and purity, ideas of segregation, mutual repulsion, etc. However all these views further reflect on sub-variation of castes and understand caste in terms of particularistic phenomenon or that caste is of universal application. On the basis of a combination of two dichotomus propositions, we can distinguish four approaches about the caste system, namely, structural universalistic, structural pluralistic, cultural universalistic and cultural particularistic. The structural universalistic view is promoted by K. Davis, N.K. Bose and A.R. Desai. They are of the view that caste in India manifests the general principle of a closed form of social stratification based on hierarchy. The structural particularistic view on caste is promoted by E. Leach who contends that the use of the word caste is used to define the system of social stratification found in traditional Indian society and which is also surviving to a large extent in modern India. The cultural universalistic view of caste is held by Weber and Ghurye who consider caste a cultural phenomenon, a matter of ideology and value system. The caste system promotes the idea of hierarchy. The cultural particularistic view of caste is held by Louis Dumont. He says that the caste system is based upon a set of ideas like pollution and purity and these ideas are unique to India.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. To which language does the word 'caste' owe its origin?
2. Who is the author of *Caste in Modern India*?
3. List any two approaches to the caste system.

2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system in India has a complex nature. Many scholars, namely Ghurye, Hutton and Ketkar, have pointed out the characteristics of caste. Ketkar describes two characteristics of caste, namely, (i) that membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born, (ii) the membership is forbidden by an inexorable social law to men outside the group. From this, it can be said that if a man should be banned from his caste for some reason, he would be without any group, since no other group, lower or higher could accept him into its membership. Moreover it also limits the choice of marriage partners. G.S. Ghurye in his book *Caste and Race in India*, has identified six characteristics of the caste system.

(a) Segmental division of society

The caste system exhibits a segmental division which shows that the groups are divided into various groups called castes. Each caste is a well defined social group, where membership is assured at birth, making transferring from one caste to another unfeasible. Each caste has its individual social position, professions, traditions,

rules and regulations. Every group has their own its own ruling body called the caste or jati panchayat which ensures that the rules of that particular caste are being adhered to. Such panchayats make decisions not only about matters pertaining to castes but other offences as well, offences that legitimately fall within the judicial process. These include matters like eating, drinking, matters related to marriage, non-payment of debts, breach of customs peculiar to a caste, petty assaults, etc. Caste was thus a group as Ghurye rightly points out, 'with a separate arrangement for meting out justice to its members apart from that of the community as a whole, within which caste was included as only one of the groups. Hence the members of a caste ceased to be members of a community as a whole, as far as that part of their morals which is regulated by law'. In other words, it can be said that 'each caste is its own ruler'. The citizens owe their moral allegiance to the caste first, rather than to the community as a whole.

(b) Hierarchy

Each caste is positioned hierarchically in society. The divisions of caste can be noted by watching the actions of higher castes. Castes are never equal in status and one caste has either higher or lower in status compared to another. Ghurye pointed out that 'there are as many as two hundred castes which can be grouped in classes whose gradation is largely acknowledged by all. But order of social precedence among the individual castes of any class, cannot be made definite, because not only is there no ungrudging acceptance of such ranks but also the ideas of the people on this point are very nebulous and uncertain'. For instance, rank of certain castes can be determined by finding out from whom a designated caste takes water. One may take water from his equals or superiors, but not from his inferiors unless it is served in a brass pot.

(c) Restrictions on commensality and social intercourse

Every caste imposes restrictions on its members with regard to food, drink and social intercourse. Food is another rank indicator. Indian food is placed into two groups, *pakka khana* and *kachcha khana*. *Pakka khana* is made with clarified butter from flour, sugar and sweetmeats, while *kuchcha khana* is cooked with water or salt. *Pakka khana* is taken from most inferiors, but *kachcha khana* is taken with discrimination. Roughly, a man will take *kachcha khana* from the same people from whom he will take water (Zinkin, 1962). In practice most castes seem to have no objection on taking *kachcha* food from the hands of a Brahmin. A Brahmin, on the other hand does not accept *kachcha* food from the hands of any other caste. So far as *pakka* food or *pakka khana* is concerned, a Brahmin can take from the hands of a few castes only. According to Ghurye, thirty-six out of seventy-six UP castes take *kachcha* food from their own members only.

Besides food, there are widespread beliefs of pollution by touch which require the members of different castes to maintain social distances from one another. Theoretically, the touch of a member of any caste lower than one's own

defiles a person of a higher caste. The rigidity of this rule however varies from caste to caste and place to place; e.g., it is prevalent in U.P. and Gujarat. As per the classification given by Ghurye, the Shannar, a toddy-tapper of Tamil Nadu, contaminates a Brahmin if he approaches the latter within twenty-four paces. In Kerala, a Nayyar would approach a Namboodri Brahmin but may not touch him. In fact so much rigidity was attached to pollution that a Brahmin would not even perform his ablution within the precincts of a Shudra's habitation.

(d) Endogamy

The caste system also imposes restrictions on marriage. Castes are divided into sub-castes and each sub-caste is an endogamous group. The principle of endogamy was so prominent that Westermark, an eminent sociologist, said, 'It is the essence of caste system.' Every caste or sub-caste insists that members should marry within the group. Any breach of this rule is viewed as a serious offence, the punishment for which often amounts to being ostracized from one's own community or caste. However there are few exceptions to this rule in the form of hypergamy (marriage of a man of a higher caste with a woman from a lower caste). Except in cases of hypergamy, each caste had to adhere strictly to the rules with regard to matrimonial alliances. For instance, the younger son of a Namboodri Brahmin of Kerala can only marry a Nayyar woman.

