



Block 2
Social Organisations

Jigjiga
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BLOCK 2 SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS

It is inherent in human nature to differentiate and classify objects and human beings into different categories. People are categorized on the basis of age, gender, kinship, occupation, and ethnicity. Differentiation of people based on various socio-economic attributes results in assigning differential status and roles to them. Differential status and roles lead to differential power. Tribal societies differentiate between individuals in various ways and distribute power among them. The differentiation and the power differentials are important to understand the social inequalities in tribal societies.

Unit-1 of this block delves into the way in which the social differentiation is made in different types of tribal societies, the distribution of power according to the category to which people are assigned. This takes us to the institutionalised locus of power and authority in different tribal societies in India. Apart from status and power, social differentiation in societies can be understood from the perspectives of age and gender. In fact, the basic criteria for the division of labour in simple societies have been age and sex. Childhood is the stage where the socialisation process ensures the requisite training for the future members of society. The social and cultural continuity of the community is the outcome of the socialisation and enculturation processes. Psychological anthropologists focus much on childhood experiences across cultures to understand personality formation. Socialisation studies formed the focus of anthropologists interested 'Culture and Personality studies.

Unit-2 deals with the different traditions of socialisation studies in anthropology in different parts of the world, and India. While sex is a biological phenomenon, gender is a cultural construction. The construction of cultural stereotypes plays a crucial role in prescribing and prohibiting different roles and occupations in various societies. By and large, discrimination and subordination of females have been a feature of human societies in different parts of the world. But, this situation is undergoing a transformation with changes taking place in the resource utilisation and entry of new occupations. Gender constructs in tribal societies are significant for understanding the transformation taking place.

Unit-3 examines the gender concepts and practices in various tribal societies and the changes that are taking place. Age is another criterion that is important for assigning different roles and statuses in societies. The concept of ageing in rural and tribal areas is different from the ageing of the urban employed people, who retire from salaried jobs at a given age. In tribal areas, people work as per their ability and not according to their age. There is marked cultural variation with regard to the position and role of the elderly in society. There are different perspectives and theories to explain the perceptions of others on aged people, and the self-perception of the aged.

Unit-4 deals with the definitions, theories, perspectives, and ethnographic accounts on ageing.

UNIT 5 SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND STRATIFICATION

Contents

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Learning Objectives:

After reading this unit, the learner would be able to understand:

- how in tribal societies status and identities are conferred and the manner in which power is distributed in society and authority is maintained;
- the varieties of ways in which societies differentiate between kinds of personhood and the distribution of power among various units of society, individual and collective;
- the nature of authority and the difference between legitimate and non-legitimate power as well as about the institutionalisation of power; and
- the actual processes through which power manifests itself, the tools of control, and the ideological apparatus that legitimises and justifies inequality and differentiation.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Human beings are biologically the same but in every society, there are ways in which one human is differentiated from the other; the term differentiation is used for a simple 'difference' that may be at the level of individuals or at the level of groups and refers to identities. Stratification on the other hand is defined as inequality or an arrangement of individuals or groups into high or low, the word strata being analogous to 'layering'. Thus while 'differentiation' may be understood as horizontal, stratification is always vertical; in real life, these may overlap such that certain kinds of differences also translate into inequality. The most important character of differentiation and stratification is that both are culturally constructed, historically situated, and arbitrary in nature. There is never any real basis for any kind of hierarchy, except one that is arbitrarily imposed by those in power and justified by ideologies that are maintained and continued by the very same power structure. Over historical epochs, the power structures may change

as the ideologies that inform them transform due to a variety of reasons that may be either internal or external to the society in question. Thus, while different societies exhibit different forms of differentiation and stratification, these are both dynamic and shifting and may change over time. Secondly, differentiation and hierarchies are subject to interpretations and may be understood differently by different members of the same society, particularly if they happen to be holding contradictory positions in the power hierarchy.

5.2 EGALITARIAN SOCIETIES

An egalitarian society implies one with the least amount of stratification and differentiation. A truly egalitarian society would ideally recognise only the biological and obvious differences of age and sex without any inequality. It was believed that the tribes that represent some of the earliest adaptations of human society, such as hunting and food gathering would also be most egalitarian. In terms of social evolution, the evolutionary schema as given by Elman Service (1962): Band, Tribe, Chiefdom, and State is largely accepted, but without any particular time frame, in contradiction to the classical evolutionists. These represent increasingly complex organisational structures, rising populations, and greater differentiation but without any consideration of anyone being superior to the other. It is recognised that smaller populations that facilitate face-to-face interactions require less control from the top and less complex authority systems. These had been called ‘acephalous’ or headless by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1970 reprint).

5.2.1 Bands

Three variables commonly inform the level of complexity of the social organisation, and these are also interrelated: namely population, subsistence pattern or livelihood, and property norms. Let us first consider the simplest form of organisation, namely the Band society. The mode of subsistence in these societies is of an acquisitive nature that is they depend largely on what is naturally available in nature. Most of the resources are in the nature of ‘free goods’, what nature has to offer to humans for their living. The Nayakas of southern India has been described by Bird-David (1999) as looking upon the forest as their parents, that give and sustain them. In other words, they do not conceptualise the forest as their property but themselves as belonging to it, as its children. This lack of a concept of property precludes the possibility of any stratification based on possession, the primary variable for stratification in what we understand as ‘class’ based societies. Thus, most hunter-food gatherers have few material possessions and therefore do not differentiate and have no hierarchy of people with more or people with less. Everyone has equal access to all life-sustaining resources and that includes men and women.

A major source of differentiation is often based as Durkheim had suggested on the division of labour in society. The tasks in society are distributed among its members and they may be placed on a hierarchy depending upon the social evaluation of these tasks. Hunting and food gathering societies, in terms of the data obtained from them, indicate that the food gathering activities of women provide the bulk of the calories in the camp, yet the hunting activities of men, that brings in occasional highprotein food, has greater prestige. Among the Oraon, Mundas, and Santals of central India, hunting is a ritual activity as well. In the absence of any property differences, patriarchy usually takes the form of a symbolic and ritual hierarchy, rather than one that translates into

any real form of domination in terms of control over resources and decision-making powers. In a band society, where all relations are face to face, of the primary group kind, most major decisions are collective in nature. A hunting food gathering way of life also requires individuals to take situational decisions, like when they go to the forest any danger may crop up and a person needs to take a quick decision. Thus, they fluctuate between a practical individualism and a collective, consensual decision-making process. Ethics and morality, necessary for the functioning of any society are enforced through the fear of supernatural sanctions. Most wrong actions are seen in the nature of sin, and not a crime, where sin is defined as a wrong against supernatural beings and crime as against fellow human beings. Forest dwellers, some consider the forest and its inhabitants as sacred and have taboos for killing or harming flora and fauna.

Shamans and ritual specialists have a higher degree of prestige than ordinary people, but often in such societies the supernatural manifests itself in the body of a person, who is regarded only as a medium, but not as having any real supernatural power, and certainly not considered sacred (Channa 2005). As long as the person is possessed, he or she will gather attention but at other times they are treated as ordinary people.

The sexual division of labour varies from one tribe to the other, but among some, there may hardly be any division, like the Malaipantaram of South India (Morris 1982). The classical division, as found in most such societies, is between men as big-game hunters and women as food gatherers; but not all environments yield big games. Some tribes may also be dependent on fishing and small game hunting like the Malaipantaram and here the egalitarian relations are most prominently seen, in fact, Morris (1982:180) reports a “pervasive emphasis on sexual egalitarianism”. Yet, the Malaipantaram are not isolated and do not depend totally on hunting food-gathering activities, and have established trade relations with the settled agricultural neighbours. They thus differ significantly from the Andamanese as reported by Radcliffe-Brown who had more elaborate rituals especially marking the puberty of boys and girls and also lived in villages or permanent encampments.

5.2.2 Tribe

The next level of the social organisation of what Service has termed as a tribal level; meaning that they are organised into kinship-based groups that function as economic and political units of society. Each of these groups is distinct but not necessarily different from each other. These are based on the principle of continuity of blood (or bone) and form closed groups based on descent from a common ancestor male or female, depending upon the nature of the descent groups, patrilineal or matrilineal. Both kinds of societies exist among the tribal populations of the world. In India, while most tribes like those of central India and the Nagas and Mizos of North East India are patrilineal, the Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya are matrilineal. The descent groups have been named in terms of the ideal structure that they may follow although in real societies various forms and named entities may exist. Ideally, three types of descent groups may exist; one which divides the tribe into two intermarrying groups, called Moities, one that is based on actually traceable descent lines, called lineage, and one that is based on putative descent from a common ancestor, known as clans. On the ground many variants may exist; for example, the Todas of Nilgiris (Walker 1998) are divided into two groups but these are endogamous in themselves, although there are many kinds of ritual relationships. Thus, they are not exactly moieties but yet there is a dual division.

Tribal social organisations have been called segmentary organisations because they can be viewed as horizontal segments rather than as vertical layers. First described in among the Nuers, detail by Evans-Pritchard (1940), this type of organisation is found in most societies that have either a pastoral or a horticultural economy. The main character of this kind of economy is that the major resource of the society, pastures and water, in the case of pastoral communities and cultivable land in the case of those practising shifting cultivation, is held in common. Sometimes, as in the case of the Bhotiyas (Channa 2013), they may be held by the entire community in common, or they may be divided among the kinship groups or lineages. Meyer Fortes (1953) had designated Unilineal descent groups as corporate lineages.

In the case of the transhumant Bhotiyas, the entire community has equal access to the high-altitude pastures near the Indo-Tibet borders, and they were given rights to graze there by the Raja of Tehri; they also have access to the streams of water that flow freely in this region. When they come down in the winter months to the lower altitude pastures near Dehradun and Hrishikesh, they have to share them with other pastoral communities like the **Tolcha and Marcha** from Niti and Mana. Such sharing of pastures over the generations has also given rise to intermarriages among them. In the communities of the upper regions of the Himalayas, there is an internal hierarchy based on the social division of labour. Some among them belong to artisan groups, like iron-smiths, carpenters and are musicians and drummers also. These groups are treated as untouchables by the upper caste of these communities that also profess caste allegiance and say that they are Rajputs. However, there are no Brahmins or other castes among them, and most such tribes, stretched along the upper regions of Uttarakhand and Himachal, including several types of Bhotiyas, have a dual hierarchy, of an upper layer of so-called Rajputs and a lower layer of untouchable artisan castes. Although most people separate tribes from castes, some incipient caste-like institutions may exist among them, although these castes are different from the rigorous pollution and purity concepts of the more traditional Hindus (see also Bailey 1961, Bose 1971 (reprint, Nathan 1997).

Many central Indian tribes show characters similar to the unilineal type of organisation as described by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, for the African tribes. The Gonds, Mundas and Santals have lineage organisations, so have the North-eastern tribes of the Nagas. For the shifting cultivating tribes, collective ownership of land is important as in shifting cultivation, large amounts of land lie fallow and need to be protected, and such protection cannot be managed by single households. It becomes the responsibility of the entire clan that owns that land. In terms of hierarchy, the descent groups have collective ownership and they are equal to each other. The size of the descent groups needs to adjust to keep up this equality, for example, if the number of members of a group becomes more then they have to disperse so that the resources at their disposal do not diminish per unit; and if they become less, then they have to attract more members. Since in principle all members of a tribe are seen as identical, such fission and fusion of descent groups take place by marriage and adoption of members of other clans (Sahlins 1961).

Within each descent group, the land is distributed between individual households for cultivation in each cultivating season, according to need. In this way, it is ensured that each has according to need but no individual has either more or less than the other. The property concept in such societies is based largely on what has been called 'abstract property'; that is one has the right of the user but not of possession. In the lineage-

based societies, as among the Todas of Nilgiris, the elders of the lineage have authority but not real power. They have managerial roles to take care of community resources and also in some societies to negotiate marriages of the children of the lineage and to give or take bride-price. Marriage in such a society is viewed more as a relationship between two social groups than two individuals. The internal unity of the descent group is expressed in the unified identity of all members of the group, separated only by sex and age, in other words, the individual is embedded within the identity of the descent group. This identity in a practical sense implies that one member of any lineage group may be replaced by another of the same age and sex. The two important institutions that arise from this substitution are blood feuds and the marriage principles of levirate and sororate. In levirate, a dead husband may be replaced by his classificatory brother (another young man belonging to the same lineage), especially if his wife is still in childbearing age. In this way, the descent group saves on payment of another bride price and also takes maximum advantage of the fertility of the woman for whom the bride price has already been paid. In sororate, applying the same principle that bride-price has been paid for a woman, the husband's lineage feels entitled to a replacement if she dies too young. In both instances, a person is almost always substituted by a younger sibling, as he or she is a natural substitute being structurally placed next in line. In other words as social persons, one member of a lineage group is identical to another one separated only by sex and age.

The descent groups act as political units, such that individuals act towards each other as members of groups, not as unitary persons. If, for example, group A and group B are having a dispute, then all members of A will regard all members of B as the opposite party, irrespective of individual likes or dislikes. If one member of A is killed then, any other member of B can be killed in retaliation, irrespective of individual identity; this is the basis of blood feuds, and these can go on forever. Thus, personhood is in a way a collective identity and there is the least differentiation between group members.

