various ethnic groups and different cultures created the urgency in the European rulers to study the life and cultures of the ruled. Bernard Cohn (1968) argues that the British Orientalists’ study of Indian languages was important to the colonial project of control and command. The college at Fort Williams in Calcutta was established with the specific goal of training young administrative officers in Sanskrit and other Indian languages and also culture.

In the post Battle of Plassey period (1757 onwards) we find growing knowledge of Persian, Sanskrit and vernacular texts among the British administrators that enabled a comprehensive analysis of the society and culture of India. The depth and range of India's history, philosophy and religion came to be known through the translations that were now being attempted by early scholars. Alexander Dow, the first to translate the Persian history of India and arriving at the understanding of Hinduism also realised the limitations of not referring to the original texts of Hinduism written in Sanskrit. Interestingly enough, in the process of giving importance to the text as the main source of knowledge about Indian society and culture, little attention was paid on the experienced reality. Thus a textual or Brahmanical version of Indian society was constructed that greatly neglected the way the masses lived.

The Indological view 18th century and onwards gave a more systematic account and provided some concepts, theories and framework that the scholars claimed to have drawn from their study of Indian civilization. The scholars' approach and their understanding of Indian society and its structure' was based largely on their study of classical Sanskrit texts and literature.

The School of Indology drew attention to the presence of a traditional, Sanskritic and higher civilization that demonstrates a semblance of 'oneness'. However, its fault lies in assuming that India has a homogenous population thereby refusing to accept the lower or popular level of the civilization. This 'unity' of India that Indologists talked about did not take into account local, regional and social diversities.

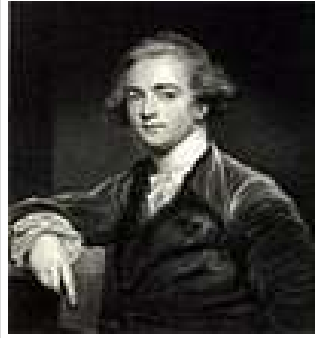
Following are some of the assumptions that Indologists made about India as a geographical entity and as a civilization:

- India had a glorious past and to understand it one must go back to the sacred books that were written during the ancient times. Both the philosophical and the cultural traditions of India are rooted in these texts.
- These ancient books reveal the real ideas of the Indian culture and society. One must understand these books to chart out the future development of India.
- Institutions should be set up to encourage the study of ancient Indian texts and teach Sanskrit and Persian literature and poetry.

The Indologists stressed on the spiritual aspect of Indian civilization and largely overlooked the study of material culture. Hence, they arrived at a more unitary definition of Hinduism, that did not account for numerous diversities.

Secondly, it led to a fixed view of Indian society with no regional variation let alone historical changes over time. What followed is an unquestionable acceptance of authority of texts and prescriptive behavior rather than the actual behavior and customs being practiced by the people. Hence Indian society came to be understood as a system of rules and social order that was more static.

In the 18th century there were many who subscribed to this Indological or Orientalists view of India. Works of Max Mueller, William Jones, Henry Maine and later Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Alexander Dow, Alexander Cunningham had an influence in shaping the subsequent writings on India.

Box 1: Sir William Jones (1675-1749)

William Jones was born in London and came to Calcutta in 1673. He established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1684, which was devoted to studying Indian culture and society. Over the next few years of his life in India he immersed himself in studying all aspects of Indian society. One could say that he is responsible for launching of the modern study of Indian subcontinent, an area which was neglected in European scholarship. He produced an array of writings on law, music, literature, botany and geography of India. And made the first English translation of several works, which included *Manu Smriti*.

(Image credit: By Joshua Reynolds; Originally from sv.wikipedia; Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=379007>)

The Indological writings dealing with the Indian philosophy, art, and culture are reflected in the works of Indian scholars like A.K. Coomarswamy, Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji, G.S. Ghurye, Louis Dumont and others. Even within sociology many of the founding fathers of Indian Sociology were also influenced by Indology, like B.N. Seal, S.V. Ketkar, B.K. Sarkar, G.S. Ghurye and Louis Dumont among others. Ghurye, although a trained anthropologist under W.H.R. Rivers, turned routinely to classical texts for understanding all manners of contemporary phenomena – costume, architecture, sexuality, urbanism, family and kinship, Indian tribal cultures, the caste system, ritual and religion. His colleagues and students like Irawati Karve and K.M. Kapadia also continued to do so. Ghurye's method has often been later referred to as indigenous Indology, more influenced by the writings of Indologists of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Mumbai) rather than the British writings established by Sir William Jones or Max Muller. Dumont's Indological bias is more apparent in his thesis about *varna* and caste where he assumes unity of Indian civilization. The work, *Homo Hierarchicus* is based on the fixed view of four-*varna* theory of caste which sees it as an all-inclusive category and therefore Indian society as basically based on the principle of hierarchy, where everyone is ranked on the basis of their birth. He further assumed that the structure of caste is the result of the ideology of principle of purity and pollution – a fixed and unified set of ideas and values which do not change. Louis Dumont imagined a modern Western society which – unlike India – aspires to rationality and was essentially individualist compared to the collectivist or group/community-based identities in India (Dumont 1972). Hence in many ways he followed the Indologists by going back to the idea of a European-Indian divide, the West and the East as typically opposite.

Sociologist A.R. Desai critiques those viewing Indian society from the lens of culture and providing a textual view as being far removed from the real India with its inequalities, diversities, dialectics and exploitations.