(e) Lack of unrestricted choice of occupation

In a caste-based society, there are restrictions on choosing one's own vocation. Each caste group is traditionally associated with a caste occupation which is hereditary. Abandoning one's hereditary occupation was looked down upon so people strictly followed their caste occupation even if it was not lucrative. Thus, a Brahmin would consider it his rightful duty to become a priest while a shoemaker would consider it his duty to make shoes. No caste would allow its members to take on any profession which was either degrading or impure. There are however occupations like trading, agriculture, military service, working in the fields, etc., which were considered as being open to all.

(f) Civil and religious disabilities

Social segregation is another aspect of caste differentiation. Ghurye remarked, 'Segregation of individual castes or of groups of castes in a village is the most obvious mark of civil privileges and disabilities and it has prevailed in a more or less definte form all over India.' In a village or a town various castes were segregated on the basis of residence. Segregation has been more severe in South than in North India. In the South, as referred to by Ghurye, parts of the town or village are inaccessible to certain castes. The agitation by the impure castes to gain free access to streets in Vaikam in Travancore brought into clear relief some of the disabilities of these castes. 'All over India,' Ghurye points out, 'the impure castes are debarred from drawing water from the village well, which is used by members of other castes.' A Mahar in Maharashtra, for example, was forbidden from spitting

on the road lest a pure caste gets polluted if his foot happens to touch it. Besides these, there were restrictions on Shudras to enter temples and participating in the performance of certain rituals. They were prohibited from reciting Vedic Mantras and performing Vedic rituals. They had to satisfy themselves with Puranic rituals. A Brahmin was not expected to bow to anyone while members of other castes were required to bow to him.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. Give two characteristics of caste as described by Ketkar.

5. Name two functions of caste panchayats.

6. How can rank of certain castes be determined?

7. What is the difference between *pukka* and *kacccha khana*?

2.4 CONCEPT OF *VARNA*

It is now agreed that all social divisions in India were not hereditary in the beginning; rather they were only functional divisions. In Hindu social organization, *varna* is only the reference category: it is not a functioning unit of social structure, and only refers broadly to the ascribed status of different *jatis*. It is also a method of classification (Dube, 1990). So far as the etymological meaning of *varna* is concerned, it has come from Sanskrit root, *Vri*, which means colour. The *varna* system evolved as a result of the conflict between the different races. Fair skinned Aryans entered the Indian sub-continent through its north-west borders around 1500 BC, conquering the dark-complexioned original inhabitants and, laying the foundation for a class system based on birth. It is also stated in the *Purusasukta*, a hymn in the *Rig Veda*, that the four categories of society come out from the four parts of *Purusa* who is the supreme being. The professions of these *varna*s or groups are related figuratively to the parts of the body of *Purusa*. It is an anatomical analogy between man and society to illustrate the various ranks and functions of different groups.

According to the *Rig Veda*, the oldest scripture, the words Rajanya, Vaishya and Shudra are present only in the *Purusasukta*. The four castes can be classified into Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Brahmins are thought to have emerged from the mouth of the Purusa and are therefore placed at the highest strata of society. Their particular tasks relate to speech. The second level is that of the Kshatriya (Rajanya) who emerges from the arms of the *Purusa* and therefore has the honour of handling weapons. The Vaishyas are thought to come out of the thighs of Purusa making their profession agriculture and trade. Last, the Shudras emerged from the feet of the Purusa making them the lowest part of the body, Shudras are therefore placed in the depths of this four-fold division of society.

The *Purusasukta* is apparently the contribution of the Aryans as it came into being after the Aryans had already settled down in India. As the Aryans needed labour to purse the agricultural tasks, they employed *dasa*s. Slowly *dasa*s became a synonym for Shudra. Both these words have their roots in the Iranian language. The word *Dasa* is an adaptation of the Iranian word *dahae* or common man. The word Shudra relates to the word *kurda*, which is the name of a pre-Aryan tribe which still exists in Iran. As per the sayings in the *Rig Veda*, the profession of a priest and warrior is considered higher than the profession of the agriculturalist. People employed as agricultural labourers or slaves came to occupy the lowest position in society. The constitution of the *Purusasukta* and its insertion in the *Rig Veda* was the initial effort to organize, and make official the mistreatment of non-Aryans by the Aryans.

2.5 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *VARNA* AND *JATI*

Varna and *jati* (caste) may appear synonymous but are two separate categories. The inter-changeability of these terms has created confusion in the sociological analysis of the institution of caste. Caste is a confusing word; in different contexts it has been used to convey different meanings and social categories. It is better to use the term *jati* to denote an endogamous community with a more or less defined ritual status, and some occupation traditionally linked to it (Dube, 1990). Jati is a social group, a unit of great importance and a basic component of the social system. *Varna* is frequently mentioned in Sanskrit scripture, jati less often. Emile Senart warned that the two terms are confused in the literary tradition which, he wrote, 'is less concerned with the faithful record of facts than with their arrangement in systems conforming to the tendencies of a strongly biased group' (Senart, 1930).

However, the origin of castes has no semblance to the origin of *varna*s, though in the process of development of castes, they came to be associated with *varna*s. Srinivas (1962) holds that *varna* has provided a common social language which holds good or is thought to hold for India as a whole, that is, it has enabled ordinary men and women to grasp the caste system by providing them with a simple and clear scheme which is applicable to all parts of India. He further holds that importance of the *varna* system consists in that it furnishes an all India frame into which the *jati*s, occupying the lower rungs, have throughout tried to raise their status by taking over the customs and rituals of top *jatis*. Caste is tied to locality but *varna* functions on an all India basis.