5.2.3 The Chieftdom

This is the next form of complexity that a tribal society may take. This form of complexity is supported by some form of inequality that may exist between the various descent groups so that the elder of the descent group of higher rank may have authority over all the other lineages. There is a possibility that with enough resources as backup, the family of the chief may establish itself as a hereditary chief-ship, although it is not necessary that all chiefdoms are so. There are ways in which one individual or a lineage may establish its superiority. We do not have enough scope in this unit to discuss them all, but in most tribal societies, anyone having the superior ability is judged by not what he accomplishes for himself/herself, but what that person can do for the community and for others.

As already mentioned, dispersion rather than accumulation is the key to success, and the ability to draw followers is based on what one can offer. All social surpluses are dissipated by ritual means. If there is a chief, then the surplus is given to him in deference for his rank but to maintain his prestige, the chief needs to give away this surplus, by either giving feasts or as gifts to his followers. Elaborate ceremonies may otherwise take away the surplus. As Leach has shown in his classic study of Burma (1954), the tribe may or may not always have a chief, depending upon the individual's ability to attract and keep followers. Status in such societies is not based upon what one has but upon what one can give. In other words, the innate social mechanisms that generate

prestige also ensure that no real accumulation takes place to give rise to any actual differences in terms of power. Ownership is not encouraged. Such societies are also known as Rank societies as opposed to actual hierarchical societies. Their economy has been termed as redistributive by Karl Polyani (1957).

Such chiefdoms are usually found among shifting cultivators, where land management and protection are crucial, for example, the Nagas have the institution of Angs. Since in such type of economy, women play a key role in productive activities and bride price is given to get a bride, a hardworking man can get a surplus and get himself more wives to work in his land and then get himself more wives to generate more surplus that he can then redistribute to establish himself as a chief.

At times some descent groups or tribes as a whole manage to conquer some other tribe and then take their members as captives or slaves. In a segmentary organisation, is the absence of any concept about inequality, such captives are incorporated as members of clans and help to augment the population of the tribe. Sahlins (1961) has described how the Dinka became Nuer through conquest. If, however the slaves are used as actual slaves to generate surplus and create a real hierarchy then a chiefdom could potentially become a kingdom.

5.2.4 Kingdom

A tribal kingdom is one where the ruling family has finally found a means to establish its power in a way that it can direct surplus towards itself in the form of a real tribute. Here the ruler and his family are no longer redistributing to maintain their power but have now established some kind of ideological legitimacy to tribute offered by their followers. Often such legitimacy is evoked through a supernatural association. However, as in India, many of the tribal kingdoms, like those of the Bhils and the Gonds, were a result of the higher royalty of the land, bestowing some privileges on a particular family or tribe. Tribal kingdoms may occur within an overall feudal structure where such an ideology of centralised power pre-exists. Ecologically such a kingdom to exist requires a resource base that allows accumulation and subtraction of surplus. In his study of Burma, Leach had shown that the Shan kingdom was supported by settled wet rice cultivation in the valley while the hill Taungya (shifting cultivation on the hills) could only support a fluctuating and unstable system of power. Most tribal kingdoms are unstable and tend to dissolve easily and the tribes return to an earlier form of democracy. Usurpation of power by a few individuals usually go against tribal ethos that often tends to be egalitarian in principle. The king or person in power may be held legitimately powerful only by supernatural sanction. None of the tribal kingdoms, like in central India managed to maintain themselves or grow in size and complexity comparable to the vast monarchies of the Hindu and Muslim rulers. Their existence too was mostly dependent on the patronage of these powerful rulers.

5.3 FORMS OF LEADERSHIP AMONG TRIBES

Weber, in his classic work on power, has distinguished between three types of leadership, namely Charismatic, Traditional and Rational-Legal. The former refers to leaders who have personal charisma and can become leaders purely on their personal merit and qualities. Such kinds of leaders have always been found in various tribal societies across the world and they tend to rise in times of crises, like the famous Shaka Zulu of South Africa who was able to lead his people to victory against the mighty British Empire. In India, too several tribal leaders rose in rebellion against the

colonial forces, like Birsa Munda from Central India and Rani Gaidinliu from Manipur, a Naga woman who resisted British colonialism as well as the spread of Christianity. The Nagas also united under their charismatic leader Phizo, who has iconic status in modern Nagaland.

Such situational and charismatic leadership is a feature of most tribal societies where messiahs and even saint-like personalities tend to come up at times of stress and oppression. Among warring tribes such as the pastoral nomads of the Middle East, such leadership was the norm and persons with administrative and leadership qualities often led from the front in raids and war. Charismatic leadership may or may not be institutionalised and in most tribal societies the individuals acquire many followers during their lifetime but the movements began by them may continue or die down. We all know for example that the Naga secessionist movement began by Phizo is almost non-existent today.

Traditional leadership is ascribed and often hereditary, and is embodied in status and not in a person. The Nagas had their hereditary chiefs known as Angs and some other tribes also tend to have their Mukhiya or chief. But chiefs or hereditary rulers tend to be present only in tribes that have enough resources for stratification. In some tribes as described by Leach in his study of the Burmese highlands, chiefs can be temporary, based on their ability to attract followers. The chief has to continually replenish their resources and then redistribute them in the form of feasts and other attractions for the people to accept them as leaders. Tribal societies rarely show actual accumulation and stratification that may lead to the stage of negative reciprocity where the chief may establish his legitimacy to get tribute and have his position exalted as a leader.

Some tribes in central India like the Gonds, Mundas, and Bhils at times had rulers with real power who also had the symbolic apparatus to legitimise their traditional power, like ceremonies and paraphernalia of a palace and other riches. However tribal kings never achieved the status of other Hindu kings and often remained as small local chieftains. A tribe may have a king only when it also has a large population. The Gond Rajas of the Satpura Plateau had under them more than three million persons. According to Haimendorf, "The rulers of Chanda, situated now in Maharashtra, were until 1749 powerful princes whose domination included a large part of the Adilabad District of Andhra Pradesh. The rule of the Gond rajas of several princely states in Chattisgarh lasted until 1947 when the British withdrew from India and the Gond states merged with Madhya Pradesh" (1982:14). The Jaintias and the Khasis also had their kingdoms in the North-East, the former known as Synteng, which had a unique federal kind of organisation. As described by Dutta (1982:21), "A Khasi state was a mere federation of villages under a chief styled Syiem or Raja or Lyngdoh. There is evidence to show that at an earlier stage, the chief of such a federation was the priest or Lyngdoh. Later a separate clan was recognised as ruling clan and it was from such clans that Syiems were chosen customarily." This we find the condition of a divine legitimacy in the authority of the Khasi Syiem.

Rational-Legal power is achieved by personal merit and legitimised in a modern setup by demonstrable criteria like the passing of an examination, acquiring some prestige resources like education and money, and is supported by public acceptance. In the modern-day setup within the Indian democracy, a new set of tribal leaders have emerged who can be said to belong to this category. The Indian Administrative Service, the educational institutions, and the various tools of democracy have made available certain legitimate statuses for achieving power. Today a tribal leader is one who can win an election or pass an examination to become an IAS officer.

5.4. INSTITUTIONALISED POWER

The tribes have had their centralised institutions of power, often referred to as Tribal Councils which may have local names like the Naga Hoho or the Durbars of the Khasi Syiems. Among the Jaintias the chiefs of the many kinship-based segments of the tribe were known as Doloi. Before their contact with the British, the Doloi formed a loose federation of chiefs, of which they had twelve. Later for some reason, they formed a more cohesive group under one chief chosen from the twelve existing ones and called him Syiem. He however had only nominal and symbolic significance, probably only to unite the Jaintia, also known locally as the Synteng. Under one leadership the Jaintia had managed to conquer parts of Sylhet of the adjoining Bangladesh territory and at one time the raja of the Synteng had considerable power and extensive territories both of the plains and of the hills. The Syiems ruled with the assistance of their Durbars which were composed of administrative officers of the nature of ministers and viceroys. In the next rung were the village headmen and community elders. The Syiem could not act independently of his Durbar, which effectively meant that there was a top-down administrative system that involved many men of various ranks. As pointed out by Dutta (1982:22), “One of the chief functions of the Syiems was to act as judges with their Durbars serving as the jury”. In the modern days, the Khasi tribal councils hold considerable power and rule the state of Meghalaya, composed of the Jaintia and Khasi hills.

All the tribal areas are now under the Indian democracy and are incorporated within the central schema of Panchayati Raj. From 1992, the 73rd Amendment in the Indian Constitution made significant changes in the participation of tribes in the Indian democracy, with the formation of the statutory Gram Panchayat. While the states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, greater parts of Mizoram and North Cachar district of Assam are under **Inner Line Regulations**¹ and do not have to follow the Panchayati Raj program of the Central Governments. The other states such as Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya are under the Sixth Schedule and deemed Tribal Autonomous Regions and have Autonomous District Councils that are elected democratically. The traditional Hill councils like those in Meghalaya are still represented by the consensual leaders of the tribes, who may often be only the male elders. The Constitutional Panchayats on the other hand have provisions for representation by weaker sections and by women; which does not become applicable to those areas that are under the Inner Line provisions. The democratically elected councils may however pose a threat to the traditional power hierarchies. However tribal councils often have considerable powers and the earlier structures may prevail even under democratic conditions.

5.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learned that tribe is not a homogenous category and a large range of variation exists with respect to differentiation and stratification in the tribes of India. They range from the very simple and almost perfectly egalitarian organisations of the hunting and food gathering peoples like the Malpantaram of South India and the far more complex stratified village councils and local patriarchies of the Nagas and the Gonds etc. The complexity of structures and the intensity of stratification vary according

¹ Inner Line Regulations are certain regulations introduced by colonial rulers enforcing strict travel restrictions into tribal areas to ensure that no encroachments were made into these areas. This was done to protect the rights, privileges, customs and traditions of the tribal people.

to the population density, economy, and history of a tribe. The larger, more densely populated tribes with economies that can produce enough surpluses to support an elite stratum usually show more inequality. The shifting cultivators who have communal access to property are likely to be more segmental in their authority and as we have seen some like the Jaintias, traditionally had a federation of the village chiefs.

One must also keep in mind that none of the power hierarchies and inequalities are static in nature and change over historical periods. The factors that influence such change are the influence of outsiders, changes in the economy, changes in religion, education, and in the present context, the incorporation within a democratic nation. The two-tier hierarchy of the **Bhotiyas** of Uttarakhand is for example a result of their long exposure to Tibetan society with a similar stratification. The impact of British rule led to some significant changes in tribal political structures like the emergence of centralised authority among the Jaintias.

The impact of modern value systems through urbanisation, western education, and liberalisation has also seen changes in traditional hierarchies. Thus, women may contest their traditional inferior position as among the Naga tribes, or the young may contest the authority of the elders, as among the people of the Khasi hills. One form of inequality may give rise to another as is happening with the rise of a new tribal elite based on education, occupation, and political and administrative powers within the Indian nation-state.

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Sample Questions

1. What is the difference between inequality and difference?
2. What do you understand by an egalitarian society? Is it possible to have perfect equality?
3. What is a band society? Give some examples of such societies and how they maintain order.
4. What is the role of kinship groups in segmentary societies?
5. What schema of social complexity was given by Elman service?
6. Can tribes have centralised power? If so, then under what conditions?
6. Give some examples of leadership among Indian tribes. Under what conditions did these leaders emerge?
7. What has been the impact of Indian democracy on the tribal traditional authority?
8. Who are the new elite among the tribes? How did they emerge?

UNIT 6 SOCIALISATION AND CHILDHOOD

Contents

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Learning Objectives

After having read this unit, you should be able to:

- define socialisation;
- differentiate and compare between the British and the American anthropological traditions in the context of socialisation and childhood studies;
- understand the anthropological approaches to socialisation and childhood studies;
- differentiate between socialisation and enculturation; and
- appreciate socialisation and childhood studies in the context of India and the Indian Tribes.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The structural-functional paradigm in anthropology pioneered and fuelled by scholars like Radcliffe-Brown tries to understand the society in terms of its social structure. Social structure is defined as the ensemble of social relationships. Such relationships according to Brown, can be located at the level of the ‘person’. “Social structure includes all interpersonal relations, the differentiation of individuals and groups by their social roles, and the relationships between a particular group of humans and a larger network of connections” (Moore 2009: 153). Social structure is also defined as “a system of real relations of connectedness between individuals, or more properly, between individuals occupying social roles, between ‘persons’” (Kuper 1983: 53). Both the definitions of social structure are concerned with social relations that are governed by social roles in society.

Social relationships are governed by the various social positions that individuals occupy. Such social positions are pre-defined in the society and each position is accompanied by a set of roles. As a member of society, we all learn such roles. We learn how to act in different circumstances according to the accepted norms of a particular social position.

For instance, the social position of a father is accompanied by the roles that are desired and expected from the father. Similarly, the social position of a son or daughter is accompanied by a set of roles that are pre-determined by a given society. Socialisation as a process can be defined in terms of learning desired roles for a given set of social positions in society. Such roles are learned as being part of a given society. "Socialisation may be broadly defined as the inculcation of the skills and attitudes necessary for playing given social roles" (Mayer 1970: xiii). It goes as a corollary with this definition that social roles are not fixed and they keep on changing. People acquire new roles and shun the older roles as they progress in their life cycles. This makes sure that people learn skills and attitudes associated with new roles that they acquire. This also ensures that one cannot define an end to the process of socialisation and it can be conceptualised as a life-long process. Newer roles are also generated by the larger process of social change like urbanisation and industrialisation. Such changes involve re-socialisation of people which is required in the changing socio-economic landscape. Social mobility also entails a change in social roles and thus involves socialisation. One of the very popular concepts of social mobility in anthropology- Sanskritisation- is a good example of anticipatory socialisation. Sanskritisation involves the 'lower caste' groups taking up values and norms associated with the 'higher caste' groups and therefore involve learning new attitudes. Sanskritisation involves socialisation where new lifeways are learned in anticipation of moving upwards in the caste hierarchy.