Check Your Progress 2

i) What is an Indological view?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

ii) Mention two basic assumptions of Indologists.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.3.2 Colonial View of India

Let us now look at the colonialist view of Indian society. The aim of the British colonial interest in studying the traditional Indian society proved useful in laying the foundation for further studies of Indian society. The emphasis of the studies was on how to govern India better. After the arrival of the British, knowledge of Indian society began to develop very rapidly from 1760 onwards. They needed to study Indian languages in order to understand India better.

The view of the British Colonialists can be sub-divided into a) Missionaries. It was N. B. Halhead who presented first compilation of Hindu *Dharamshastra* (1776) William Jones, Colebrook were other scholars who did notable work on India) and b) Administrative view, from H.H. Risley under whom first census of India (1872) took place to J.H. Hutton, who was the last census commissioner, the collected census data helped later scholars like, Morgan, McLennon, Lubbock, Tylor, Starcke and Frazer.

a) **Missionaries In India** : Early 19th century saw considerable literature by missionaries on Indian society scholars like Claudius Buchanan, William Carey, William Ward and Sir John Shore condemned Hinduism and saw hope in the spread of Christianity. Missionaries like Abbe Dubois understood caste as a *Varna* system which was seen as an impediment to conversion to Christianity (Dirks, 2001). This view developed through the writings of early Evangelicals (Protestants who believed in spreading the teachings of Christianity through conversion by persuasion) in the late eighteenth century. They viewed Indian society as being essentially undignified as compared to the British society and the only way to improve was by infusing it with British ways and by British rule. Interestingly though in their search for the proof of a generally corrupting Hindu society, these missionaries made major contributions to the empirical study of the Indian society. Moreover, the

need for translation of Bible into vernaculars led to socio-linguistic study of Indian languages. This in turn gave rise to more systematic and written accounts of the lived realities of the different caste and occupational groups. The missionaries also helped in the spread of modern education in different parts of India, went to work in the remotest areas (amongst tribals in the forests and other backward communities) and worked with zeal and fervor for the weak and the poor.

Orientalists and missionaries accepted and agreed (Cohn, 1968) that religious ideas and practices underlay all social structure. They also were of the opinion that Brahmans were the maintainers of the sacred traditions through their control of the knowledge of the sacred texts. The orientalist also agreed with Brahmanical theory of the four *Varnas*. While the Orientalists had immense admiration of an ancient Indian civilization and were deeply aggrieved by the fall of Indian society from that ideal, the missionaries were of the view that there was no glorious past and it has always been filled with absurdities.

- b) **The Administrative View:** The interpretation of Indian society by the administrators, trained in British universities and indoctrinated by practical scientific rationalism were more realistic and were largely based on facts on the ground. Their purpose was to understand India in order to exploit its resources. The administrators sought to develop structures and institutions that would help them in organising their actions (rules) related to the life of the native locals of India along with the enormous complexities characterising the Indian society.

British scholarly administrators posted in different parts of India, for example, Risley, Dalton and O'Malley in East India, Crooks in Northern India, wrote detailed accounts on the tribes and castes of India, which even today provide the basic information about the life and culture of the people of the respective regions. The purpose of these studies was to familiarise the government officials and private persons with classified descriptions about castes and tribes in India with a view to ensuring effective colonial administration. But these early works proved insufficient as East India Company's territory rapidly increased and the British became aware of the baffling variety of peoples, histories, political forms, systems of land tenure and religious practices. They realised that the relatively haphazard reporting of sociological information must be more systematised and supported field surveys whose goal was acquisition of better and more accurate information.

Box 2: Caste and Census

The exercise of census undertaken by the British also shaped and laid stress on the system of caste in India. Nicholas Dirks in his book, *Caste of the Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (2001) argues that before the British arrived, the Indian society was highly fragmented into communal groupings and it was the Portuguese who first suggested caste as a social formation. The British took these ideas further to help them get a sense of order. Dirks shows how caste was shaped by the active participation of British and Indians which included administrators, Brahmins, caste claimants, information gatherers, among others.

The first census of 1872 under Lord Mayo was mainly an exercise where open ended questions were asked, and the categories of religion, caste and race were used.

Other than caste, the administrative idea of India was based on the category of 'Village'. The perspective developed and forwarded was that India was primarily composed of villages. Charles Metcalfe, described Indians as living in "village communities" which "are (like) Little Republics (self-governed units), having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations" (Cohn 1971 reprint 2000: 86). The villages therefore came to be seen as self-sufficient units both economically and politically. However, villages were always a part of a larger sub-system, paying taxes to the rulers, socially interconnected through marriage relations, market fairs and social and economic inter-relations with others (see unit 4 for a more detailed discussion on Village India).

The 'caste' and the 'village' view combined together helped the British rulers frame policy, revenue laws, created the class of *zamindars* and also forced commercial agricultural practices.