The crucial distinction between *varna* and *jati* is that, where *varna* is a system of differentiation in the epoch of Asiatic mode of production, which was characterized by general exploitation, the *jati* system developed later in the epoch of feudalism and was characterized by localized exploitation in a closed village economy, where the ruling class lived off the land (Gupta, 1995). *Varna* may be described as an abstract classification of people on the basis of a mythical origin; *jati*, on the other hand, is a concrete grouping based on ritual and occupational

NOTES

criteria. *Varna* should be understood as a symbolic framework within which diverse castes or *jatis* are grouped together. Caste belonging to the same *varna* may have no social ties with each other. For instance, a Kashmiri Brahmin and a South Indian Brahmin belong to the same *varna*, but they do not inter-marry or inter-dine. Castes have regional, linguistic and communal diversities incorporated in them. As a consequence, castes having the same *varna* rank are quite distinct from each other. The *varna* framework has served as a means of caste mobility but mobility is restricted among *jatis*. However, it can be said that *varna* is a reference group to various *jatis* of Indian society.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

8. What does the Sanskrit word for *varna* mean?

9. Which are the four *varnas*?

10. What Iranian word has the word *dasa* evolved from?

11. List three factors which impacted the caste system.

12. Name two changes brought about in the caste system.

2.6 RECENT CHANGES IN THE CASTE SYSTEM

The Indian caste system has undergone tremendous transformation in modern times. The caste system has undergone and is still undergoing adaptive changes. M.N. Srinivas quite aptly referred to the changes brought about in independent India as the erecting of constitutional defences for the protection of the backward sections of the population, especially the scheduled castes and tribes. This has provided a new lease of life to the people. Many factors are responsible for the transformation in caste system.

Srinivas draws out a distinction between the traditional and modern caste system which roughly coincides with the distinction between pre-British and post-British period. It was indeed a matter of great significance to learn about the nature of rendering political power to Indians by the British. This was an important step in the various castes assuming political functions. There were territorial boundaries in the pre-British period which separated the castes by limiting their mobility. However, later on, the interdependence of castes upon each other for economic and other functions somehow became instrumental in liberating castes from territorial filiations.

Srinivas also refers to the building of roads all over India, and how the introduction of postage, telegraph, cheap paper and printing, especially in regional languages, enabled castes to organize themselves as they had never done before (Srinivas, 1962). However, Prof. G.S. Ghurye has also reflected upon the impact

of British rule on the Indian caste system. The civil and penal codes introduced by the British over the subcontinent of India took away much of the power previously exercised by caste panchayats (Srinivas, 1962). However the process of Sanskritization has also been instrumental in bringing about social mobility leading to fluidity in the caste structure.

Other factors like Western education, urbanization, industrialization and the new legal system also contributed a lot in bringing about changes in the caste system. The growth of industries and the service sectors have also led to the expansion of occupational opportunities for many castes. So, in spite of the ascribed status assigned to castes, people focused on achieved status. Such occupational spaces have led to the abandonment of the principles of pollution and purity. Moreover, democratic decentralization of power right down to the grassroots level has led to an increased participation in the political process and besides economic success, access to political power has become another means of status enhancement.

Some of the prominent changes identified in the caste system are as follows:

1. There has been a decline in the supremacy of Brahmins. The Brahmins who used to occupy the topmost position in the stratification system of India are no longer considered the most superior. Modern occupations and urbanization has led to increased occupational mobility among other castes which has enhanced the status of castes lower than the Brahmins in the hierarchy. In the present-day context, the Weberian notion of one's class position gains ascendancy over one's caste position.

2. The *jajmani* system has also weakened .The economic context of inter-caste relations which is termed as the *jajmani* system has lost its siginificance. The monetization of economy and expansion of the market system in rural areas had a severe impact on the economic functions of castes.

3. The second important change is the position of castes came about due to processes like Sanskritization. Initially it was observed that the caste system had a rigid structure which strictly prohibited social mobility. But with occupational interdependence and opening of greater avenues for employment, the lower castes had an opportunity to pursue an occupation according to their choice. This led to fluidity in the caste structure and considerable positional changes were observed.

4. The Protective Discrimination Policy of the Government further led to the enhancement of status of many of the subjugated castes. Such policies also led to the improvement in the socio-economic conditions of various castes.

5. The enforcement of the Special Marriage Act of 1954 further brought about many changes in improving the marital alliances among the castes. Initially endogamy was strictly observed as an attribute of caste and

people violating it were ostracized from the village. But the Special Marriage Act legalized inter-caste marriages, which is a significant change in the entire system.

6. The notion of pollution and purity and restrictions on feeding and intercourse are no longer valid. The enactment of the Untouchability Offences Act, 1956 was an important milestone in this direction. Untouchability was made a punishable offence and a person found practising it is severely punished either in terms of being fined or sentenced to imprisonment.

7. With industrialization, new occupational structures have developed in urban areas. These new occupations are are not dependent on the caste of a person. Recruitments to these occupations are solely based upon technical skills which can be acquired through modern education. Thus the traditional concept of caste occupation has lost its significance.

8. Contemporary society is undergoing massive transformation due to technological breakthroughs and is witnessing many cultural changes. A new class of lower caste urban youth, whom some scholars have termed as the 'breakthrough generation', are playing a significant role in bringing about a sea-change by breaking the boundaries that had kept the Shudras in conditions of extreme poverty. This new generation of educated Shudras are positioning themselves for modern urban jobs.