However, it is also a fact that many areas in the world are experiencing 'socialisation crisis'. This has emerged due to the fast pace of social change that the world is experiencing today. Rapid social change leads to a rapid change in social roles and therefore it becomes difficult to fathom and know for which social roles we are socialising our children. There is an element of uncertainty in the process of socialisation owing to such rapid social changes.

6.2 SOCIALISATION AND CHILDHOOD STUDIES WITHIN THE DOMAIN OF 'SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY'

Philip Mayer (1970) has argued that socialisation as a concept and as a process is well represented in Sociology and American Cultural Anthropology, but is underrepresented within the domain of Social Anthropology practiced in Britain and Commonwealth countries. In sociology, Durkheim considered education as the 'systematic socialisation of the young generation by adults'. Sociology has followed various themes in socialisation in the context of the peer, family, and the various social institutions. Similarly in America, anthropologists followed the theme of socialisation and conducted researches, but in Britain, except for anthropologists like Raymond Firth, Meyer Fortes, and S.F. Nadel, socialisation and childhood as a theme of inquiry were not explored much. This, according to Myer is reflected in British textbooks on anthropology where the theme of socialisation hardly finds any mention.

British social anthropology has been found to neglect the theoretical as well as the empirical ethnographic documentation of the process of socialisation. This neglect to some extent can be explained on the basis of too much emphasis on 'social structure' in British social anthropology. It is due to this reason that important ethnographic texts related to the age-set and age-grade systems of various African tribes and other tribes that were mostly studied in the British colonies were more projected as structural

systems rather than systems of socialisation within those tribal groups. Similarly, kinship systems were seen as part of the larger political and economic systems rather than educational systems playing role in socialising children in kinship behaviours.

Audrey Richards (1970) has presented a more nuanced understanding of socialisation studies within the British social anthropological tradition. She is of the view that the first part of the twentieth century produced monographs that represented socialisation in a very crude form. Such monographs contained chapters on life-cycle rituals of the tribes under study. Such rituals and ceremonies formed a large part of the monographs as the societies in which fieldwork was carried out were 'simple' and therefore large chunk of the data was in the form of various ceremonies and rituals that were performed. Rituals starting from childbirth till death were presented. This scenario is exemplified in one of the most celebrated monographs of its time by W.H.R. Rivers on the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills in India. This monograph contains a chapter on 'Birth and Childhood Ceremonies'. This monograph was published in 1906 and therefore holds the testimony of Richards's first phase of so-called 'socialisation studies' in British social anthropology.

The next phase of socialisation studies extended between 1922 and 1940. This was the period when British anthropology was largely influenced by the work of Malinowski. He emphasised studying kinship behaviour and attitudes as he was interested in knowing how children classified various kins on the basis of similar attitudes and behaviours towards them. Scholars like Raymond Firth, Fortes, Powdermaker, and Richards produced works that gave space to socialisation and child-rearing practices among the people that they studied. Malinowski underscored the importance of the 'knowledge element' of a particular institution that is being studied. Without proper knowledge of institutional values, appropriate behaviour cannot be achieved. Therefore understanding such knowledge was important for knowing the system. However, it is argued that the transfer of this knowledge from one generation to another did not form part of the anthropological studies at that time. The entire emphasis was on understanding each system as a part of the larger system and its function in maintaining the society as a whole. This kind of holism overshadowed the socialisation studies in anthropology. It is also a fact that Malinowski gave much emphasis to political, economic, and religious institutions and neglected the all-important educational institutions in his study among the Trobriand Islanders. "The handing on of knowledge, technical skills, and traditions is a task fulfilled by a group, a family, clan-elders, age-mates, village or territorial authorities, priests of magicians. Such groups are responsible for a body of knowledge, not committed to writing, which may be esoteric or alternatively open to all, and which may concern myths, history, magic formulae or prayers, patterns of organising economic activities, or knowledge of the environment. The responsible groups can often claim charters of ownership for the handing on of knowledge, and observe rules for the passing on of esoteric knowledge or for the sale of, say, magic formulae. They may use a specific language for instruction, and mnemonic devices, such as ritual actions and songs, or emblems or designs associated with traditions or knowledge. The sociology of education could have been handled fruitfully by Malinowski's concept of institution, but he did not in fact do this himself" (Richards 1970; 2-3).

Besides the above observation on Malinowskian anthropology lacking clear-cut socialisation studies, it is also a fact that Malinowski contributed a great deal towards the understanding of the cultural factors in child development (Levine 2007). He was in fact one of the biggest critiques of Sigmund Freud who propounded the theory of Oedipus complex in the context of psycho-sexual stages of development of children.

Freud generalised his theory upon all human societies to which Malinowski objected and observed in his book- *'The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia'* that Freud's theory can be challenged within the context of matrilineal societies like the Trobriand Islanders. The kind of impact that an authoritarian father has on the personality development of the child in a patrilineal and patriarchal society, that Freud was talking about and generalised over all the societies, was found to be untrue in the case of Trobriand Islanders where the society is matrilineal and both father and mother participate in infant and care and have almost equal status in the society. This has a profound impact on the adult personality and gender roles. However, when Freud's theory of psycho-sexual stages of development lost credibility on accounts of its methodology and scope, childhood studies focusing on its critique also lost their significance (Levine 2007).

Activity

Gather information about the concept of 'Oedipus Complex' and Psychosexual stages of Child Development as given by Freud.

Childhood accounts also formed part of ethnographies generated by many of the students of Malinowski like- Raymond Firth, Audrey Richards, Phyllis Kaberry, Evans Pritchard and Margaret Read. Firth in his classic ethnographic account- *'We The Tikopia: Kinship in Primitive Polynesia'* talked about initiation ceremonies and rituals of Tikopian boys. Similarly *Chisungu* is a monograph generated by Richards where she talked about the initiation ceremonies and rituals related to the girls of Bemba of Zambia. Evans Pritchard in his monograph *'The Nuer'* and *'Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer'* discussed Nuer childhood and father-child relationships. Read published a book titled *Children of Their Fathers* in which she gave an account of childhood among Ngoni of Malawi. Meyer Fortes, also talked about learning and social relationship among the Tallensi children in his book *'The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi'* (Levine 2007).

There was a period in Britain around 1940s when British anthropologists were influenced by the kind of studies that were conducted by their American counterparts. Such studies were labeled as the 'culture and personality' studies and anthropologists like Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead were associated with such studies. The role of socialisation in personality formation was a major theme in such studies. However, to the British anthropologists, such studies seemed to be too much concerned with weaning, swaddling, and bowel training and too little concerned with economic activities, social structure, and social roles. "The work of Kardiner and DuBois seemed somewhat nearer to the British outlook since they stressed, in addition to the effects of infant training, the importance of economic activities, such as the food quest; of structural characteristics, such as primogeniture and the authority system; and of life goals and ritual patterns, in determining the basic personality (Richards 1970: 5)."

Richards (1970) talks about an underlying paradox within the discipline of social anthropology in the context of socialisation studies as she observes that on one hand social anthropology claims to be comparative sociology and on the other hand paid little attention to the concept of socialisation which has been dealt with in much greater depths in the discipline of sociology. Again, the rationale that was put forward to explain the abandoning of the subject in itself seems to be paradoxical in that it is argued that if one follows Durkheimian sociology, as it was done in social anthropology

when people like Radcliffe Brown claims to be influenced by Durkheim, then one has to lay emphasis on the ‘social facts’ which are different from the biological and psychological facts. Socialisation as a concept was considered to be in the domain of the ‘psychological’ and hence little emphasis was paid on the subject. Richards labeled this phenomenon as the ‘British fear of Psychology’. She shows that psychology had been accepted here (in Britain) as quite respectable up to the 1930s, but in 1953 Firth could write of its having become ‘rather a scare word for anthropologists in this country’ (Mayer 1970: xvi).

6.3 CHILDHOOD AND SOCIALISATION STUDIES IN THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TRADITION

Things were different in America. “First presentations of the culture pattern concepts, obviously closely related to studies of socialisation, appeared in the works of Benedict (1934), Mead (1928, 1930, 1935).....The theories are now described under the heading of ‘culture and personality’(Richards 1970: 3)”. Under the leadership of Franz Boas, American Anthropology for a very long period of time was concerned with the basic debate of nature vs nurture. The racial discrimination that linked skin color with personality traits against the ‘black’ in America led Franz Boas to think on the line whether personality has anything to do with the biology of the individual or a group. He was a firm believer that racial discrimination is socially constructed and has nothing to do with biology. He wanted to empirically prove this point. This line of thought was picked-up by his students- Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. The basic idea behind the works of both Mead and Benedict pertains to the assertion that it is culture and not biology that determines the personality of the individual and of the nations as a whole.

Mead set out to empirically prove this assertion with her work among the girls in Samoa. She came up with a book- ‘*Coming of Age in Samoa*’ that dealt with the contrast in the education system/socialisation process and practice between the children in America and in Samoa. The Samoan adolescents were free from the stress that age and biology seem to bring among the adolescents of America. This difference was attributed to the contrast in the ways in which child-rearing takes place in America and Samoa. The adolescent personality which was thought to be a product of the biological changes during the adolescent age was now linked to the cultural factors of educating the children. The conflicting and contrasting standards of life in American civilization were seen as the root cause of the conflicts that emerge in the adolescent personality. Mead remarks that- “Samoa knows but one way of life and teaches it to her children. Will we, who have the knowledge of many ways, leave our children free to choose among them?.... We have many standards but we still believe that only one standard can be the right one. We present to our children the picture of a battlefield where each group is fully armoured in a conviction of the righteousness of its cause. (Mead 1928: 247, 248)” This suggests that the adolescent personality is a product of the socialisation process through which we are subjected to the constraints of our civilization. Franz Boas, while writing the foreword to the book- ‘*Coming of Age in Samoa*’, comments- “When we speak about the difficulties of childhood and of adolescence, we are thinking of them as unavoidable periods of adjustment through which everyone has to pass.....The anthropologist doubts the correctness of these

views. . . . The results of her painstaking investigation confirm the suspicion long held by anthropologists, that much of what we ascribe to human nature is no more than a reaction to the restraints put upon us by our civilisation (Boas 1928: xiv, xv).”

Mead’s contributions towards childhood studies in anthropology become important at another conceptual level. She tried to distinguish between the notion and concept of ‘enculturation’ and ‘socialisation’. Enculturation is defined as the “process of learning a culture in all its uniqueness and particularity (Mead 1963: 187)”. On the other hand, socialisation is defined as “the set of specieswide requirements and exactions made on human beings by human societies (Mead 1963: 187).” Based on the above definitions of enculturation and socialisation, Mead was of the view that for generating cross-cultural theories of socialisation, in-depth studies of enculturation needs to be carried out. Mead writes that- “each time an anthropologist applies to his own work the treatment of socialisation currently in vogue in behavioural sciences, which has not passed through the refining crucible of a comparative study of enculturation, the confusion is further compounded (Mead 1963: 187).”

Another American anthropologist Ruth Benedict devoted an entire chapter on childhood learning and rearing practices in Japan in her most celebrated book- “*Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*”. This book was an outcome of research that was conducted with a specific purpose to understand the Japanese culture and personality of the people to help America in knowing its enemy in a better way during World War II. This book is also an example of a different kind of research in anthropology which is known as studying culture at a distance as Benedict used secondary sources and interviewed American-Japanese in order to understand the Japanese culture as she could not visit Japan during the war. She compared the child-rearing practices in Japan to those prevalent in America. It was revealed in her study that if child-rearing practices have to be understood with the help of a graph or a curve in which freedom is plotted against the age then one gets a complete ‘U’ curve in the case of Japan and a complete inverted ‘U’ in case of America. In Japan, childhood is a phase in which children are free and are reared in a very cordial atmosphere with lots of love and affection. As their age progresses, restrictions and restraints are put on them and they face a lot of restraint during their adulthood when they are at the peak of their productive capacity and at the best of their health and energy. Again, during old age, a lot of affection is shown towards older people. The title of the book reflects this dichotomy- the chrysanthemum and the sword. On the other hand, in America, a lot of restraint is put on the child and is trained in a much-disciplined environment. Later on in adult life, people enjoy freedom when they are independent economically. Benedict writes- “We put him (the American child) immediately on a feeding schedule and a sleeping schedule, and no matter how he fusses before bottle time or bedtime, he has to wait. . . . He is punished when he does not do what is right. . . . The Japanese however do not follow this course. . . . The arc of life in Japan is plotted in opposite fashion to that in the United States (Benedict 1946: 118, 119).” The child-rearing and socialisation process in Japan produces a contradiction and duality in the Japanese character and in their outlook with respect to life.

The above discussion brings us to an understanding that childhood and socialisation studies took different forms in British and American traditions. While it is well represented in the American tradition, it is under represented in the British anthropological tradition. Nonetheless, scholars do admit that anthropology as a subject has its own approach with respect to the socialisation and childhood studies.