2.3.3 Nationalist View of India

After the Indological and colonial view, let us now look at the nationalist view of India. Before British came to India, it was divided into various small states, principalities and dynasties. Due to its diversity in terms of religion, culture, language, and region it was widely believed that India cannot form a nation as it did not have a common culture, language or a common history, rather it had too many diversities. While there was a semblance of subcontinental identity as a nation the nation-state was not in place. It was only after independence from the British that a full- fledged Indian state emerged. There were several aspects to the colonial regime which helped shape India's nationhood. Let us look at some of these aspects and factors that went into bring the idea of nation to a fruition:

- 1) The British brought various diverse sections of Indian society under a singular administrative purview as well as introduced various modern institutions such as bureaucracy, western education, law, modes of communication, printing press etc. These institutions and establishments helped the colonial power to exploit the Indian people as well as their natural resources; conversely it also brought the diverse people of India into singular framework of reference.
- 2) The exploitative colonial system under the British gave rise to anti-colonial movements. The leaders of this movement left no stone unturned to free themselves from the colonial yoke and establish their own rule in free India. The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 accelerated the movement and mobilised people of various regions to bring unity.
- 3) The founders of the modern Indian Nation created symbols to bind those diversities such as, common flag, national song/anthem, etc. Thus despite the diversities a common sentiment was created among the diverse sections, widely categorised as 'unity in diversity' factors. However, different freedom

fighters like Gandhi, Nehru, Tilak, Patel and others added new aspects in nationalist movement of India such as non-violence, non-cooperation, civil disobedience movement etc. to accelerate the movement.

- 4) In the context of Indian nationalism as opposed to European model of nationalism, anti-colonial movement also played a big role. Many scholars argue that the freedom struggle of India was more anti-colonial than national. The struggle brought all the sections of society on a single platform against the British.

A R. Desai, D.D. Kosambi, Partha Chatterjee etc. have presented new dimensions to understand Indian nationalism and have looked at factors which helped in creation of 'Indian nationhood'.

Desai (1948) has analysed the fundamental economic transformation of Indian society during colonial period. He viewed that the economic transformation was one of the important material pre-requisites for uniting the diverse population of the region. At the same time he also addressed the role of other factors such as modern transport, new education, press, and others, in contributing towards the unification of the Indian people and in engendering a nationalist consciousness among them. Bringing examples from colonial Bengal to analyse Indian nationalism Partha Chatterjee(1993) gave the examples of language, culture, drama, schools, family, etc. and their role in nation formation.

Box 3: Nehru on India

Sometimes as I reached a gathering, a great roar of welcome would greet me: Bharat Mata ki Jai — 'Victory to Mother India.' I would ask them unexpectedly what they meant by that cry, who was this Bharat Mata, Mother India, whose victory they wanted? My question would amuse them and surprise them, and then, not knowing exactly what to answer, they would look at each other and at me. I persisted in my questioning. At last a vigorous *Jat*, wedded to the soil from immemorial generations, would say that it was the *dharti*, the good earth of India that they meant. What earth? Their particular village patch, or all the patches in the district or province, or in the whole of India?

And so question and answer went on, till they would ask me impatiently to tell them all about it. I would endeavour to do so and explain that India was all this that they had thought, but it was much more. The mountains and the rivers of India, and the forests and the broad fields, which gave us food, were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. Bharat Mata, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this Bharat Mata, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves Bharat Mata, and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery.

Jawaharlal Nehru in *Discovery of India* (pg.59)

On the other hand V. D. Savarkar, a freedom fighter and a writer, looked to India's civilisational ancestry, geographical entity, common ethos and cultural practices in trying to come up with an idea of India. He believed that "The most

important factor that contributes to the cohesion, strength and the sense of unity of the people is that they should possess an internally well-connected and externally well demarcated ‘local habitation’, and a ‘name’ that could, by its very mention, rouse the cherished image of their motherland as well as the loved memories of their past. We are happily blessed with both these important requisite for a strong and united nation” (Savarkar 2009:82). The two requisites he has in mind are geographical identity and common civilizational culture. Savarkar says that this land is distinct in that it is naturally defined by geographical boundaries. As for common civilizational core Savarkar looks to the word Hindu and its derivative ‘Hindutva’ in trying to come to an understanding of its cultural essence. The Hindus have more similarities than dissimilarities and a culture that is distinctly different from others, he argues. He argues, therefore, that they should be recognised as cultural unit. “A Hindu is then one who feels attachment to the land that extends from Sindhu... as the land of his forefathers-as his fatherland;... and which assimilating all that was incorporated and ennobling all that was assimilated has grown into and come to be known as the Hindu people; and who, as a consequence of the forgoing attributes, has inherited and claims as his represented in a common history, common heroes, a common literature, common art, a common law and a common jurisprudence, common fairs and festivals, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments” (Savarkar 2009:100).

Rabindranath Tagore while being a patriot, makes distinction between patriotism and nationalism; Patriotism means love for one’s country — a sense of territoriality, ‘a certain emotional attachment to place of one’s birth, the place where you have grown up, place which frames your earliest memories. Tagore differentiates patriotism from nationalism. According to him nationalism is an ideology which is based on the idea of a nation. ‘Tagore believed that India was a country of communities. It was not a country of a nation. So trying to build a nation in India was like an attempt to build a navy in Switzerland.’ (www.sahapedia.org)

The idea of what constitutes Indian ‘nation’ has been discussed here, different view points have been given without going too much into the details and an analysis of it. These differing view points should indicate to you that the idea of nation is a construction: where tradition, language, culture, civilization history, and its people have all been held up to define what constitutes a nation.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) What was the purpose of Colonialist view and how did it help the British in ruling over India?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

ii) What was the administrative view of India?
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

iii) What were the factors that helped in formation of Indian nation-state? Mention two.
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2.4 LET US SUM UP

Colonialism or imperialist rule by the British changed Indian society in various ways. The interest of the British rulers to control and govern India better gave rise to the studies of Indian society. In this unit, we have observed in detail how ‘India’ was imagined and viewed by Indologists, colonialists and nationalists.