Thus, the caste system has undergone many changes in the recent years. It is however difficult to predict the complete disappearance of such a system. It can be said that though there has been enough fluidity in the system due to various forces, yet the system still persists in India. The practice of politics through caste (casteism), the entire reservation issue and the recent debate about calculation of caste census further stirred the caste sentiments.

2.7 UNTOUCHABILITY

Caste and untouchability have always been one of the important areas for sociological investigation. Sociologists and anthropologists have been engaged in understanding the various aspects of caste and untouchability. Untouchabilty has been a social malaise responsible for differentiation in Indian society. Though there has been a significant change in the caste system post independence, and due to modernization, yet the practice has not disappeared completely from the Indian social context. According to G.S. Ghurye, the idea of pollution and purity, whether occupational or economic, is found to have been a factor which gave birth to the practice of untouchability. According to Dr. Majumdar, the untouchable castes are those who suffer from various social and political disabilities, many of which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced by the higher castes.

Mahatma Gandhi first used the term Harijan (children of God) for those sections of people who suffered from various social, religious, economic and political

disabilities. 'Untouchability is the product, not of the caste system, but the distinction of high and low status that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it' (Gandhi, 1932). So it can be said that untouchability has been a social practice in India of treating some people unjustly because of their low ascribed status. There was a traditional belief prevalent in India that a person's birth decided his destiny and some castes were believed to be 'impure' and their shadow could defile a person of higher caste. The untouchables known by several names like Chandalas, Panchammas, Avarnas or Harijans, were not allowed to pursue education, draw water from village wells, enter temples or use public roads.

The definition of untouchabilty most often given in India has two different meanings. First, untouchability is a stigma attached to some people because of the pollution they convey. It is a stigma by caste from birth, not from deeds performed; it lasts throughout life and cannot be ritually eliminated. The concept of ritual pollution by caste pervades the whole traditional caste structure and untouchability, in this sense of the term, is conceptually no different in kind. It is different only in degree and is used for pollution-by-caste which is so great that the rest of society segregates its members from these castes and protects itself against them. Second, untouchability refers to the set of practices engaged in by the rest of the society to protect itself from the pollution conveyed by the untouchables and to symbolize their inferior status. This is the most common use of the term. Untouchability is rarely defined in a sentence; it is usually described in terms of civil, social and religious disabilities (Dushkin, 1967).

However, a considerable amount of regional variation exists in the manner in which social relations among different groups of castes have historically evolved. As is widely known, there are different sets of cast-off groups in different regions and the pre-occupation with purity and pollution was not equally marked in every part of the country (Beteille, 2000).[1] Many sociological studies on villages focus on the changes in attitudes among various castes. Though some may argue that untouchability is still alive today (Diliege, 1999),[2] over the last century or so the system of caste hierarchy, its forms and manifestations, have indeed undergone considerable changes. Even I.P. Desai, while studying the untouchables in Gujarat in 1970s observed that in rural areas there has been the emergence of a new 'public sphere' of social interaction with modernization and economic development. Such a development has lessened the practice of untouchability. The norm of caste and untouchability had begun to be violated in the economic or occupational sphere as well. This included seating arrangements in schools, travelling in buses and postal services. However, when it came to the traditional relations that included the domestic and religious life of the people, untouchability was highly practised (Desai, 1976).[3]

[1.] Beteille, A. 2000. *Chronicles of Our Time*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, p.172.

[2.] Deliege, R. 1999. *The Untouchables of India*. New York: Berg Publishing Ltd, p. 3.

[3.] Desai, I.P. 1976. *Untouchability in Rural Gujarat*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

On the basis of these observations, it can be argued that though untouchability is now treated as a serious offence after the formulation of the Untouchability Offences Act, 1955, yet in some regions it still persists. The atrocities being practised against untouchables have become a thing of the past but there are subsequent regional variations. So, though the practice of untouchability has declined yet the spirit of untouchability still survives.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

13. What are two other names for untouchables?

14. When did the Untouchability Offences Act come into force?

15. What is untouchability, as defined by Mahatma Gandhi?

16. Give two examples of the norm of caste being violated.

2.8 FEATURES OF THE PROTECTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

India is a welfare state committed to the welfare of its people in general and the welfare of vulnerable sections in particular. The Central government has been responsible for implementing various plans and policies for the upliftment of the weaker and marginalized sections of population. The practice of untouchability was so rampant in Indian society that it became a social responsibility of the government to formulate and implement appropriate policies to remove this social malady. So the formulation of Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act is a significant endeavour in this direction.

In order to safeguard the interests of all Indian citizens, the Constitution has provided a detailed outline for abolishing those customs, practices, or traditions, including provisions in law, if any, which encourage untouchability practices and other biased and prejudiced customs which society enforces on communities.

The Untouchability Offences Act, 1955 was enforced by Parliament five years after the Constitution of India was adopted. The Act includes specific clauses where if any outlawed customs which are harmful to a member of a scheduled caste are practiced, then the court would automatically presume, unless proven wrong, that the act was executed was on grounds of Untouchability. Even after the act was adopted, the public was not satisfied as it did not have the desired effect. The Government of India saw the need to appoint a Committee in April 1965, chaired by Shri Illaya Perumal to investigate the issues related to Untouchability. As per the suggestions of the Committee, the act was exhaustively amended in 1976 and it was changed to be known as Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955.

The Untouchabilty Offences Act, 1955 came into force in accordance with Article 17 of the Constitution. The name of the Act was changed to 'Protection of

Civil Rights Act' so that it would create more of an impact. It was enacted on 19 November 1976. This resulted in widening the reach and making punishments more severe. The Act allowed offences related to untouchability to be punished and extended its scope to the entire country, including the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Act is put into practice by the administrations of the State Governments and Union Territory.