6.4 THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO SOCIALISATION STUDIES

Mayer (1970) while discussing the history of socialisation studies in Social Anthropology delineates basically two approaches to the study of socialisation in anthropology viz- a) studying socialisation as 'practice' and b) studying socialisation as a 'process'. The basic difference between the two approaches pertains to the former approach being associated with the 'vernacular model' of socialisation and the latter approach being associated with the 'observer's model' of socialisation. In other words, socialisation as a practice can be studied through the vernacular model or the people's model. Practices that are defined by people to contribute towards the socialisation of the child come under this kind of study. There might be some practices in a given society that are labeled as socialisation practices or which explicitly claim to contribute towards socialisation of children. This approach is 'actor driven', which means that the agents and actors of socialisation define the context and the anthropologist records it. According to Mayer (1970), socialising practices include-

1. "Initiation rituals and all explicitly initiatory institutions and practices;
2. Explicit vernacular theory and practice regarding the training of children and young people for adult roles;
3. The same regarding the training of adult aspirants to given roles;
4. Informal but deliberate exercise of socialising pressures, as by the teasing, etc. of those who seem to discharge their roles ineptly; and
5. Vernacular opinions-not necessarily endorsed by the observer about the suitability and effectiveness of socialising techniques.

In a given culture the body of conscious, deliberate socialising practice and theory, as just defined, constitutes a vernacular system, and the anthropologist can hope to deal with it by the regular techniques of his discipline (pp- xvi, xvii)." Such a vernacular system can be easily studied at three levels:

- a) At the level of ethnography. Such systems can be recorded ethnographically in detail.
- b) Cross-cultural comparisons can be made of such vernacular systems and similarities and differences can be delineated out of it.
- c) Such systems can be seen within the context of other systems in a given society or a community and a functional relation can be studied between various systems with the socialising vernacular system.

Anthropologists have noted that it is somewhat easier to study the socialisation practice in complex societies as compared to simple societies because complex societies are more functionally differentiated and therefore specialised socialisation systems exist in such societies. However, it is also realised that simple societies also have some kind of a system that is devoted to socialising individuals into different social roles. Thus, socialisation studies become a legitimate field of anthropological enquiry.

Another anthropological approach lies in understanding the socialisation process. This is an observer-oriented approach or an observer's model. This includes both conscious and unconscious activities that might lead to socialisation to different social roles. People

might get involved in socialising with their children without consciously knowing that the socialisation process is at work. It is the observer who can identify such occasions and talk about the process of socialisation in a given community. Having differentiated between the two approaches, it is also worthwhile to mention that there is no clear-cut distinction between the two approaches and it might happen in most of the cases that these two approaches may coincide. It is also logically and theoretically possible that the vernacular model and the observer’s model coincide with each other leaving no distinction between the two. Nonetheless, conceptually, we might distinguish between the two approaches.

6.5 THE SIX CULTURES STUDY: AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

A collaborative project known as the Six Cultures Study (SCS) was launched in Anthropology in 1954 by John Whiting who was a professor at Harvard University along with two psychologists Irvin L. Child from Yale University and William Lambert from Cornell University. Data on the social and cultural contexts of childhood were collected from six different societies across the world. A single field manual was prepared to collect data on different aspects of childhood in six different cultures to make the data comparable. Trained anthropologists conducted ethnographic studies on six communities between 1954 and 1957. The following chart outlines the communities and anthropologists who conducted the study.

Communities/Area	Country/Place	Name of the anthropologist
Mixtecan	Mexico	Romney and Romney
Ilongot	Phillipines	Nydegger and Nydegger
Rajput	India	Minturn and Hitchcock
Okinawa	Japan	Maretzki and Maretzki
Gusii	Kenya	LeVine and LeVine
Small town of West Acton	Eastern Massachusetts	Fischer and Fischer

Source - LeVine 2007

All the above-mentioned communities and areas were rural in nature and except for the last, all the communities were engaged in agriculture. The studies got published in 1963 in the form of a single volume edited by Beatrice Whiting. Later on, in 1966, all the six monographs were separately published.

The ethnographic studies of childhood in the SCS were based upon detailed and systematic observations of children in their natural cultural settings. The aim was to study the child-rearing practices in a particular culture and compare it with different cultures. The observational sample comprised of children between the age groups of three and eleven years. “Each book constituted a record or reconstruction of the routine practices, relationships, settings, and activities that made up the environments of children and their interactions with those environments-from birth to adolescence in a particular local community at a particular moment in time (LeVine 2007: 253)”.

6.6 CHILDHOOD AND SOCIALISATION STUDIES IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Krishna Kumar (2016) is of the view that childhood studies in the Indian context can be viewed in the backdrop of various constraints. The first constraint is that of knowledge. There is limited institutionalised knowledge that is being generated in the allied fields of parenting, teaching, children's literature, and ethnography. He is of the view that the above-mentioned fields are not adequately represented in Indian educational and academic institutions. Another constraint in this area relates to the diversity of cultural and sub-cultural experiences that a child goes through in the Indian context. This makes childhood a heterogeneous category. Childhood therefore cannot be conceptualised as a monolithic and homogeneous category in the Indian context. Besides culture, economy, caste and gender are other variables that can be located within the context of diversity in childhood experiences.

Anthropologists however have been studying childhood and socialisation processes in the backdrop of ethnographic studies of various tribes and also in the backdrop of locating various forms of inequalities prevalent in the Indian context. Gender is one such category that provides an opportunity to study childhood and socialisation to understand the nature of inequality that is prevalent in society. Socialisation is a process through which we learn our cultural values, traits, customs, and rituals. We also learn behavior patterns that are accepted and legitimised in the larger societal context. In this context, gender-specific roles are learned both at home and outside. This learning is largely observational in nature and both genders internalise the kind of behavior they receive which is later projected in their own behavior. Leela Dubey, one of the pioneers in the field of gender studies had discussed the construction and consolidation of gender identity. She is of the view that in a patriarchal, patrilineal society like ours in India, gender roles start taking shape very early in life. The difference in the enthusiasm of parents at the birth of a male and female child is keenly observed by the female child and is internalised which becomes part of her psyche. Later in life, she observes her mother, grandmother, and other female members in the society and try to become like them in order to gain acceptance in the family and in society at large. The very notion of women being '*paraya dhan* (someone else's property)' that is largely held in our patriarchal society also contributes towards constructing the gender identity that leads to discrimination and subordination. A woman is never regarded as a permanent member of her natal family as she has to leave that family and move to her husband's house. This gives rise to the belief that she will never contribute to the family income and instead she will take away a certain part of the family income as her dowry. In contrast, a male child is considered to be the savior of the family and as a permanent member of the family, one who will contribute towards the family income and take care of aging parents. Such expected roles and identity formation lead to a stratified system where gender is placed in a hierarchical pattern (Dube 1988).

6.7 CHILDHOOD AND SOCIALISATION IN THE CONTEXT OF TRIBES IN INDIA

Vidyarthi and Rai (1976) have described in detail the childhood days of tribes in India. They are of the view that gender-specific roles get crystallised very early in life. Both boys and girls learn roles that are suited to lead an adult life. Boys generally help their

fathers in the field or grazing cattle or in the hunt and girls generally help their mothers in domestic activities like cooking, looking after the infants, and doing daily household chores. At the age of five or seven years, both boys and girls start helping their families with their productive works. Evenings are generally spent in youth dormitories where recreational activities are performed and children play with each other.

L.P. Vidyarthi (1963) talked about the childhood days among the Maler community. A Maler boy spends time playing with other boys of his age. At the age of six years, he is initiated into the life of youth dormitory and learns a lot of skills necessary to lead an adult life. Through various games, he learns the likes and dislikes that are prevalent in his society. He learns what it means to be a valued member of his community and what takes to make a mark as an individual in his own community. He is socialised in the values and norms that are at the core of the community. Dormitories are great places where he learns what kind of behaviour is appreciated in the community and which kind of behaviour meets punishment. "Through imitating his older playmates and inmates of the youth dormitory he learns the good and bad habits, the value attitude system and above all the traditions, ideals and aspirations of the community" (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976: 275).

Verrier Elwin (1947) described Muria childhood. Among the Murias also, childhood is the time when both boys and girls learn gender-specific roles. Girls help their mother in fetching water from the village well and boys go along with their fathers to cut woods in the forest. Both boys and girls go to the jungle with the older members of their community for getting fruits and leaves. Elwin also talked about Ghotul and its role in early childhood among the Murias. Ghotul is a youth dormitory among the Murias. A Muria boy goes to this dormitory along with his father. He plays with axe, drums, and mud in the dormitory. Such dormitories are akin to educational places where socialisation of the young takes place. Elwin was of the view that in the backdrop of socialisation these dormitories are significant as they establish a relationship between the children and the older members (youth) of the society. Elwin believed that such relationships were more important than parent-child relations vis-à-vis socialisation. The relationship between the child and the head of the dormitories- Sirdar in the case of boys dormitory and Balosa in the case of girls dormitory- is of prime importance in the context of socialisation.

Sachchidanand (1958) had made observations on the youth dormitories of the Oraon tribes. The youth dormitories among the Oraons are called as Dhumkuria. Although they are youth dormitories children are engaged in some activities of the dormitories like cleaning and sweeping the floors. Boys are also engaged in massaging the older boys. Both boys and girls sing and dance in these dormitories. According to Sachchidanand it is during the time of dancing and casual gossip that the children learn a lot about social relations and gender-specific roles and behavior patterns. S.C. Dube (1951) while working among the Kamar tribes made observations regarding the childhood days of the Kamars. He observed and recorded that the Kamar boys at the age of seven or eight begin hunting small games like rabbits and squirrels with their small bows and arrows. They start mixing with the older boys and start taking up the responsibilities of protecting their cattle and domestic animals. At this age, they also learn to make baskets. Similarly, girls start learning household activities.

The above-discussed activities together with various ceremonies, rituals, and rites form a system of socialisation within the tribal context in which a tribal child learns his/her

values and morals sanctioned by the society and community. “Every individual undergoes a socialisation process that has reference to beliefs, concepts, values, skills and so on, and these in their totality form a distinctive mode of life, i.e., a culture” (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976: 303). It is also observed that socialisation in a tribal community is an informal process that forms part of the larger socio-cultural negotiations and transactions of everyday life. Adult roles are learned by the young boys and girls largely by imitating the elders and observing their behaviours in various situations.

The entire socialisation process within a tribal community is guided and governed largely by two agencies- family and youth dormitory (Xaxa 2011). Both the agencies work towards imparting values and attitudes that are suitable for adult roles. Traditionally tribal societies were differentiated only on the dimensions of age and sex. This has an important bearing on the process of socialisation as the age and sex/gender-specific roles are the ones in which children are trained from the very beginning in their lives. However, over a period of time, with the increasing outside influence on the tribal communities, the society became also differentiated on the dimensions of class and religion, but the overall value system and tribal worldviews remained the same. Xaxa (2011) observes that “Even after the emergence of social differentiation especially in the areas of class and religion, tribals do share cultural values and practices specific to their own society and culture” (pp 18). Division of labour on the basis of gender is highly marked among the tribal communities and thus forms an important part of the overall socialisation process.

With the advent of British rule, new agencies of imparting knowledge developed in the form of modern educational institutions. Christian missionaries were instrumental in popularising such schools of knowledge. This also had an important bearing on the traditional institutions like youth dormitories that were alien to the British ideals of education and socialisation. This led to a demise of the very important tribal institution of socialisation in the form of youth dormitories. “However, new youth organizations came up under the influence of Christian missionaries’. Though they were primarily church-based, these organisations engaged in activities affecting the community and also acted as an important agency of socialisation” (Xaxa 2011: 19, 20).

Xaxa (2011) also observes a new kind of socialisation that is of recent development among the Indian tribes. This relates to the communalisation of and loss of tribal identity. With religion forming an important part of harnessing vote banks and election strategies, various religious organisations are trying to impart a very specific kind of ideology among the tribes. This has an important bearing on the socialisation of tribal children in a particular kind of religious ideology which is different from their own worldview and magico-religious cosmology.

6.8 SUMMARY

From a developmental point of view, tribal childhood is marred with malnutrition, stunted growth, underdevelopment, unsafe drinking water, poor health facilities, low literacy levels, lack of sanitation, and traditional beliefs and practices pertaining to health care that contribute towards malnutrition and ill-health. Children not only learn the desired social roles as part of the socialisation process but also learn the health-seeking behavior and attitude towards health, ill-health, and treatment of diseases. Attitude towards sanitation and other aspects necessary for keeping good health also forms part of the socialisation process. However, “The available literature.....points to the lack of

knowledge about personal hygiene and reproductive health care practices. In fact, many of the diseases they suffer are traced to these problems in the tribal society” (Xaxa 2011: 20).

It has already been stated in the text above that childhood and socialisation studies were conducted in anthropology differently in different national traditions. The British and American anthropology show different sets of studies focusing childhood and socialisation. Largely, childhood became part of the overall ethnographic mapping of the specific communities studied by British anthropologists. This is reflected in the life-cycle approach where childhood and associated rites and rituals were studied and reported as part of the larger ethnographic text. In America on the other hand childhood and socialisation studies took different forms and were studied as part of the process of personality formation and the overall national character. In the Indian context, Vidyarthi (1976) claimed that socialisations have not been explored as a separate topic in the backdrop of tribal life. He writes that- “Few studies have been made in this light (pp-304).” However, talking about anthropology as a whole including different national traditions scholars like LeVine (2007) have argued that the claim that childhood studies have been neglected in anthropology is baseless. However, such statements need to be examined within the conceptual background that separates childhood as a development phase in one’s life from socialisation as a distinct concept demanding specialised and focused studies with different sets of methodologies and specific research questions.