The Indological view, 18th century onwards gave a more systematic account and provided concepts, theories and framework that the scholars claimed to have emerged from their study of Indian civilization based on their study of classical Sanskrit texts and literature. Colonial view and the studies helped the British rulers frame policy, revenue laws, created class of *zamindars* and also forced commercial agricultural practices. The views and studies by the missionaries and administrators also proved useful in laying the foundation for further studies of Indian society.

In the section on nationalist view we explored the major factors that helped in the creation of ‘nation’. A.R. Desai was of the view that the economic transformation was one of the important material pre-requisites for uniting the diverse population of the region, along with factors like modern transport, new education, press, etc. For Partha Chatterjee language, culture, drama, schools, family, women etc. played a role in formation of the Indian nation state.

2.5 REFERENCES

Cohn, Bernard. (1968, reprinted 2009) *The Study of Indian Society and Culture* in Cohn and Singer (ed.) *Structure and Change in Indian Society*. Rawat Publications, New Delhi.

- Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Vol. 11). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cohn, Bernard . (1971, reprint 2000). *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*. OUP
- Cohn, Bernard. (1998, reprint 1990). *An anthropologist among the historians and Other Essays*. OUP.
- Dasgupta, B. (2003). The Colonial Political Perspective. *Social Scientist*, 27-56.
- Desai, A. R. (2005). *Social Background Of Indian Nationalism (6Th-Edn)*. Popular Prakashan.
- Dirks, N. B. (2011). *Castes of mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton University Press.
- Dumont, L and Pocock, D. (1957). For a sociology of India, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1, pp 7-22
- Inden, Ronald. (1990). *Imagining India*. Basil Blackwell Ltd, Cambridge, Mass.
- Nehru, J. (2008). *Discovery of India*. OUP.
- IGNOU, Course material. (2005). *Sociology in India*, Book-1 MSO 004. Indira Gandhi National Open University School of Social Sciences, New Delhi (<http://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/21039/1/Unit-1.pdf> accessed on 2nd Sept 2018)
- Vidyarthi, L. P .(1976) *Rise of Anthropology in India*. Concept Publishing Company, Delhi
- Savarkar V.D., (2009). *Hindutva*. Hindi Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi.
- Nandy, Ashish, (2018) <https://www.sahapedia.org/tagore-nationalism-conversation-prof-ashis-nandy> accessed on 12th October, 2018

2.6 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Colonialism is a form of territorial expansion through imperialism where a colonial country exerts political, economic and social control over the colonized nation, leading to gain in wealth for the colonial country and impoverishment and poverty for the colonized.
- ii) Effects of colonialism:
 - Modern Law in the form of a new penal code was introduced by the British. New codes of criminal and civil procedure, mostly based on English law were also established. This meant equality in the eyes of law and no discrimination (in theory) on the basis of caste, region, religion or gender.

- Many social reforms became possible with legal jurisdictions, like abolishing Sati, raising the marriageable age, etc. led by Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar and others.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) The Indological view gave a more systematic account and provided some concepts, theories and framework that the scholars claimed to have emerged from their study of Indian civilization based on their study of classical Sanskrit texts and literature.
- ii) Basic assumptions of the Indologists:
 - India had a glorious past and to understand it one must go back to the sacred books that were written during the ancient times. Both the philosophical and the cultural traditions of India are rooted in these texts.
 - These ancient books reveal the real ideas of the Indian culture and society. One must understand these books to chart out the future development of India.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) The emphasis of the Colonialist studies was on how to govern India better. The studies helped the British rulers frame policies, revenue laws, created class of *zamindars* and also forced commercial agricultural practices.
- ii) The interpretation of Indian society by the administrators, trained in British universities and guided by practical scientific rationalism. Their purpose was to understand India in order to exploit its resources. The administrators sought to develop categories that would help them in ordering their ideas and actions relating to the life of the natives of India avoiding the enormous complexities characterising it.
- iii) Factors which helped India's 'nation-state'
 - a) The British brought those various segments under a singular administrative purview as well as introduced various modern institutions such as bureaucracy, western education, law, modes of communication, printing press etc. Such establishments while bringing changes to Indian society conversely helped the colonial power to exploit the Indian people as well as other natural resources.
 - b) The rise of anti-colonial movement, the then leadership left no stone unturned to establish India as a nation. After the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, it accelerated the movement and mobilised people of various regions to bring unity.

UNIT 3 NATION, STATE AND SOCIETY*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Stateless Society in India
- 3.3 Transition from Stateless to State Society in India
- 3.4 Nation, State and Society in Colonial India
 - 3.4.1 Political Unification
 - 3.4.2 Legal Unification
 - 3.4.3 Economic Unification
- 3.5 Anti-colonial Movements and the Idea of the Nation
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 References
- 3.8 Specimen Answer to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of nation, nation-state and nationalism;
- discuss the nature of stateless societies in India; and,
- discuss the role of British colonialism and anti-colonial struggles in the birth of the Indian nation.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Nation, state and society may appear to you as three different conceptual categories, but in this unit we are going to discuss their relationship in the Indian societal context. Human society has existed for a long time, but emergence of state and nation has changed the way societies lived and progressed. Historically the emergence of state societies was a unique and revolutionary phenomenon. There were stateless societies at some point of time in the world. India too had stateless societies. Existence of state is generally associated with the nation. It is an erroneous understanding to assume that state and nation are the same. The transition from stateless to state societies in India did not coincide with the emergence of nation-state. For a long time India had state formations in which the idea of Indian nation-state was not present. It was at a particular period in Indian history that the idea of India as a unified nation-state took shape. It was during British colonial rule and struggle against it that this idea germinated. So in a way when we discuss the relationship between nation, state and society in India, we are narrating colonial and post-colonial India. Keeping this in mind, the first part of this unit will discuss the transition from stateless to state societies in India and its growth. Then the second part will discuss the relationship of nation, state and society in colonial India, which has paved the way for formation of the nation-state