The goal of the PCR Act was to impose penalties for those indulging in the practice of untouchability and for any kind of differentiation on the grounds of untouchabilty. Civil rights can be defined as any rights that are accorded to a person by the abolition of 'untouchability' as per Article 17 of the Constitution. Discrimination and biases linked to certain occupations like manual scavenging, flaying and tanning were strongly discouraged. Lack of property, illiteracy and other social and economic backwardness worsen the situation. Many plans and proposals are being actioned for the socio-economic and educational development of the members of scheduled castes. These schemes along with the implementation of the Protection of Civil Rights Act are slowly reducing crimes related to untouchability. The State Governments have been authorized to levy fines on any person found guilty of committing an offence related to untouchability. This act describes in detail procedures for assuring the protection of the casualties of crimes linked to untouchability by setting up special courts, special tribunals, fixing period for investigations, etc.

The Section 3(7A) defines and punishes offences arising out of untouchability. These offences include enforcing social and religious disabilities, refusal to admit persons to hospitals, educational institutions, refusing to sell goods or render services and unlawful compulsory labour to do scavenging.

Section 7 punishes prevention of the exercise of civil rights, injury for having exercised civil rights, inciting/encouraging the practice of untouchability, insulting a Scheduled caste on grounds of untouchability, reprisal for exercising civil rights and excommunicating another for not practicing untouchability. Public servants neglecting investigations are considered to be abetting offences under the PCR Act. Abetting of offences under this Act is treated as a commission of the offence and punished accordingly. This Act requires courts to presume that the offences are done on grounds of untouchability if the victim belongs to a scheduled caste.

The PCR Act prescribes minimum sentence and imprisonment and also enhanced penalty on subsequent conviction. While convicting for refusing to sell or render service, the court may, without prejudice to other penalty, cancel or suspend licence. The Government may suspend or resume the grants to institutions punished for refusing to admit if they receive government grants. Moreover the State Government under the coordination of Central Government shall ensure that civil rights are available to the concerned and there are sufficient facilities of legal aid to victims. The Government shall appoint officers for prosecution, establish special courts, set up committees for formulating and implementing measures,

provide a periodic survey of the working of PCR Act, and identify notorious areas in order to remove disabilities.

From the above discussions it becomes apparent that untouchability had been a serious problem engulfing Indian society and creating social injustice. Though lot of efforts have been made to eradicate this problem yet it still exists in some corners of Indian society and goes unnoticed. The legal dimension of this problem and the implementation of the PCR Act have been instrumental in ensuring social justice yet there are some cultural barriers due to which the act is not fully successful. It is of some comfort to think that although the practice of untouchability made India quite unique among social systems, the attempt to eradicate it has also made the country unique.[4]

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

17. What is the goal of the PCR act?

18. What are two punishments as per the PCR act?

2.9 SUMMARY

- Caste is an ancient social institution that has been a part of Indian history and culture for thousands of years. This unit discussed the system of stratification in India — the caste system. This unit provided an understanding of the various features of castes and the sociological views to understand the system. The differences between *varna* and *jati* are explained and the factors that have brought about the recent changes associated with the caste system have also been explained.

- The concept of untouchability has been explained in detail and the offences and crimes related to it have been discussed. The Government of India has enforced the Protection of Civil Rights Act which implements various plans and policies for the upliftment of the weaker and marginalized sections of the population. The PCR Act prescribes minimum sentence and imprisonment as well as enhanced penalty on subsequent conviction.

2.10 KEY TERMS

- **Caste:** A system of social stratification
- **Caste Panchayat:** The ruling body for a caste or *jati*
- **Endogamy:** People can marry only members of their own castes
- **Jati:** An endogamous community with a more or less defined ritual status

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[4.] See Ghurye pp. 143–239; Cf Issacs, *India's Ex-untouchables*, p. 106.

- **Varna:** A system of differentiation in the epoch of the Asiatic mode of production which was characterized by general exploitation

- **Untouchability:** A social practice in India of treating some people unjustly because of their low ascribed status

2.11 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Portuguese

2. M.N. Srinivas

3. Structural, universalistic

4. (i) Membership is confined to those who are born of members and include all persons so born.

   (ii) Membership is forbidden by an inexorable social law to men outside the group.

5. (i) Makes decisions about matters pertaining to castes

   (ii) Judges matters like petty assaults and non-payment of debts

6. By finding out from whom a designated caste takes water.

7. *Pukka khana* is cooked with butter and flour and sugar while *kachcha khana* is cooked with water or salt.

8. *Vri*, which means colour.

9. Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.

10. *Dahae*, which means common man.

11. British rule, Western education, industrialization.

12. Decline in the supremacy of Brahmins; inter-caste marriages were made more common.

13. Chandalas, Avarnas

14. 1955

15. Untouchability is the product, not of the caste system, but the distinction of high and low status that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it.

16. Seating arrangements in school, travelling in buses.

17. The goal of the PCR Act was to impose penalties for encouraging the practice of untouchability and for any kind of differentiation on the grounds of untouchabilty.

18. (i) The Government may suspend or resume the grants to institutions punished for refusing to admit if they receive government grants.

    (ii) While convicting for refusing to sell or render service, the court may, without prejudice to other penalty, cancel or suspend licence.