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Sample Questions

1. What is socialisation and what are the anthropological approaches to study socialisation?
2. Write a note on the childhood studies in anthropology
3. Comment upon the British and American anthropological traditions of childhood and socialisation studies.
4. Comment upon the childhood and socialisation studies in the Indian anthropological tradition
5. Comment upon the Six Cultures Study in the context of anthropology of childhood.

UNIT 7 GENDER: CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

Content

- 7.1 Introduction
 - 7.2 Gender as a Concept
 - 7.3 Construction of Gender
 - 7.4 Gender, Economy, and Power Relations
 - 7.5 Gender and Kinship: Patriliney and Matriliney
 - 7.6 Patriarchy in Tribal Societies
 - 7.7 Summary
- References
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives

After reading this Unit, the student would be able to develop:

- a broader perspective on gender relations and understand that gender is not a given character of any society but is culturally constructed;
- a dynamic concept that evolves and transforms subject to historical and living conditions of a society. For example, gender relations transform when occupations and resource base change; and
- an understanding of gender constructs in tribal societies.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, the students will be introduced to the concept of gender and its enactment at the level of living relations of actual tribal societies. Gender has broadly two dimensions, a conceptual one that deals with the construction of gender models intersecting with cosmology, history, and modes of subsistence, and the second one of practice that includes negotiations of social relationships and the technologies that enforce hierarchy. The theoretical discussions on the concept such as nature/culture and public/private discourses will be discussed with ethnographic examples from various Indian tribes. In the first part, we shall describe gender constructs and show their cultural variations. In the next section, the intersection of gender with other aspects of society such as subsistence patterns, political organisation, and the economy will be described. The third section will describe the intersection of gender with kinship and family with ethnographic examples highlighting the matrilineal and patrilineal societies.

Lastly, the debates on the extent of patriarchy in tribal societies will be discussed and also how national and global forces are bringing about transformations in gender relations in these societies.

7.2 GENDER AS A CONCEPT

Gender is a concept and not a character of any human being. Although we customarily refer to two genders, men and women, there are many societies that have more than two. Broadly speaking when we speak of gender, we are talking about the characters and roles of people who are assigned a status based on their assumed biological differences of sexuality. The number of sexes is a part of cosmology and worldview determined through religion and specific rationalities. Thus, some religions like Christianity may recognise only men and women as God's creation, others may recognise more like ancient Hindu texts that had mythological characters like Shikhandi and Brihannala; that has now inspired the Indian government to formally recognise three genders.

Gender studies thus focus on socially constructed personhood, that is, to be a normal person, one must behave like a 'normal' man or a 'normal' woman. The meaning of what it means to be 'normal' varies from one culture to another, although in most cultures, this 'normalcy' is often seen as a given condition of being a biological male or female. These constructs often become what are known as stereotypes, meaning typical characters assigned to a person by virtue of their gender identity. Thus, in western societies, for example, there was a stereotyping of men as having the power of thinking and women as being conditioned by instinct, a derivative of the dichotomy where men were equated with culture and women with nature (Mac Cormack and Strathern 1980). This analogy was also transplanted to the difference between the tribes and the civilized, where the tribes were seen as 'natural', as driven by instinct and customs and not by reason and thinking power. Thus, the famous psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud had presupposed women to be driven by instinct, to be immature and infantile and the tribes (then referred to as primitives) to be the same (Freud 1913). Such stereotyping also justified the oppression of women and even of the indigenous or tribal people in the name of 'developing' them or keeping them out of power.

Margaret Mead (1935), in her study of three New Guinea tribes first delinked the construction of gender from biology by showing that men and women in different societies may follow very different models of being men and women (the word gender was not in use then) and therefore it is not possible that any aspect of body or mind can be seen as specifically masculine or feminine. By her study, Mead also contradicted the proposition of 'universal domination of women' as put forward by Western Feminists. In fact, the works of Mead and later of other anthropologists, often indicated that patriarchy or the domination of women by men was most evident in higher civilizations and was more a factor of developed economies and complex hierarchical societies than simpler ones. In their classic work on Women and Colonisation (1980), Etienne and Leacock also showed how colonisation by western people often reduced the position of women in the colonies. It was shown that in most tribal societies with simpler technologies and less developed concepts of hierarchy, the position of women relative to men was much better. Etienne and Leacock were following the model given by Marx and Engels (1962 org. 1884) linking patriarchy with the rise of private property and the state. Thus, the tribal societies were stereotyped in two ways with respect to gender, while some people still believed in the brute 'primitive' theory, most scholars, especially anthropologists were more inclined to believe that the gender relations were more equal in the tribal societies. The questions that may be raised and which we will answer in the following sections are in identifying the causative factors that determine gender relations and how these are negotiated and may transform over time. Before

we begin to do this it is better to keep an open mind about the nature of gender relations in tribal societies and not be influenced by any preconceived stereotypes but to rely on ethnographic data.

7.3 CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

Gender constructs, or how men and women are culturally conceptualised are drawn primarily from cosmology (a constructed view of the way the creation is) and a general world-view, which in turn are conditioned by religion and mythology. Although God appears as Father in Judeo-Christian theology, in most non-western religions and world views the sacred is not always only masculine. The indigenous communities may also have deities of unspecified gender. The Bhotiya tribes of Uttarakhand (Channa 2013), although having a male village god, have many female deities and are often not sure of the gender of a sacred being, who are seen as androgynous. Hinduism, with a strong stream of female or Mother goddess worship, has also influenced them. The Naga tribes also traditionally had female deities or even androgynous ones. According to Humtsoe-Nienu (2012), the traditionally holistic concept of divine Being (as both female and male) of many tribes of the North-east, was transformed into a male god, under Christian influence. The Mizo, for example, had two names one masculine (Pathian) and the other feminine (Khuanu) for referring to their supreme being, but under Christian influence they retained only the former. Similar occurrences of change over from an androgynous concept to a masculine one took place among the Tikhir, the Kyong, Chakhesang, Angami, and the Zeme Nagas, among others. The Todas of Nilgiri also believes in a female goddess of creation although the ritual status of women among them is very low. The Girasia (Unnithan-Kumar 1997) have a major male deity, the Mountain God (Bhairu) associated more with the conquest and symbol of territory and two female deities, the clan mother and the pox goddess; the former marking out lineages for purpose of marriage and the latter as a protective deity, especially from deadly diseases. The division of labour of the deities among the Girasia indicates the cultural conceptualization of sexual division of labour, the masculine with war and territory the female with sociability and nurture.

The western dichotomy of nature and culture is also absent in many non-western especially indigenous societies, whose home is in the forest. What the city dwellers refer to as 'wild' is home for these people but taboos on women may nevertheless be applicable. For instance, the Bhotiyas of Uttarakhand, prohibit the women from going too far into the forest that is considered the abode of sacred beings, as their bodies would pollute the sacredness of the deep forests and also their pastures. Similar taboos are extended onto the polluting bodies of women among the Todas. Thus as pointed out by Channa (2015), the masculine and feminine may follow the sacred/profane dichotomy more than that of nature/culture, and most ethnographers have noted that in the absence of any other form of hierarchy, the ritual or symbolic hierarchy does operate in many tribal societies, even forging ones with no other form of inequality (Godelier 1984).

Many tribal societies do allow women to practice rituals and become shamans and at least some women may control some parts of the sacred universe.

7.4 GENDER, ECONOMY, AND POWER RELATIONS

Anthropologists like Meillassoux (1981) gave a schema linking gender and types of kinship relations to forms of subsistence. Most ethnographic studies reveal that inequality

is largely a corollary of property and a complex division of labour, leading to those in possession of resources or capital, being more powerful than those who have less or no possessions including the means to a livelihood. In this sense, foraging or hunting food-gathering societies are often described as pre-property or where the sense of property itself has not yet developed. The forests, streams, and the fruits and animals in the forest are free goods to which everyone can have access and thus all individuals, men, and women are more or less independent producers and consumers and can survive on their own. This is not to say that exchange relations do not exist in hunting food-gathering societies or that there is no division of labour; yet, the foraging societies are often upheld as providing the state of least gender differentiation and least hierarchy. Since the bands are flexible and based on bilateral kinship, there is no privileging of any sex in terms of the formation of patrilineal or matrilineal structures. Even if bands follow the men hunting and women gathering division of labour, the ethnographic material has shown that women's gathering provides for most of the calories consumed by the members of the band, and thus women are the main food providers. Since there is often no technology of preservation, accumulation rarely happens and thus there is no delayed consumption and therefore nothing to invest power in control over consumable resources. This however does not mean that men and women are absolutely equal for as Godelier (1984) has shown in his classic study of a tribe in New Guinea, the men may have ritual control over symbolic resources that puts them in a state of symbolic superiority to women. Also, resources and food have a symbolic content apart from their utilitarian value. Thus, while food gathered by women is a primary staple for the band, the meat hunted by men has a cultural and ritual superiority that makes hunting a socially prestigious activity, superior to food gathering. Another important aspect of hunting food-gathering societies is that unlike as earlier assumed, they have often been in contact with neighbouring societies over generations and many of them have had active trade relations. Thus, they have been and continue to be influenced by agricultural and even urban neighbours.

Brian Morris, in describing the Malpantaram (or Hill Pandaram) of South India, talks about their 'pervasive emphasis on sexual egalitarianism' (1982:180) and lack of any organization above the level of the family. But not all foragers may be at the same level. Some like the Paliyan described by Gardner (1988) take on Tamil characters while in the village but revert back to their egalitarian relations in the forest. The Paliyans provide a typical example of what is known as an 'enclaved' foraging community, meaning one that is in close proximity to an agricultural settled village. Although the 'enclaved' Paliyans under influence of the settled Tamils show some characters deviating towards Tamil culture, like a large settlement (much larger than a normal band structure), a tendency towards virilocality, although uxorilocality is also present in significant proportion; they retain a sibling preference, where the entire settlement can be seen in terms of having a core composition of sets of siblings. All of them prefer to stay close to siblings with no sex bias. With respect to gender roles, Gardner reports minimum division of labour and a culture of mutual respect; 'Neither partner has authority over the other in any regard; neither has greater property rights, greater rights to divorce, greater freedom in sexual matters, and so on. Male and female may do something with a different style, but it is the symmetry that really matters in a field of rights and privileges' (1988:97). However verbal abuse and ridicule by Hindu neighbours had forced the Paliyans to change some of their practices, atleast overtly for the outsiders. In terms of kinship terminology, they do not distinguish between wife givers and wife takers, and in terms of marriage age, there is no pattern at all; the husband and wife may have any kind of age difference.

Those in a settlement near the Tamil village showed practices that were closer to the Tamils than the forest Paliyans; like the comparative less frequency of remarriage of females as compared to those living in the forest. They also exhibited explicit deference to patriarchal traits and Tamil division of labour, putting women in the domestic and the men in the public sphere; thereby putting pressure on the accepted egalitarian relationship between spouses. Thus, we find that gender relations may change under cultural pressure from a group with overt higher rank and power. Such transformations of tribes under pressure from Hindu and upper-caste neighbours have been seen in many parts of India and described in terms of Hinduisation or Sanskritisation (Berreman 1993).

The shifting cultivators and horticulturalists, like the Nagas, have more elaborate social organizations often based on lineages as the land is collectively owned by the lineage group. In such a social formation, women are ritually and socially disadvantaged to the men but because they contribute significantly to the economy, they have more agency than in those communities, where land is privately owned. Community ownership means that women and men have equal access to the resources and if women do most of the work, as they do in shifting cultivating societies, then they have agency of movement and enjoy more liberties in comparison to non-tribal women. In such communities, bride price is often paid and polygyny may be the practice. Marriages may be negotiated by elders by paying a bride price to continue the lineages. Similar organizations may be found among the pastoral communities also, but here the relative position of men and women may differ, according to the nature of productive activities and the kind of animals that are domesticated. One may take the contrasting examples of the Todas (Walker 1998) and the Bhotiyas (Channa 2013), where the Toda women have a much lower social and ritual position as compared to the men because they are totally kept away from the main productive resource, the Toda buffalo, that apart from being a source of livelihood is the crux of Toda identity.

The Todas believe that they along with their buffaloes are descended from the same goddess. In Toda cosmology the buffaloes are sacred and pure while the women are impure and should therefore be kept away from the buffalo and even its products; thus, even processing of milk and cooking that involves milk products is the domain of men. The Todas also practice polyandry and wife-capture, both of which put women at disadvantage. The Bhotiyas on the other hand also equates men with the sacred and the women with the profane aspects of the cosmos. But in practice, since the pastoral and trading men are away from the village, most of the time, the women control the social world and rule the village. Thus, their lower ritual status does not prevent them from having a monopoly of power in their own villages. The difference between the highly patriarchal Todas and the relatively egalitarian Bhotiyas may be attributed to the nature of the animals that are herded. The Toda buffalo is supposed to be fierce and also sacred; the women play little or no role care and nurture of these precious animals. The Toda female symbols are the broom and the loom, indicating the primary tasks for women that are keeping the house clean and weaving. The Toda buffaloes are kept in pens within the village and migrate only seasonally. The Bhotiyas rear sheep and goats that are taken for grazing on long pastoral routes (Channa 2013) such that a man will stay away from home for a long period. The Bhotiyas were traditionally cross-border traders that also kept the men away from the village, which is seen as the domain of women. The conceptual and symbolic lower status of women does not prevent them from playing a significant role in village life and controlling most of the social activities. The Toda women too have their own agency as they are expert weavers and the Toda

shawls made by them have a lucrative market. Thus, tribes never show the degree of patriarchy as seen in societies, where women, are totally alienated from the means of production.