3.2 STATELESS SOCIETY IN INDIA

Stateless societies are defined in terms of the absence of any centralised political structure implying that there is no formal agency of social control as you find them in contemporary societies. The ties of kinship and lineage system guide the political order of stateless societies. State societies emerged with the Agricultural Revolution, as states are made possible only if there is a surplus generated that can support a non-producing elite. Pre-agricultural societies did not produce a surplus as they did not have any stratification to demand the production of a surplus. Even when the agricultural transition was made, most parts of India continued as non-state, kinship and community based societies, where land is not owned and there is no well-developed concept of property and of land revenue. Scholars have two views on the link of agriculture, surplus production and state formation. One view that was classically held by scholars such as Gordon Childe, consider the technological advancement as the trigger for the emergence of urban civilization and state formation. The other view primarily led by scholars such as Ester Boserup have put primacy to hierarchy and the need to pay rent as the push that led towards technological revolution and people had no option but to look for ways to create surplus to pay tribute.

The history of the beginning of civilisation in Indian subcontinent starts with Indus Valley Civilisation which is also known as Harappan Civilisation. Scholars have argued that there existed uniformity in this civilisation in terms of the construction of its cities. This has compelled them to conclude that there existed a central political authority implying that it was not a stateless society. Fortification, which is one of the constituent elements of state, is also found in some of the cities of Indus Valley Civilisation such as Dholavira in Gujarat. Depiction of a soldier on a pottery shard suggests that Indus civilisation had a standing army. Without going further into the discussion on nature of state in Indus civilisation, let us begin our discussion on stateless societies in India after the disappearance of Indus Valley Civilisation as scholars are still debating the reasons for its disappearance and are also unable to decipher its history with the available historical evidences. In this backdrop, the discussion on stateless societies in India starts with society during the Vedic period. *Rig Veda* is the primary source from which the history of vedic period is reconstructed.

The Vedic society was primarily pastoral-nomadic. It did not have knowledge of agriculture in the beginning. It was primarily guided by lineage system. The sociological classification of stateless societies makes it evident that kinship and lineage are central features guiding the political organisation of stateless societies. It is argued that “characteristics of the lineage system do appear to be recognisable in much of what we know of Vedic society” (Thapar, 1990:10). You will not find a state structure emerging in this society until later Rigvedic period. The period between early Rigvedic to later Rigvedic time saw the fourfold division of society on the basis of caste. “In the Indian situation lineage society gave shape and form to caste structure. Lineage elements such as kinship and marriage rules are important to caste. When differing forms of stratification begin to emerge an attempt is made through the *varna* framework to draw them together into a holistic theory of social functioning. In the later stage the occupational groups employed in production, the *sudras*, are added on as a fourth category but denied a lineage origin form, so that their exclusion is made explicit” (Ibid:18).

In fact historians like Wolpert (1997:25) has raised doubt about the Aryan conquest theory (much prevalent for a long time) saying that in comparison to the fortified and well developed cities of Mohenja Daro and Harrapa, the Aryans did not have the technological or military capability of storming the cities. Doubts are also cast on the veracity of this term where Aryan seems to have been a linguistic rather than a racial category. As Wolpert puts it 'Arya was a person of high rank, and the common category of the Aryans, referred to as *Vīs*, were probably the ancestors of the later Vaisyas' (ibid). This is a reflection similar to that of Ambedkar who also thinks that these divisions were political and flexible. Some eminent scholars like Irfan Habib are of the opinion that since the Harappan civilization was not simply its cities but also a large peasantry (required to support the cities), the flood or disaster theory is not tenable as it is not possible that the entire agricultural communities were submerged. Therefore he is still supportive of the invasion and conquest theory by some outside people. "The success of the Aryans is ascribed to the possession of the horse, and, still more, the horse drawn chariot. Since, compared with all the previous armour and weaponry, the chariot was immensely expensive machine, its possession implied a pre-existing aristocracy; it is therefore difficult to envision an early egalitarian stage within Rigvedic society, as has sometime been suggested" (Habib: 2007/1995: 114)

3.3 TRANSITION FROM STATELESS TO STATE SOCIETY IN INDIA

The transition from stateless society to state society takes places at a particular juncture in Indian history. It happened at point when the agricultural production and social relations in society reached a stage where producing agricultural surplus was possible and a standing army could be maintained. The period depicted in the *Mahabharata*, that is dated to around 1st century AD, shows that some small feudal kingdoms were emerging. *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, which is described as one of the significant texts to understand the nature of state in ancient India, lists seven constituent elements of States – king (sovereign power), ministers, people, fortified city, treasury and the army (Rangarajan, 1987:117).

A frieze from Sanchi Stupa depicting the city of Kushinagar of Malla Dynasty which is one of the ganasanghas.