2.12 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. State three definitions of caste as given by eminent sociologists.
2. What are the four approaches of the caste system?
3. List the six characteristics of the caste system as explained by Ghurye.
4. List five religious restrictions imposed by society on members of lower castes.
5. Differentiate between *varna* and *jati*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. How can the cultural view of the caste system be explained?
2. Explain the four categories of society as per the *Rig Veda*.
3. Assess the impact of British rule on the Indian caste system.
4. Explain the punishments for violating the PCR Act.
5. Explain the sociological debate on the caste system.
6. 'The caste system in India has a complex nature.' Do you agree? Substantiate your answer with examples.
7. Elaborate on the six characteristics of the caste system as propounded by Ghurye.
8. Describe the recent changes in the caste system.
9. Examine the features of the Protection of Civil Rights Act.

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UNIT 3 RURAL ECONOMY AND RELIGION

Structure

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit is divided into two sections, rural economy and religion. The unit will help you to understand the nature of village economy in the pre-industrial phase as well as in the post-industrial phase. You will learn about the *jajmani* system and the changes associated with it. The unit also explores the sociological dimensions of economic life where you will learn about the viewpoints of various sociologists. It discusses cottage and small-scale industries, agriculture and allied activities, and so on. Finally, the dynamics of rural society are explored in the first section of the unit.

The second section of this unit provides an understanding of religion in general with a particular focus on rural religions. Some theories about the origin of religion are explained and you will be able to understand the various primitive forms and functions of religion. You will learn the nature of rural religion, the beliefs and practices and festivals of the rural people. At the end of this unit, you will learn about the various changes in the religious life of rural people.

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

- Understand the nature of village economy in the pre-industrial and post-industrial phases
- Explain the *jajmani* system and the changes associated with it
- Describe the views of different sociologists regarding economic life in India
- Assess the importance of the small-scale village industry
- Understand the meaning and evolution of religion in India
- Explain the various forms of religion
- Identify the religious beliefs and practices of rural India

3.2 THE NATURE OF VILLAGE ECONOMY

The village has been an important unit of social and economic organization since the pre-historic period. The standard and often reprinted quotation on the Indian village as a monolithic, atomistic, unchanging entity, is from a report by Sir Charles Metcalfe, one of the founding administrators of British rule in India. The passage begins, 'The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations.' (Mandelbaum, 1970). Others who have a significant contribution towards studies of villages are Sir Henry Maine, Mahatma Gandhi, Karl Marx, M.N. Srinivas, etc. The villages or 'little communities' as termed by Robert Redfield are societies

characterized by a 'we-feeling' or a communitarian life. The traditional view of Indian village portrays it as a self-sufficient unit.

The *Rig Veda* also mentions that the society is divided into many dynamic hierarchical groups of which the smallest unit is the family, and many such families constitute a village. In ancient literature, the word village was interpreted as a group of families living at one place. The leader of the village was known as *gramini*. Even in the epic Mahabharata, there are references of village communities as rudimentary units of administration. Besides the Mahabharata, many other books of ancient literature have mentioned the village. According to *Manusmriti*, a village is the smallest unit of administration which has its own individual organization.

But with the passage of time, modern field studies show that villages are no longer self-sufficient and hardly republics. Inter-village trade, marital alliances and other economic needs makes a particular village dependent on another. However, the study of rural communities has become indispensable in the field of anthropology and sociology. Post-Independence, the Indian government has paid special attention to the progress and improvement of the villages. Thus the studies of rural communities were assisted by the governemnment. D.N. Majumdar's *Caste and Communication in an Indian Village* (1958), Oscar Lewis's *Village Life in Northern India*, *Indian Village* by S.C. Dube and *India's Villages* by M.N. Srinivas (1968), are some important sociological contributions after Independence.

A village community can be defined as a group of persons permanently residing in a definite geographical area and whose members have developed community consciousness and cultural, social and economic relations which distinguish them from other communities. The traditional, rural economy in India was primarily a subsistence economy in which the economic organization involved exchange of goods and services between various local *jatis* within the framework of *jajmani* relations. Periodic markets were held on festive occasions where goods and services of various artisan castes as well as products manufactured in the urban centres, were exchanged. Though these periodic markets did not constitute an integral part of the rural economy, they were more valued for their social, rather than economic functions. A limited degree of cash economy and market exchange existed in pre-industrial urban centres. Such limited market exchange did not influence the society in any significant way. The system of land revenue settlement introduced by the British demanded the payment of revenue in cash. The village economy got linked to the urban economy and later indirectly to the national economy. But this partial monetization and extension of the market economy to rural areas had only negative consequences and did not bring about any significant change in social relations.

Only after Independence was there an expansion of the market economy. However, widespread expansion of market and monetization had far-reaching consequences for the traditional rural economy. First, with the introduction of a market economy, there was a change in the nature of production. The market economy opened up avenues for mobility. The volume of trade and commerce

increased, which facilitated economic integration of Indian society. Occupational diversification and increasing specialization of occupations in turn created a demand for educational institutions to provide specialized training. The market economy had its impact even on the most conventional vocations. Owen M. Lynch in his study of the Jatavs of Agra city said that they were traditionally engaged as stone cutters, labourers, scavengers and tanners of leather. The shoe industry developed and they made economic progress. However, the sociological effects of those economic changes were many. With the development of the shoe industry, the Jatavs became residentially segregated and their interaction with other castes was reduced to a minimum. This consequently loosened the upper castes' control over the Jatavs.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Who wrote *Caste and Communication in an Indian Village*?