Even in agricultural societies like the Gonds and the Mundas of Middle India, the land was held collectively by the village or community, and therefore although the society was patrilineal and followed more or less patrilocal residence, the relationship of women to men was more equal as the men too did not have much power. Whenever men had more power, the position of women suffered.

In small-scale tribal societies like the foraging bands, the decisions are taken collectively and more than gender age may play a crucial role in determining influence over others. When there are formal councils, these as among the Khasis of Meghalaya are almost always composed of elderly men.

7.5 GENDER AND KINSHIP: PATRILINITY AND MATRILINITY

There are two major factors that both influence and are also determined by gender constructs; property and inheritance rules and the marriage rules and lineality. As already noted, the absence of property often leads to a situation of egalitarianism as men and women are not distinguished by virtue of their relative control over resources and are not dependent on anyone else for access to primary modes of subsistence. In pastoral and agricultural economies, animals and land often become property that is owned and since these are also primary modes of subsistence, the persons who do not have ownership may be delegated to a lower or dependent status. It is not necessary that such ownership or deprivation is only gender-based for as pointed out by Rao (1997), it may differentiate between rich and poor men as well. Gender constructs may also operate independently of property and inheritance rules, as among the Bhotiyas and other Himalayan communities, where normative patrilineal inheritance is countered by the practice of having incoming son-in-law (magpa); a practice that allows parents to pass their property de facto to their daughters as the role of the magpa is primarily to perform the death rituals of his parent-in-law, while the wife maintains control of the property of her father. Such practices reflect the high social position of women and the fact that daughters are given importance by the parents. Also, in the general order of things, the pastoral community accepts women as the center of the social universe (Channa 2013).

The Nagas on the other hand considered women to be always inferior because they could not take part in headhunting which was the central focus of bestowing social status. Among the patrilineal Nagas, the property usually passes to the male lineage members if a couple does not have any sons. Property and inheritance rules are thus more reflective than determining aspects of gender hierarchy, as they can be manipulated according to the overall gender preference.

One needs to focus more on the concept of personhood than on the mere practices or rules, although these do reflect upon these concepts. Legal personhood enables an individual to assume all the responsibilities bestowed by society as well as enjoy the privileges. Thus, only if an individual is viewed as capable of decision making and full and complete rationality, is the person given charge of such affairs as becoming a leader, owning property, performing rituals etc. In most patriarchal societies women

are either seen as infantile or incomplete as persons, but then all women are also not equal. Thus, among the Todas, women are seen as 'objects' to be manipulated by men, among the Nagas, the women are seen as physically and ritually inferior as they cannot take part in head hunting and war, yet they have high social standing as negotiators and interlocutors. Traditionally when two Naga clans were at war, a woman who was wife to one and daughter to the other was given diplomatic immunity as a negotiator. Even in recent times Naga mothers and elderly women of Manipur have played key roles in peace making and political protests.

Women in most tribal societies, irrespective of the marriage rules, have more agency and freedom, than in more complex societies, also because these societies have not yet evolved the stringent methods of control, as found in complex societies. There are less curbs on freedom of movement and speech although stringent taboos may exist as among the Todas, where women are not even allowed to walk on the paths that pass from in front of their sacred dairies.

While most tribes in India are patrilineal that is the property, that exists, passes in the male line of inheritance, the Khasis and Garos of the Jaintia hills in Meghalaya are recognised as matrilineal. Among the Khasis, the property passes to the youngest daughter, who also is entrusted with the ritual upkeep of the lineage deities and shrines. Matriliney does endow the Khasi women with more agency than many other women, but it does not give them political power as the Khasi tribal councils and at present the Khasi state of Meghalaya is primarily ruled by men. The Khasi men interpret it as the choice made by women as they keep busy with the family and lineage duties; the women may however think otherwise.

7.6 PATRIARCHY IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

While discussing patriarchy we must bear in mind that what we refer to as 'tribal' varies considerable. Primarily the differences lie in the mode of subsistence, the demography, the pattern of residence: nomadic/settled and the extent to which the tribe has been exposed to the non-tribal modes of life. In the earlier sections we have discussed the variations in modes of subsistence showing that marked differences exist pertaining to property concepts and laws, variations within a particular mode like the nature of animals in a pastoral economy, the exposure to a more powerful neighbor, like among the Paliyans exposed to 'superior' Tamil culture. Settled agriculturalists, with long term relations to land differ from those whose property consists of mobile herds of animals. Local cultures and inherited traditions of language and religion also affect the local tribes. The Himalayan tribes for example show the influence of both Hinduism and Buddhism, yet they have their own interpretation of these universal religions (Channa 2005).

The commonly held belief among scholars is that since the tribes at the simpler level of division of labour and less complex technology have not yet developed the mechanisms of inequality sophisticated by more complex hierarchical societies, therefore patriarchy, even if it exists must exist among them in a more dilute form. Most ethnographic examples especially of forest-dwelling tribes and those from mountain and remote areas indeed show that women have more freedom and agency than they have in more urban and complex societies.

Yet as tribes are coming in contact with complex cultures and facing situations of globalisation and integration into national mainstreams the position of women among

them is deteriorating. In many of the north-eastern states, women are facing the brunt of violence and the outcomes of military and state oppression. Family relations get disrupted and women are often left to fend for themselves when the men become victims of police/military aggression or go underground. Women of this region have shown courage not only to care for their livelihood but also to protest and to push for peace. Women have also organized against large scale drinking habits of the men. Here it is relevant to mention that the cultural practice of ritual and social drinking often takes a turn for the worse when social and political conditions deteriorate. In the upper Himalayas, the women of Bhotiya and other tribes brew their own liquor and are in charge of its distribution. The men do get drunk but cannot misbehave because of the strong control by women over their activities. In the plains, the men drink with their peers from the plains and may get violent or out of control. When liquor becomes a commodity from being a home product, it goes out of control of women, who are normally in charge of brewing in all tribal communities. In her study of Santals of Santal Paragans, in Jharkhand, Nitya Rao (2004) has pointed out that traditionally all forest collection such as bamboos, fuelwood, etc., was women's task, who used to sell them in the market and keep the money. With the introduction of bicycles, that is only used by men, who can now take the produce to the market to sell, the women's burden of carrying heavy loads has decreased but their income too has been curtailed. However, her study shows that men use the money for buying household provisions but if they have a surplus they drink it; while women could have used the same surplus for their own luxury goods like trinkets and clothes.

Likewise, insurgence and a flourishing drug cartel have destroyed the lives and gender relations in the North-East states of Manipur and Nagaland. Emulation of a believed to be higher culture like Christianity has also transformed what were earlier more equal gender relations, towards patriarchy. The shifting cultivating tribes of the North-East, held resources in common, but with the advent of private property, their patrilineal clans interpreted property as passing in the male line and individual property, including cash and its purchases in the form of houses and land, were seen as the property of the patriline, excluding the inheritance of women. Today the Naga women decry this so-called tradition of patrilineal inheritance and wish that the Indian (Hindu) law of equal inheritance by men and women should also be applied to their society. They complain that in the name of preservation of 'tradition' the men are trying to perpetuate patriarchy in the name of 'ethnic nationalism'; a common problem almost universally, where women find that upholding 'tradition' and 'identity', often works against feminine interests.

Among the tribes of middle and plains India, like Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Maharashtra, as well as in the tribal states of Jharkhand, the position of tribes is getting worse because of their marginalisation by the processes of so-called 'development' that is taking away their livelihoods and resources (Padel and Das 2010). The earlier proud kings of the forests are now reduced to rickshaw pullers and menial workers on the streets of big cities. There is what may be called in Durkheimian terms a state of anomie or collective distress among them. The frustrations and problems of daily life are often directed against the women, culminating in the accusations of 'witchcraft' to which many innocent women are becoming victims. These practices are not leftovers of past traditions of the tribes themselves, but an expression of their maladaptation in the present circumstances. Thus, contact with the outside world, the pathology of consumerist goals instigated by the modern market and capitalism is bringing values denigrating women and even the girl child. Some tribes are even practicing female infanticide and selling their women under duress.

These practices have no roots in their own traditions but are often held as examples by law/ policymakers as signs of their so-called 'backwardness'. Destruction of tribal lifeworlds, the destroying of the legitimacy of their knowledge and practices is having its repercussion on gender relations, where women often emerge as the worst victims although men too are affected.

7.7 SUMMARY

Thus, in this unit, you must have realised by now that gender relations are not givens in any society but have a link with the living world and respond to situations that have current relevance. One needs to analyse gender keeping all historical and present circumstances as a backdrop and it must be remembered that no tribe is or has even been isolated or totally self-sufficient. Gender relations are as much linked to inherited traditions and history of a tribe or community as they are to the external links and position within a more extended hierarchy. In today's world, this hierarchy is almost global in nature.

However, globalisation also provides remedies to the problems created by it by broadening the platform on which people can operate. Thus, local tribes are now joining in with the marginal and indigenous people of the world and here both men and women are playing significant roles. Thus, global forces will reorganise gender relations in times to come. As of today, education and exposure are playing significant roles in this direction.

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Sample Questions

1. What do you understand by gender? How is this useful as a tool of analyzing social relationships?
2. Identify the major factors that affect the construction of Gender
3. Give a brief description of gender relations of foragers with an ethnographic example.
4. How is gender relations affected when a tribe transforms from collective to individual ownership?
5. How does religion and changes in religion affect gender constructs and relations, explain with examples?

Social Organisations

6. Are gender relations the same among all pastoral communities? Discuss with ethnographic examples.
7. Discuss the effects of external colonisation upon tribal communities.
8. Do gender relations change with context as tribes move close to or away from outside influence, discuss with examples.
9. Can there be conflict of interest between 'tribal identity' and women's position in a tribal society.
10. Discuss gender relations in a matrilineal society with examples. Compare with patrilineal society.



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UNIT 8 AGEING

Contents

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References

Sample Questions

Learning Objectives

After having read this unit, you will be able to:

- define ageing;
- understand various approaches to the study of ageing;
- deliberate on the various social theories on ageing;
- reflect on the anthropological approach to ageing; and

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Ageing can be defined as “a process whereby people accumulate years and progressively experience changes to their biological, social and psychological functioning as they move through different phases of the life course” (Phillips et al. 2010: 12). Studying the process of ageing is a much-specialised field of enquiry and technically in academic jargon, such a study is labelled as ‘gerontology’. Gerontology can be defined as the study of ageing from three different perspectives- biological, psychological and social. Since gerontology is defined as the study of ageing from different perspectives, therefore it is a multidisciplinary subject that is informed by biological sciences, social sciences and psychology. The discipline of anthropology owing to its holistic understanding of human beings is best suited for a subject like gerontology. Eric Wolf once defined anthropology as “less a subject matter than a bond between subject matters”. This suggests that for a holistic understanding of human beings various dimensions needs to be taken into account that form an integral part of human life. In this very basic sense gerontological and anthropological interests coincide with each other. Franz Boas who is regarded as the father of American anthropology defined the scope of anthropology and projected it as a discipline that includes biological, cultural, linguistic and archaeological studies of particular groups of people. Multi-dimensionality

being at the core of anthropology makes it suitable for the study of ageing. An anthropologist would be interested in understanding the biological, social, cultural and archaeological dimensions of ageing.

Gerontology is also associated with geriatric medicine. It is a much specialised field which caters to the need of old people in an institutionalised setting. It is related with diagnosis, treatment, prevention and holistic care of older people who are suffering from some kind of physical and mental disorders. Historically if we try to trace the emergence of gerontology and an interest in understanding and studying 'age' as a group then we might have to go back to the seventeenth century when for the first time age related statistics on mortality and morbidity were recorded (Thane 2005). As is the case with most of the modern disciplines, by nineteenth century, study and research on old age started crystallising. However, it was only in 1903 (early twentieth century) that a Russian-born biologist named Elie Metchnikoff for the first time proposed and named a separate field of study called gerontology (Phillips et al 2010). In 1908, Metchnikoff, for the first time, used the word 'gerontology' in his book *The Prolongation of Life* (Victor 2005). "Whereas before the Second World War there was a concentration on paediatric care, by the end of the war there had been a greater recognition of the social and medical implications of an ageing population as well as an awareness of the low level of care for older people" (Phillips et al. 2010: 118).

As has been mentioned above gerontology is a multi-disciplinary science, there are largely three broad perspectives on ageing- biological, psychological and social. Engel in 1977 advanced the bio-socio-psycho model of ageing. This model tries to understand ageing from a holistic point of view. That is to say, that to grasp the problems and issues related to ageing an integrated approach like the bio-socio-psycho model is needed.