(credit: By Asitjain - Detail of, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=70372759>)

Now the question is: how an agricultural surplus was produced which was essential for the emergence of all these elements of state? Historians have argued that the use of iron coupled with rice cultivation was significant in this transition from stateless to state societies in ancient India. Therefore, you will find that Ganga Valley was the place where the first republics of ancient India developed which is called *ganasanghas*. The presence of a perennial and large source of water has been seen as the prime requisite for the emergence of state and urban civilizations. Thus the cradle of urban civilization was Mesopotamia on the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers and the Indus river and its tributaries the site of the Indus valley or Harrapan Civilization. The Doab, or the flat plains watered by the Ganga and the Yamuna in Northern Peninsular India provided the ecological conditions necessary for cultivation and surplus production.

The republics developed alongside monarchies. So, two state systems developed at this time – *ganasanghas* and monarchies. This is where the first empire of India i.e. Magadha, emerged. This transition from pre-state or lineage society to state took place around 1000-600 BCE in the mid Ganga Valley. Buddhist scriptures explain the history of social organisation of this period. Both *ganasanghas* and monarchies had different form of social organisation. *Varna* structure was prominent in monarchies whereas *ganasanghas* find no role of *varna* structure, but of clans and lineage. Cities like Kausambi, Vaisali, Rajagriha appear during this period.

All these transformations in social organisation and state systems was possible because of the increased agricultural production which provided the base for the appearance of cities, states and complex class society. The establishment of sixteen *Mahajanapadas* along with their capital cities and standing armies could not be achieved if agricultural surplus was not produced. This was all the more difficult if the caste system had not divided the labour but also labourers. The consolidation of Mauryan Empire under Ashoka's regime is compelling story of these factors. We are not going to narrate the story of rise and fall of Mauryan Empire here. Our primary aim is to show that the idea of nation-state was still absent at a time when consolidation of empires was taking place in ancient India. Similarly the rise of Gupta empire may lead you to think that India as a nation-state existed. There is no doubt that these empires had huge centralised administrative and bureaucratic structures and have acquired territories through regular conquests, but the kind of political and economic consolidation brought out by British colonialism was unparalleled in Indian history. Till that time India as a nation-state was non-existent. It was during colonial rule and struggle against it that the idea of India as a nation got strengthened. British colonials ruled in two ways – first direct rule in some states and then there were around six hundred princely states which were primarily autocratic monarchies. The colonial governance and anti-colonial struggle has shaped much of the political processes of contemporary India.

The Second World War also contributed to the emergence of what today we recognise as nation-states. The War initiated feelings of belonging, marked by redefined territories, ethnic and cultural identities.

Check Your Progress 1

i) What is the role of agriculture in the transformation of social organisation that led to the emergence of state structure in ancient India?

.....

ii) What are the two forms of states that emerged in ancient India?

.....

Activity 1

Take a map and draw the spread of Mauryan and Gupta Empire. Compare that map with the spread of colonialism in India.

3.4 NATION, STATE AND SOCIETY IN COLONIAL INDIA

Today when we refer to India, we think of it as a nation-state, consisting of twenty nine states and seven union territories. There is clearly a specified Indian territory ruled by Indian State. It has a flag, national anthem, constitution and codified legal norms and rights for its citizens. The territorial boundaries of India were drawn after 1947 according to the map of British conquest, but not necessarily according to any historical sense of belongingness, cultural identity or ethnic roots. In this scenario one is bound to ask the question as to what is this entity called India and more importantly who does it represent and who feel that they belong to it. For the many people of India, primordial ties of caste, clan, community and religion often override the sense of belonging to the abstract entity of the Indian Nation.

India’s political unification is a product of colonialism and anti-colonial struggles. Before colonials, there were feudal kingdoms and fiefdoms in India, but the territories they ruled were limited geographically. For instance, the first empire in Indian history was Mauryan Empire which could consolidate its territorial foundation, but it could not emerge as a nation. Oommen writes, “the compulsion for conceptualising an Indian nation was largely the outcome of British colonial presence and its articulation. In the pre-independence period, the use of the term “nation” for India was applicable to colonial India”(Oommen 1999:1).

One of the enthralling statement in this regard is by British politician John Strachey – “This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India – that there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social, or religious; no Indian nation, especially no ‘people of India,’ of which we hear so much” (Strachey, 1894:5). This characterisation implies that India as we know it today was completely absent when British colonials came. In the same spirit, Sir John R. Seeley in his book *The Expansion of England* writes, “India is only a geographical expression like Europe or Africa. It does not make the territory of a nation and a language, but the territory of many nations and languages”(Seeley, 1993:255 cited in Oommen, 2003: 1).

“ If nationhood requires people living within a given political boundary to have one language, one faith, one culture and one race, then claiming nationhood for India required stretching credulity. This is how the early nationalists responded to the colonial insinuation: They invoked the essential unity of the people of India, but struggled to explain how that essence fitted all the areas that fell within the boundaries of colonial India. The one thing they found hardest to wish away was religious diversity and divisions. The dilemma has persisted in post-colonial India” (Yadav, 2013). Oommen argues that the essential unity of India has been defined in several ways, in terms of (i) an ancient civilisational entity; (ii) a composite culture; (iii) a multi-national polity; (iv) a religious entity; (v) a territorial entity populated by a multiplicity of religious communities; (vi) a geographical/collectivity of linguistic communities; and finally (vii) as a unity of great and little nationalisms (Oommen, 2003:267). In these seven ways of defining India as a nation, two important elements – political and economic are missing which were specific to the colonisation due to which India could emerge as a nation.