2. What professions did the Jatavs of Agra follow?

3. What is the main characteristic of an industrial society?

3.3 FEATURES OF PRE-INDUSTRIAL AND INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

The economic system of rural India is founded mainly on functional specialization and interdependence among various castes. Each village has several *jati* segments which have separate ties in certain spheres. But there are also neighbourhood ties, and personal and family relationships and animosities. Three aspects of inter-*jati* and inter-personal relations within the village merit special consideration; the inter-dependence of *jatis* through the exchange of specialized occupational services; the functioning of village panchayats (generally involving representatives of all *jatis* residing in the village) in addition to *jati* panchayats; and the factional politics of the village. (Dube, 1990). In this unit we will discuss the system of village economy based on occupational inter-dependence of castes, called the *jajmani* system.

Pre-industrial economies were basically agrarian economies. These were characterized by the preponderance of extended kin groups. Kinship loyalties tend to be very strong and are based on interpersonal interactions to a large extent. Economic activities and division of labour were very simple in primitive societies. The division of labour was based on age and sex. It was self-sufficient in fulfilling economic needs. The custom of offering gifts in these societies developed as social obligation on one hand and as a kind of primitive trade on the other. Surplus production made possible the exchange of commodities between groups. Agrarian economy was characterized by the use of land as the main source of production; collective, familial or personal ownership of land; development of an exchange

system for excess production, and development of regular markets. Daryle Forde, in a comprehensive survey of primitive societies, shows that there is considerable variation in institutions within the same economic type.

Historians have also gathered enough evidence to show that the Indian village was internally undifferentiated and self-sufficient. During the Mughal period of Indian history, economic differentiation had progressed considerably among the peasantry. There were large cultivators using hired labour and raising crops for the market, and there were small peasants who could barely produce enough food grains for their own subsistence. Beyond this differentiation among the peasantry, there were still more definite divisions between the caste peasantry and the 'menial' population (Habib, 1982).

However, after the middle of the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution and industrialization took the form of a definite system. The industrial economy is based on differentiation and a complex division of labour. Since Independence, the process of industrialization has progressed more rapidly. At the same time, much effort has been devoted to raising the level of productivity in agriculture as an indispensable basis for capital accumulation and industrial expansion. It is apparent from studies that economic growth in India is impeded by numerous social factors: high fertility, the caste system, resistance to innovation founded upon religious belief, dependence of the individual in a joint family, and so on. On the other hand, there are clear signs that economic progress is ardently desired and that national planning as well as government encouragement to private enterprise is generally approved. Industrialization and economic growth depend as much on understanding social factors as on economic calculation.

Industrial society is characterized by a high degree of division of labour. The importance of primary relations and kinship ties are reduced and a great deal of social interaction occurs in secondary groups and large, anonymous urban communities. Given the condition of anomie, alienation and rapidity of change, community integration is a major problem in industrial societies.

3.4 THE *JAJMANI* SYSTEM AND ITS BEARING ON TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

The *jajmani* system is a system of traditional occupational obligations. Castes in early India were economically interdependent on one another. The traditional specialized occupation of a villager followed the specialization assigned to his caste. The specialization of occupation led to the exchange of services in village society. This relationship between the 'servicing' and the 'serviced' castes was not contractual, individual, impersonal or temporary but was caste oriented, long term and broadly supportive. The relation between a landowning family and the landless families that supplied them goods and services is known as the *jajmani* system.

The term *jajmani* system was introduced by W.H. Wiser in his book *The Hindu Jajmani System* based on his study of Karimpur village in UP. Harold Gould has described the *jajmani* system as an inter-familiar inter-caste relationship pertaining to the patterning of superordinate and subordinate relations between patrons and suppliers of services. The patrons are the families of clean castes while the suppliers of services are the families of lower and unclean castes. The system is reciprocal to the extent that a man of a comparatively low caste will serve a Brahman patron on certain occasions, while on others the same Brahman will serve him, in turn, in his role of priest at family rites. The *jajmani* system is essentially an agriculture based system of production and distribution of goods and services. Through the *jajmani* relations the occupational *jatis* get linked with the landowning dominant caste. The *jajmani* system operates around the families belonging to the landowning dominant caste, the members of which are called *jajman*s. The landowning caste maintains a paternalistic attitude of superiority towards their occupational castes who are called *Kamin*s in northern India. In terms of Karl Polanyi's classification of exchange system *jajmani* exchange can be termed as a *redistributive system of exchange*. The *jajmani* relations entail ritual matters and social support as well as economic exchanges. Pauline Kolenda, referring to *jajmani* system has said 'Hindu *jajmani* system may be approached as an institution or social system within Indian villages made up of a network of roles and into the system as a whole and legitimized and supported by general cultural values.'

3.4.1 Nature of *Jajmani* Relations

Jajmani relations are exclusive in that the farmer family is supposed to carry on such relations with only one blacksmith family, and those blacksmiths should make tools only for their own farmer families. The families of village officials or village servants, e.g., the watchman, maintains *jajmani* relations with the whole village rather than with particular families.

A patron family must carry on *jajmani* relations with those whose services are required for ritual purposes, especially concerning the family's pollution and also with those whose services and products are materially useful. Though most of these castes have specialized occupations yet they perform multiple functions. For instance, though barbers have a specialized occupation of cutting hair yet they have multiple roles to play in a wedding. The barber's wife cleans and refurnishes the house, massages the bride, helps her bathe and dress. She joins in the wedding songs sung when the groom's party is met. The barber accompanies the wedding party in the ceremonial round, doing for the members of the wedding whatever tasks need to be done. He is present through all the rituals, helping the priest, performing such duties as the formal tying of the groom's shirt to the corner of the bride's dress. In return, the barber and his wife are given a sum of money and tips of a rupee or two when they perform some special service in the course of the rites. S.C. Dube, on the basis of his study of Shamirpet village near Hyderabad,

has shown how barbers play the additional roles of matchmakers and messengers. *Jajmani* associates are expected to be, and some are, broadly supportive of each other, with the quality of ready help that close kinsmen are expected to show.