8.1.1 Biological Perspective

The biological perspective on ageing is concerned with the physiological and physical changes that accompany ageing. It is concerned with how with the passage of time physical appearance and physiological systems change. "Biologists refer to ageing as 'senescence'. This describes decreases in the efficient functioning of an organism with age as a result of natural processes rather than abnormal processes which bring about pathology and disease" (Victor 2005: 2). "Strehler (1962) defines ageing as the changes which occur in the post-reproductive phase of life that result from a decrease in the ability of the body to maintain homeostasis, that is to regulate the functions of the body within the very precise limits required for efficient functioning and survival" (Victor 2005: 2). The process of ageing makes the human body more susceptible to disease and pathology. Ageing from the biological perspective is seen as an involuntary process that is bound to happen and that decreases the adaptive capacities of people. It is a fact that there are other biological processes that are a result of various diseases and pathology and that may bring about a decrease and decline in the functioning of various organs and physiological systems of human beings but that will not amount to ageing as it has been described as an involuntary process. It is also true however that with increasing age people tend to become more susceptible to various diseases and pathology. It is in this context that Strehler (1962) has suggested four criteria that must be fulfilled in order to define a process and condition as part of ageing process. Any condition that fulfils these four criterions will be regarded as part of ageing. These are universality, internality, progressiveness and harmfulness. These four criterions

distinguish ageing from other biological processes that induce various kinds of changes in human body similar to the one defined as ageing. Let us examine what these criteria exactly mean:

1. **Universality**- A process will be considered as a part of ageing only when it is universal in its influence. This means that every member of the society must experience that at some point in his/ her life. For example it is now established that certain medical conditions start their appearance with advancing age. Prostate cancer (in men), lung cancer, loss of memory, etc. are such conditions. However they are not a part of ageing as they are not universal. They do not occur in every member of the society.
2. **Internality**- The process of ageing is internal to an organism/ individual. A process to qualify as ageing should not be induced from outside the individual as through radiations or other environmental hazards but should be initiated from within. Changes in the functioning of the body that are triggered due to smoking, chewing tobacco and drinking alcohol do not correspond to ageing as they are induced by external sources and thus do not qualify the criterion of internality.
3. **Progressiveness**- The process of ageing is slow and gradual. It is not a sudden or acute change but a progressive and cumulative change.
4. **Harmfulness**- Changes associated with ageing are harmful and they negatively affect the resilience and coping capabilities of the individual with respect to their environment. Such harmful changes ultimately lead to death of an individual.

From the very beginning one has to be very clear that there is a difference between ageing and old age. Where ageing is a process, old age is a stage of human development. However, it is also a fact that most of the studies and researches that are labeled and grouped under ageing studies are related to the studies undertaken on elderly people. This however does not mean that when we talk about ageing we are only referring to people belonging to a particular stage named as old age or elderly. For understanding the process of ageing we must appreciate the fact that human biology that includes physical appearance and physiological processes is not static. We change continuously as an individual biological being. However, such changes can be largely grouped under two headings- progressive and degenerating. Changes that are associated with early part of our lives are progressive in nature where we grow in size and shape and our physiological systems acquire maturity and functionality. The process of ageing however is associated with changes that take place later in our lives wherein degeneration sets in and physiological functioning slowly starts declining. It is very difficult to state that exactly when ageing starts as different people experience the signs of ageing at different periods of time but roughly the process of ageing starts from the later phase of early adulthood that is a period that extends from 18 years of age to 40 years. The first sign of ageing that appears in early adulthood is weight gain. This is largely associated with the slowing of the metabolic rate. Another important marker of ageing during this period is the graying of the hair. People start experiencing protruding abdomens and grey hair. The first signs of ageing therefore are related to the physical appearances of people. The ageing process starts changing the way we look. The process continues in the middle age that is the period between 40 and 60 years of age. During this period there is a gradual deterioration in the sensory abilities of people. Marked changes are seen in the functioning of eyes and ears during this period. This is also an age where changes are visible in the physiological functioning. Most of the middle-aged people suffer from

increased blood pressure. Middle age in women is marked by menopause. Then there are changes in the muscular structures, joints and teeth. Middle age is followed by old age that begins at 60 and extends till the individual dies. It can be said that ageing as a process extends from early adulthood to old age.

8.1.2 Psychological Perspective

The psychological perspective on ageing is associated with the notion of self and identity with increasing age and other physiological and physical changes that accompany ageing. This perspective also deals with the cognitive dimensions of ageing and changes that occur in the mental/ cognitive capabilities of individuals with advancing age. Within this perspective, two issues remain at the center of analysis and study viz. (a) differences of self, identity and cognitive functioning between individuals and (b) differences within the individuals that is examined with respect to the advancing age and related changes. Since psychology is defined as the science of mind and human behaviour, the psychological perspective on ageing largely deals with cognition and human behaviour during the old age.

It is a widely held belief that with advancing age cognitive functioning is on a decline. However, it remains a matter of contention and debate that what accounts for 'cognitive functioning'. Cognitive function is a multidimensional concept. It is made-up of several components like learning, memory, verbal functions, etc. Focusing on one dimension and leaving the others might lead us to wrong conclusions about overall cognitive functioning in old age and might also lead to forming stereotypes that do not reflect the real picture. Baltes (1993) however resolved the issue by distinguishing between 'fluid intelligence' and 'crystallised/ pragmatic intelligence'. Fluid intelligence is related to information processing like reasoning, memory and attention and crystallised/ pragmatic intelligence is related to accumulated knowledge over a period of time through education, employment and life experiences. Now within this context, studies have shown that fluid intelligence might decline with increasing age but pragmatic intelligence remains stable.

The notion of self and identity do get influenced with advancing age. The concept of self is made-up of notions concerned with answering the question that 'who am I?' This notion changes with ageing as people tend to acquire new statuses and roles with new set of responsibilities and status personalities. As individual is a part of the society, the self of the individual is shaped in context of the society. The formation of the self is contingent upon the images people have or the various stereotypes that are held associated with old age. The dynamism in the concept of self comes from the changing roles and aspirations with advancing age. The psychological perspective of ageing is concerned with such notions of self and identity formation.

8.1.3 Sociological or Social Perspective

The sociological or social perspective on ageing tries to locate ageing and old age within the larger collective consciousness of people. Ageing is located in the backdrop of social relationships and how these ensembles of social relations get altered with advancing age and changing roles and statuses is the task of a social scientist to understand them. The social perspective on ageing tries to understand the process at two levels of analysis viz. micro-scale and macro-scale. At the micro-scale ageing is understood as an individual experience within the context of a family or a small primary group. On the other hand at the macro-scale ageing is understood in the context of

gender, class, caste and ethnicity. These larger social divisions do have a profound influence on the process of ageing. It is within this context that it can be said that ageing is not a monolithic process but is heterogeneous and gets influenced by many other factors that are part of the social reality.

Society is not just the collection of individuals but it is an organisation that has enabling and constraining influences on its members. We all are bound by certain rules and norms of the society that give definite and predictable shape to our behavior. In this very particular sense the society can have enabling or constraining influence on the aged people. Ageing can be peaceful in some societies while it can be very stressful and debilitating in others.

Reflection

Societal Ageing: There is another facet to social gerontology and that is societal ageing. “This is concerned with the demographic, structural, cultural and economic transformation resultant from the increase in the number and proportion of ‘older’ people within society” (Victor 2005: 5). Societies might undergo a demographic transition where the population of older people increases. How does the society respond to such a scenario is dealt within the concept of ‘societal ageing.’

8.2 WHAT IS OLD AGE? THE INDIAN SCENARIO

It is really very difficult to define old age as it is society and culture specific. Moreover an individual’s perception about his or her age matters a lot as this defines his or her self concept at various stages in life. However, still for various administrative and procedural needs chronological old age is defined. The Central Statistics Office of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, in June 2011¹ came up with a Situation Analysis of the elderly in India. The report defined old age as follows: “Elderly or old age consists of ages nearing or surpassing the average life span of human beings. The boundary of old age cannot be defined exactly because it does not have the same meaning in all societies. Government of India adopted ‘National Policy on Older Persons’ in January, 1999. The policy defines ‘senior citizen’ or ‘elderly’ as a person who is of age 60 years or above.” As per the census of 2001, the elderly population accounted for 7.4% of the total population. This is projected to rise by 12.4% by the year 2026. This has important consequences for policy as with the rise of the elderly population, several policies might be required to look after them and their welfare. This is required more when we know that around 65% of the elderly have to depend on others for their day-to-day survival. A majority of the elderly are also economically dependent upon others. This economic dependence is more in the case of females. Society really needs to think about its elder population in a collective manner.

8.3 SOCIAL THEORIES OF AGEING

As explained in the introduction, ageing as a process is not divorced from the larger society. It is society that provides the necessary context for ageing as a process. In this sense, ageing becomes a social process. “Social theories of ageing explain the complexity and diversity of the ageing process in its social context (Phillips et al. 2010: 204).”

¹http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/elderly_in_india.pdf accessed on November 14, 2016

Bengtson et al. 1997 in their most important work on ageing have tried to review various social theories related to ageing and have reached the conclusion that all the social theories of ageing can be divided into three sets representing three generations of theories. The first generation or the early theories in gerontology developed between 1949 and 1969. Major theories within this generation include activity theory, disengagement theory and modernisation theory.

The second-generation theories developed between 1970 and 1985 included theories like exchange theory and age stratification theory. The third-generation theories are multi-disciplinary in nature and developed after 1985. Theories of this generation include feminist theories, critical gerontology and political economy. The logic behind dividing various social theories into three generations pertains to the historicity of their development. These theories developed in three different time periods and were influenced by dominant theoretical paradigms of those periods (Bengtson et al. 1997). However, the generational differentiation of theories is largely chronological in nature.

The earliest theme in the first-generation theory was to consider old age as a 'social problem'. Old age was seen as problematic for both the individual and society. "The essence of this approach is that it is concerned with the problematic and difficult aspects of ageing and the knowledge so generated is concerned with these areas, thus this approach will yield very little evidence as to the 'non-problematic' or 'normal' aspects of ageing. Indeed, the focus is upon the 'deviant' or difficulty aspects of ageing rather than to 'non-problematic'" (Victor 2005: 11). The paradigm of 'old age as a social problem' however generated many negative stereotypes related to ageing and old age.

Out of the above-mentioned theories, the disengagement theory, modernisation theory and the age stratification theory are influenced by the structural-functional paradigm. The structural-functional paradigm is the logical extension of the works of Durkheim in sociology and Radcliffe-Brown in social anthropology. It is largely based upon the 'organismic model' of society popularised by Herbert Spencer. Within this model society is seen as analogous to human organism. As in the case of human organism it is made up of different organs and these organs function in order to maintain the organism as a whole, similarly, the society is seen as an organism made up of different parts where different parts function to maintain the society as a whole. This paradigm is concerned with social order and equilibrium in the society. There is a definite arrangement of parts and these parts function in order to maintain the social order.

Based on the structural-functional paradigm the disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry 1961) posits that, "independent of other factors such as poor health or poverty, ageing involves a gradual but inevitable withdrawal or disengagement from interaction between the individual and her/ his social context and that this process is mutually beneficial. Thus, disengagement would be seen as functional or useful, because it facilitates a smooth transfer of power from the old to the young. From this perspective, retirement is seen as a mechanism by which companies can predetermine levels of employee turnover, gives the individual a 'graceful' exit from the pressures of employment and creates employment opportunities for younger workers. Hence disengagement, as illustrated by retirement, is a mechanism for ensuring equilibrium within society and the transition of social power across generations (Victor 2005: 18).

The activity theory (Havighurst 1957), based upon the paradigm of equilibrium and social order is based upon the premise that social order can be maintained if people tend to retain or substitute their social and professional roles later in life. This is to say

that with advancing age people should engage themselves in other activities similar to or alternate to the activities and roles that they used to perform during their middle age. Activity theory is based upon two central assumptions:

1. People who are engaged in activity later in life are more satisfied than people who do not engage in an activity.
2. Loss of roles like in case of widowhood and retirement lead to dissatisfaction from life and compensation is needed through alternative roles enactments and role-playing.

The modernisation theory (Burgess 1960) of ageing holds that ageing in pre-industrial and pre-modern societies is stress-free and the process is different from the modern and industrial societies. It is based on the premise that modernisation leads to a very specific socio-economic condition that is not conducive for old age people and hence ageing in such societies is seen as a problem. It is argued that modern socio-economic conditions lead to a disintegration of extended families, improvement in medical technology, urbanisation and mass education. Due to improvements in medical technology more people tend to live longer lives and this leads to an increase in the population of the aged. Mass education and improvement in educational pedagogy and technology make their skills redundant in changing economic scenarios. Urbanisation led to the migration of youth to urban centers for work and hence disintegration of families begin. All these conditions lead to problems related to ageing.

Within the second-generation theories, the social exchange theory was proposed by Dowd (1975). This theory is based upon the cost-benefit model in an economy where old age is seen as less beneficial to the society as the capabilities and capacities of the individual reduce and thus the cost of maintaining them in the society increases. The solution to this problem within this theoretical premise lies in increasing the older people's resources.

The age stratification theory is based upon the premise that the chronological age in the society is responsible for allocating roles to the people belonging to a particular age-group. The roles are decided in a societal context and therefore it may vary from one society to the other. Riley (1971) argues that each age group (young, mid-life and old) can be analysed in terms of the roles that members of that group play within society and how these are valued (Victor 2005: 23). This theory argues that the normal age differentiation gets converted into a stratification system where younger people are preferred for more important roles than the older people and thus place them in a kind of hierarchy (Victor 2005).