3.4.1 Political Unification

Desai write that “one of the significant results of the British conquest of India was the establishment of a centralised state which brought about, for the first time in Indian history, a real and basic political and administrative unification of the country . Such a unity was unknown in pre-British India, which was, almost chronically, divided into numerous feudal states, frequently struggling among themselves to extend their boundaries. It is true that attempts were made by outstanding monarchs like Ashoka, Samudragupta and Akbar, to bring the whole of India under a single state regime and administrative system. However, even when they succeeded in bringing a greater portion of India under their rule, the political and administrative unity achieved was of a nominal character only” (Desai, 1984: 152) .

So, the political unification achieved by British colonials was of immense scale. One is led to further enquire as to how political unification was achieved by colonials which was unparalleled in Indian history. Desai believes that the political and administrative unity could not take place in pre British India because of lack of unified economy and means of communication that connected many parts of India then. Desai, however says that : “it is true that a conception of unity of India existed and flourished in pre-British India. But this unity was conceived as the geographical unity of the country and the religio-cultural unity of the Hindus. India was ‘both a geographical and cultural continuum. . .The concept of the

political unity of the entire Indian people did not and could not emerge under the given socio-historical circumstances. The people were not socially and economically integrated; they were, therefore, not integrated politically either. The British established a state structure in India which was of a distinctly new type. It was highly centralized and ramified in the remotest corner of the country” (Ibid:153).

3.4.2 Legal Unification

The political and economic unification of India was coterminous with legal unification. “The British established a uniform reign of law in the country. They enacted laws and codified them. These laws were applicable to every citizen of the state and were enforced by a hierarchically graded system of tribunals which constituted the judicial section of the State” (Ibid). Alongside, an education system necessary to maintain the new economic and administrative apparatus was introduced by the British. “The British also brought about the administrative unification of India. The hierarchically graded public services, established by the British, is an example of that. The Indian people, for the first time, found a substantial sector of their economic and social life coming under the governance of a universally and equally operating system of law” (Desai, 1948:156). The British government created a new land system on a private property basis and introduced money economy. A uniform system of law had to be evolved to maintain and regulate the new land relations and various contractual transactions such as purchase, sale, and mortgage of land resulting inevitably from the new system.

3.4.3 Economic Unification

Desai summarises that because of the British there was ‘an extensive and basic political, administrative and legal unification of the country for the first time in Indian history’ He adds that “such a state structure became necessary to the new type of economy which came into existence in India under the British rule. The capitalist economic transformation of India broke up the multitude of separate village economies, welded the Indian people economically, through a system of exchange relations, and made contract the key basis of their economic relations” (ibid). He further adds that the commercial crops which were grown mainly for the market not for one’s own consumption were introduced in large: commodity products such as sugarcane, tea, coffee, jute, rubber etc. The commercialisation of agriculture meant that India was linked to the wider world market. Desai write that “both the internal and foreign trade of India increased in volume and scope. Further, modern industries on a capitalist basis steadily developed in the country. The new state had to enact a mass of laws to regulate the huge complex of contractual and other relations inevitably arising from such an economic state. Thus there came into existence a system of new laws, uniformly operating and governing all complex and multi-fold relations and transactions between the tenants and landlords, workers and employers, manufacturers, traders and bankers; also laws determining the relations of India with other countries regarding perennially operating trade and other activities” (Ibid). Accordingly a uniform currency system was also introduced.

The kind of changes British colonials introduced in land relations was also significant. Pre-colonial India had no class of landed feudal nobility with

proprietary rights over land. “The feudal nobility which existed throughout the pre-British period was given only the right to collect and appropriate land revenue over a specific number of villages. The nobility was not the owner of these villages but only the revenue collector keeping the whole or a portion of the land revenue. The institution of manor never existed in the pre-British Indian society. Similarly, it was also not the monarch who was the owner of the agricultural land of the realm. The monarch or the state had a right only to receive a definite proportion of the produce” (Ibid:34). At the same time the individual peasant proprietorship over land did not exist in pre-British India. This implies that the private ownership of land was non-existent. Village possessed the right over land and that is why village was the unit of revenue assessment. This continued in Mogul India. The political principles of Mughal Empire were governed by distinct traditions giving rise to highly centralised bureaucratic structure. The system of nobles’ distribution of ranks called *mansabdari* and system of distribution of land grants i.e. *jagirdari* were its prominent structures. But they could not introduce private ownership of land.

It was after the emergence of colonial powers in Indian subcontinent private ownership of land was introduced. “The British conquest of India led to a revolution in the existing land system. The new revenue system introduced by the British in India superseded the traditional right of the village community over the village land and created two forms of property in land; landlordism in some parts of the country and the individual peasant proprietorship in others” (Ibid:35). These changes were unprecedented in Indian history. From the point of view of administration, it was more economical for the British to collect revenue from thousands of landlords than from a legion of small peasant proprietors, argues Desai. He further says, “for political-strategic reason, the young British Raj in India needed a social support in the country to maintain itself. It was expected that the new class of landlords, which owed its existence to the British rule, would naturally support it” (Ibid:36). These changes in land relations had far reaching impact on the consolidation of India as a nation. “It contributed towards building the material foundation, namely, the economic welding together of India and of India with the world, for the national consolidation of the Indian people and the international economic unification of the world” (Ibid:41).