The third-generation theories of ageing are influenced by the critical perspective in social sciences. Both, the political economy approach and the feminist approach are informed by the larger theoretical premise of critical gerontology. This theoretical perspective challenges the dominant worldviews and stereotypes that are oppressive in nature and tries to find an alternative viewpoint to look into the social realities at hand. The political economy and feminist perspectives see ageing as socially constructed and negotiated in the larger political and economic landscape. The dominant oppressive paradigms in society are implicit within this social construction. The feminist approach also shifts our focus from understanding old age as a homogeneous category to a heterogeneous category that is influenced by gender categories that are placed in the larger social structure of the society. The experience of old age according to feminists

is different for both males and females and that is largely due to their social positions in society. Besides this old age experiences are also influenced by other social categories of class, ethnicity, race, caste, etc.

8.4 ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES OF AGEING

The anthropological studies on ageing are varied in nature. As it is mentioned in the beginning of the unit that anthropology is more a bond between various subject matters and owing to this fact there are various dimensions from which ageing has been approached and studied in anthropology. It was the legendary American anthropologist, Franz Boas who defined the role and subject matter of anthropology by incorporating different dimensions while studying a particular culture. Such dimensions like the Biological/ Physical, Cultural, Archaeological and Linguistics later came to be known as four sub-fields or branches of anthropology. Ageing therefore can be approached from such different perspectives and view-points in anthropology.

The earliest perspective in anthropology was the evolutionary perspective. This perspective emerged in the mid-nineteenth century as the best possible explanation of human origin and variation. Gerontology when approached from this perspective tries to understand the evolution of life-span of various pre-historic populations. This is an important perspective to know and understand as to what is the trajectory of life-expectancy of various pre-historic groups. This can give important insights into certain environmental and technological conditions during the pre-historic times that led to changes in life-span of various groups. Studies have revealed that major change in life-expectancy occurred with the advent of agriculture and settled way of life when human beings were less exposed to the vagaries to nature. Evolutionary studies in gerontology have now shown the average life span of various populations since pre-historic times (Kanungo 1994; Bagga 2010).

<u>Population</u>	<u>Average Life-Span</u>
Neanderthal	29.4
Upper Palaeolithic	32.4
Mesolithic	31.5
Neolithic Anatolia	38.2

Source: Adopted with modifications from Bagga 2010

Another dimension relates to the difference in life-expectancy of males and females. It is a fact that females live longer than males and there are biological reasons for the same. “It has been proposed that superior life expectancies of female species may be due to secondary sexual characteristics like rate of metabolism, body composition, and masculine combatic behaviour of men that might operate to reduce their life span” (Bagga 2010: 4).

The biological anthropologists are not only concerned with evolutionary and differential aspects of ageing as a process but are also interested in knowing the causes of ageing. The two most prominent theories that explain the reason of ageing are Telomeres theory and the Free-Radical theory. The telomeres theory tries to explain the cause of ageing at the genetic level. On the other hand the free-radical theory tries to explain the

cause at the bio-chemical level. Another set of theories propose that ageing occurs due to accumulation of unrepaired damaged tissues in the body. Within the evolutionary paradigm, the cause of ageing is explained in terms of the response of the human body to the environment. The human body responds either by prioritizing tissue repair or reproduction. The difference in life expectancy of various species is dependent upon the priority accorded to either tissue repair or reproduction.

Within the domain of genetic studies in anthropology, ageing has been visualised at the genetic level. It has been established that there is a positive correlation between the longevity of parents and offspring. Data suggests that age at death of parents has an influence on the age at death of the offspring. Twin studies have shown that life-expectancy of monozygotic twins are more similar than the life expectancy of dizygotic twins (Kallmann and Jarvik 1959). Monozygotic twins are genetically similar to each other.

Anthropometric studies have also been performed in the context of ageing as a process. Such studies have documented changes in various body measurements. Several body measurements like stature, girth etc undergo a change with advancing age. With advancing age, a decrease in linear measurements is reported, for example, stature, sitting height, iliac height decreases with old age. However, the bi-gonial breadth and bi-iliac breadth increases.

8.5 LOCATING AGEING STUDIES IN THE DOMAIN OF SOCIAL-CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The scope and subject matter of social-cultural anthropology has never been monolithic. With changing times and ideas there has been a paradigm shift in the larger questions and issues with which social anthropologists were concerned. This is largely referred to as agenda-hopping in anthropology. Social anthropology began with understanding the universal history of mankind within the theoretical premise of evolutionism. The larger goal of anthropologists in the mid-nineteenth century was to classify various societies as per their levels of development into an evolutionary sequence. Anthropologists like E.B. Tylor defined the agenda for anthropologists and said that the major job of anthropologists should be to classify societies from simple to complex. Anthropologists were concerned with the origin and evolution of religion, family, marriage and kinship. Besides this, all human societies were put into stages of savagery, barbarism or civilisation. Within this perspective ageing as a separate issue or dimension worthy of anthropological enquiry could not gain currency. Anthropologists were more occupied with understanding entire societies and cultures.

It was only in the twentieth century that anthropology shifted its focus from evolutionism and diffusionism to functionalism. Within the functional paradigm, Malinowski defined the agenda for anthropologists as in-depth fieldworkers and not just classifiers of data collected by untrained travellers and missionaries. Anthropology in this era shifted its focus to an in-depth study of a particular society by way of participant observation. It was for the first time that it was realised how should one study a society. The answer to this question was found in understanding society as an organism. Within this concept, a holistic study of society was attempted. As in the case of the human organism one can only understand it by studying its various organs and organ systems, likewise, a society can only be understood when taken as a whole. Different systems in a society become

its different organs like kinship system, religious system, economic system, etc. It was also within this paradigm that social relations became the focus of study as they were real and can be observed. Extending this logic to the study of old age, ageing studies within this paradigm do not form a separate dimension that needs to be studied but it can very well be understood by studying the social relations of old age people in different societies.

Old age within this paradigm can be located within larger institutional studies of say political institution. Studies within the functional and structural-functional paradigm documented systems like the age-set systems which were part of the larger political systems. Studies from East Africa have revealed that political organisations of certain tribes are based upon the age-set system. Age-set define political roles related to authority and decision making in such societies. "In most societies in which age-sets are important, every man is not only a member of a particular set, but also at any given time he occupies, with his age-mates, a particular grade. A typical series of grades (after childhood) is junior warrior-hood, senior warrior-hood, junior elder-hood, and senior elder-hood. Specific rules are associated with each grade; thus, warriors fight and defend the tribe from attack, elders settle disputes; make important decisions, and intercede with the ancestral ghosts" (Beattie 1964: 146). Old age in such tribes is a corporate group and thus ageing is not an individual process but the entire group jumps from one age-set to the other. This ensures a sense of collective identity among the people of older age-sets. The process of ageing, therefore, becomes collective as opposed to an individualistic process in some western societies.

Besides understanding ageing in terms of status and associated roles and as a social group with specific political roles to play, anthropologists have also tried to understand old age and ageing as a cultural phenomenon and tried to document the coming of age in societies and how culture influences such dimensions. One classical example, in this case, is Margaret Mead's study of Samoa islands. Although it was a study focusing the adolescent girls, in her book *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Mead also deals with maturity and old age in one of the chapters. In this chapter, she is trying to understand what it means to grow older in a particular culture. She also compares the lives of old men with that of old women. The entire culture and personality school in anthropology deals with understanding the influence of culture on personality. The basic debate within this school of thought relates to the debate on nature versus nurture and this paradigm upheld the importance of nurture over nature. Cultural influences over personality are of prime importance and old age can be located within this paradigm. Mead argued that among the Samoan household, the age of an individual rather than relationship is an important criterion for exercising authority.

Although cultural evolutionism as a theoretical paradigm was abandoned in the beginning of twentieth century for being speculative in the light of lack of evidence to reconstruct the cultural capital of the past but its value remained in its diachronic nature (Fry 2009). Evolutionism was concerned with social and cultural change. In the context of ageing and studies on old age, understanding the dimension of change is of utmost importance. Since culture changes over a period of time, it is quite interesting to study the impact of such changes on the elderly. With culture being a variable old age can be analyzed across time. In contrast to the temporal dimension of old age having its logical roots in the diachronic approach functionalism was synchronic in nature (Fry 2009). It was not concerned as much with change as it was concerned with social order. Within this paradigm a spatial dimension to ageing was added. Owing to its rich fieldwork tradition,

experiences of elder people can be documented in a society and then it can be compared with other societies.

8.5.1 Cultural Conceptions of Age

The study of culture being central to anthropological enquiry, the cultural conception of old age and its usage becomes an important area of inquiry in anthropology (Fry 2009). The recognition of old age has a temporal dimension. It is with the time that a person accumulates years and becomes old. Time has been classified as being circular and absolute. In most of the simple societies time is circular as they do not subscribe to any calendar or timescale. Such a circular time is relative in nature and age is reckoned only in relation to some natural or social phenomenon. For example a person may say that I was born when there was a massive flood in the village. Such conceptions of time have important bearing on the notion of age and ageing. Such a life course is age-ambiguous life course as opposed to age-explicit life course where chronological age has greater influence on the social roles and responsibilities (Fry 2009). In the age-ambiguous life course ageing is more diffused. In the modern social context age-explicit life course enables the state to define roles and concessions according to the age. However, this may not match the individual or societal conceptions of old age (Fry 2009). For example, a government employee retires at the age of say 60 years because the state has such a mandate but that employee might not be a fit case of retirement since he/ she may be physically and mentally absolutely sound and fit to work. With the increase in complexity in the society and with the increasing population resources might get drained out and therefore the society attempts to force people shun those roles at a particular age which an individual could very well perform at that age (Fry 2009).

8.6 THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF AGEING: RITES DE PASSAGE AND THE BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

Ethnography is a method in anthropology where an anthropologist tends to describe and present a detailed account of the community which he/ she is studying. First-hand ethnographic accounts to understand a community in its totality began with Malinowski and his fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders. Such ethnographic accounts focused on the institutions as a whole. Within the functional and the structural-functional tradition in anthropology different institutions were studied as forming a structure having parts that function to maintain the whole. Rites de passage form an important part of the institutional and social life of people in a community. These are certain ceremonies that mark the transformation of people from one status to another. Rites de passage is akin to various *sanskars* that are performed at various important occasions of life like birth, marriage, and death. By studying the rites de passage one can understand the kind of transformation in the status that occurs when one reaches a particular age. However, scholars have argued that since studying rites de passage involves the ethnographic study of the institutional form of transfer of rights and obligations, therefore a biographical approach is more suited to understand the transformations that an individual might undergo during his/ her life course. In this context Vidyarthi and Rai (1976) observe that “The different rituals or *sanskars* only signify that the individual is being entrusted with certain obligations and responsibilities for his own welfare as well as for the welfare of the community. Talking only about the *sanskars* and rituals would present an institutional account of the community and not the man. The traditional approach of

describing the life of an individual is based on the description of the rites de passage or the phases of life. . . . Redfield terms this approach as institutional. This description may give us a good account of the birth, marriage and death of an individual. Still, they give only isolated pictures about the rites or phases and not a complete picture of life as a whole. Considering these facts we feel that the approach of describing an individual's life must be such as to express the whole story of an individual in the frame of reference of his community where he grows up and not the turning points nor specific personal experiences alone. Thus, a general biographic account of an individual would be more helpful in understanding human careers as such. The social structure and the ecological system provide points of reference for the description of that career; the reason being that ecology determines the basic economy and elementary variables of a social structure, which again limit the arrangement of people in space, types of houses and family composition" (pp. 273-274). The biographical approach to understanding ageing is an embedded approach that tries to locate ageing within the larger social structure and the natural environment that forms the necessary matrix for an individual within which the entire social life takes place.

Using the ethnographic method, ageing studies have been carried out among tribes in India. Such studies try to understand that what it means to grow old in a particular culture. How old age is perceived by the people. The broader worldview regarding ageing and old age, guides the behaviour of people towards the elders. Such studies have tried to document the transformation in status of an individual that has achieved the status of a grandfather or grandmother. Such a transformation is usually accompanied by rites de passage of the newborn. It has been documented that elders in many tribes in India achieve the status of a *gaonbudha* who is considered as a repository of knowledge and wisdom. His/ her guidance is sought for many important works in the community and such people hold much clout in the political, and decision-making affairs of the village.

8.7 SUMMARY

Anthropology being a holistic discipline entails that for a holistic understanding of human beings various dimensions need to be taken into account that forms an integral part of human life. Gerontology can be defined as the study of ageing from three different perspectives- biological, psychological and social. Since gerontology is defined as the study of ageing from different perspectives, therefore it is a multidisciplinary subject that is informed by biological sciences, social sciences and psychology. The subject matter of anthropology and the multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach to gerontology together lead to an integration between the two. This makes anthropology and anthropologist best suited to undertake gerontological studies. Multi-dimensionality being at the core of anthropology makes it suitable for the study of ageing. An anthropologist would be interested in understanding the biological, social, cultural and archaeological dimensions of ageing.

Society and culture being two most important concepts in anthropology lead to understand ageing from two important vantage points:

1. One being that of social structure and
2. The other a cross-cultural comparison of ageing experiences and locating ageing and old age within the specific cultural experiences.

Besides this physical anthropologists study the physical dimensions of ageing that largely relate to bodily changes and genetic studies on ageing.

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Sample Questions

1. What do you understand by old age?
2. What is ageing, when does ageing start in human beings?
3. What are the various perspectives to understand ageing?
4. Explain the disengagement theory of ageing.
5. How physical anthropologists study ageing?
6. How ageing is understood by social-cultural anthropologists?
7. What is the cultural conception of age?
8. What is the biographical approach to ageing and how it is different from the rites de passage?
9. Describe various generations of social theories in ageing.



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