3.5 ANTI COLONIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE IDEA OF THE NATION

The people of India did have a vague conception of India as a country some two thousand and five hundred years ago. Thereafter, in stages, as their knowledge about themselves and others grew, they began to identify the cultural features that were common to them, and to recognise a unity in the diversity of their religions and languages. But it was their resistance to colonialism and absorption of modern democratic (and later socialist) ideas that began to transform India from a country – a geographical and cultural entity – into a nation-state. India is, then a creation of the Indian people, a product not simply of nature or even of blind circumstances, but essentially of the people’s consciousness” (Habib, 1999:28-29).

But this consolidation was done by a country that left its mark on India in terms of patriarchy, hierarchy and marginalisation of large categories of people. The

British came with their own version of civilisation. Their vision of a civilised country was of individual and strong men who owned their own property and supported their families of women and children. Under community ownership, both men and women had rights of access to resources and neither had ownership but with British legislation all land and resources passed into the hands of men. They also supported the hierarchical and feudal system and were patrons of upper castes and landholders. The 'lower' castes, tribes and the landless and poor were even further marginalised and their lower position justified in many ways. Thus when the Indian Nation was born, it was typically Hindu, Brahmanical and upper class. This mainstream excluded the lower caste/class, women, tribes and several other categories, who are, even as of today, struggling to find an identity with and within the nation state.

After the transfer of power from British colonials to Indian rulers that took place in 1947, the consolidation of the country was carried out consciously. Many of the princely states were merged with the Indian union to achieve the political homogeneity throughout the country. "The territorial integration of princely States took three forms – (a) merger with the adjacent provinces; (b) grouping of certain States into separate units; (c) transformation of certain States into centrally administered areas. The process through which the states were adjusted into the new constitutional structure was two-fold. It involved, in the first place, the accession of the Indian States to the Dominion of India. Secondly, it involved the changes whereby the consolidation of small States into viable administrative units had taken place" (Sharma, 1967:238).

The erstwhile rulers were initially granted a Privy Purse, a compensation for having willingly handed over their estates to the nation. Later during her rule, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi abolished this system, under the justification that these rulers did not deserve to be supported by the state as they were like any other citizen of this country.

The Indian nation has been on a path of consolidation and developing a unified identity. Some national institutions like the Armed Forces, the National Stock Exchange, the Election Commission, the Parliament and the Supreme Court, among others, are looked upon as representatives of the nation-state. Yet regionalism, communalism, divisive politics and stark economic disparities work against the emergence of a strongly unified state. Further, the homogenising effects of cultural globalisation and the global flow of goods and information are diluting the unifying forces that hold the nation together.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) What are the factors that played significant role in the consolidation of nation in colonial India?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

3.6 LET US SUM UP

You have learnt that the emergence of state is not the same thing as the formation of a nation. The difference between a state and a nation is that while the former refers primarily to a territorial entity, the latter is a 'feeling' of collectivity that is abstract and involves a vision of unity of culture, historical past and ethnic roots. In our introductory section we traced the emergence of state in Ancient India.

It was during colonial time that the idea of India as a nation-state emerged and the modern Indian nation is thus built on a concept that is largely western in origin. We discussed the factors responsible for the emergence of the idea of India as a nation during colonial time. The economic and political unification are of prime importance in this regard. Changes in land relations could bring the country under British capital. We explained how the private ownership of land was introduced by the British for both generating revenue for themselves and also to convert the subsistence economies to capitalist market economies. The transformations in social organisation in India during colonial time were deeply layered and intensive. Although many aspects of colonial rule played havoc with Indian economy and society, the nation emerged largely because of the struggle for Independence that fired the collective imagination. The idea of nation continues to be imagined and reimagined even in post independent India. The nation is a project that is never complete but is always evolving and transforming.

3.7 REFERENCES

Desai, A.R. (1948). *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*. Popular Book Depot.

Habib, Irfan. (1999). 'The Envisioning of a Nation: A Defence of the Idea of India', *Social Scientist*, Vol.27, No.9/10, pp.18-29.

Oommen, T.K. (1999). 'Conceptualising Nation and Nationality in South Asia', *Indian Sociological Society*, Vol. 48, No. 1/2, pp.1-18.

Oommen, T.K. (2003). 'Demystifying the Nation and Nationalism', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol.29, No.3/4, pp.259-274.

Rangarajan, L.N. (1987). *The Arthashastra*. Penguin Books.

Sharma, Phool Kumar. (1967). 'Integration of Princely States and the Reorganization of States in India', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.28, No.4, pp.236-241.

Sharma, R.S. (1991). *Aspects of political ideas and institutions in ancient India*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

Strachey, John. (1894). *India*. Kegan Paul.

Thapar, Romila. (1990). *From lineage to state: Social formations in the mid-first millennium B.C. in the Ganga Valley*. Oxford University Press.

Wolpert, S. (1997). *A New History of India*. Oxford University Press

3.7 SPECIFIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Agriculture played a decisive role in the production of surplus which is essential for the emergence and maintenance of a state structure. Increased agricultural production provided the base for the appearance of cities, states and complex class society. The establishment of sixteen *Mahajanapadas* along with their capital cities and standing armies could not be achieved if agricultural surplus was not produced.
- ii) The two forms of states that emerged during ancient, after the Indus Valley Civilization were : Republics and Monarchies

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Changes in the land relations brought out by the British was one of the crucial factors having far reaching impact on the consolidation of India as a nation. It helped in building the material foundation for the national consolidation of Indian people. Alongside, the political, administrative unification, legal unification of the country was also initiated by the British which evolved to maintain and regulate the new land economy. Consequently, a uniform currency system was introduced. All these aspects of unification were reproduced through an education system matching this apparatus.