3.4.2 *Jajmani* Payments and Obligations

The relation usually involves multiple kinds of payments and obligations as well as multiple functions. N.S. Reddy in his study of Senapur village of eastern UP in 1955, found that the traditional work of Lohars was as iron or blacksmiths. But in Senapur they also worked with wood because there were no carpenters in this village. They make and repair agricultural implements for the landowner farmers, the thakurs. This work is apportioned among the Lohars according to hereditary shares. Each family has an exclusive and inalienable right over its share of work, which is not encroached upon by others. According to Harold Gould, these lower castes (*kamin*s) make their own *jajmani* arrangements either through direct exchange of labour or by paying in cash or kind. In some villages in Mysore that Alan Beals has studied, men of the lowest *jati*s are employed as village servants, as watchmen and irrigators. This gives them a more assured income than that enjoyed by families of several other *jati*s which rank higher in the local hierarchies. In Gould's tabulation of actual *jajmani* payments in Sherupur village (Faizabad district, UP), 'the washerman received the lowest average remuneration, the barbers next lowest, and the carpenter and blacksmiths the highest in order of precedence which accords perfectly with their relative traditional statuses'.

3.4.3 Change and Continuity in *Jajmani* Relations

The *jajmani* relationship has by now been largely supplanted in many villages, although in a few it has completely disappeared. The power of a local dominant *jati*, has been reduced in many places because their village dependents can move away more easily than was formerly possible, and can earn some income from outside the village as well. Yet the advantages of *jajmani* as a method of economic stability and security are still sufficiently great so that many villagers want to continue with at least some such arrangements. The cultivator gains from them in that he gets better credit and a more certain labour supply than he usually can through cash transactions. In addition to the economic benefits, the ritual services that *jajmani* associates provide are still in demand. Some landowners in villages of Poona district keep up *jajmani* relations mainly so that they may have ritual services readily available, as when a waterman must cleanse polluted clothing after a death, or when a messenger of low *jati* must be sent around to relatives with the news of a death, or when a goldsmith must purify the household deities. In a village of Barmer district in western Rajasthan, there have been notable changes, but when Bose and Jodha studied the villages in 1963, many of them still maintained some *jajmani* relations. Certain families no longer perform their traditional occupations but may keep up certain *jajmani* relations. In a study conducted of 400 households, about 129, which is 75 per cent maintained *jajmani* ties with families of the low leather worker *jati*. About 60 per cent maintained such ties with carpenter families.

Though *jajmani* relations are clearly important in the eyes of these villagers, they are of minor consequences in the village economy. *Jajmani* interchange, in this and many other villages, still provides a measure of economic credit and stability and it also helps to define the local social order by identifying those who can secure ample ritual services.

3.4.4 *Jajmani* System: An Exploitative System

Whether the *jajmani* system is an exploitative system is questionable. Biedleman (1959) explicitly equates the *jajman* with 'exploiter' and the *kamin* with 'exploited' and characterized the system as feudal. He believes the *jajmani* system to be one of the chief instruments of coercion, control and legitimization wielded by high caste, landowning Hindus. The *kamin*s are totally dependent on the *jajman*s. The *jajman*s, on the other hand, treat the *kamin*s in a paternalistic way and help them socially in emergencies. The *jajmani* exchanges are considered mutually beneficial; they tolerate the occasional irrelevant demands of their *kamin*s just as the *kamin*s tolerate the occasional coercion of their *jajman*s. Therefore, to consider the *jajmani* as an exploitative system would be illogical. Kolenda, Orenstein and Harold Gould have maintained that condemning *jajmani* arrangements as brutally exploitative is too sweeping a generalization. The system persists not because of any rational economic motivations but because of its importance to the maintenance of the social status and patterns of social interaction that are essential to the successful practice of rural Hinduism. To Gould, the *jajman* status refers to a religio-economic category rather than a social stratum. Thus, it can be concluded that *jajman*s cannot be perceived as exploiters, and the desire to become a *jajman* is not a desire to get feudal status or a common inclination to 'exploit the weak' but the wish to practice certain rituals and a way of life necessitating the avoidance of impurity.

3.4.5 Decline of *Jajmani* System and Changes

The *jajmani* system was challenged when India came under foreign domination. Gradually, after independence, the stability of the system was at stake. In order to bring about economic development deliberate attempts were made to link village economy to the regional and national markets by establishing transport and communication networks. As a result, the self-sufficiency of rural economy was destroyed. The process of planned development initiated after Independence was oriented towards bringing about capitalistic transformation in agriculture. However, the important changes in society that have affected the *jajmani* system in the last five or six decades are: reduction in the powers of the village elders, effect of the factory system and industrialization on the quality of services rendered by the *kamin*s, changes in the rigidity of the caste system, introduction of land reforms, better employment in urban areas, etc. The dominant castes now prefer to summon political help rather than depend on their *kamin*s for support. Irawati Karve and Y.B. Damle, found two-thirds of their respondents (222 out of 326) in a survey

conducted in 1962 in five villages in Maharashtra, and Bose and Jodha found 86 per cent (111 out of 129) of the respondents in their survey conducted in 1963 in Barmer district in western Rajasthan, in favour of *jajmani* system. This was due to the economic benefits, the availability of the ritual services, getting of dependable support by the landowners from some of the families and castes in their factional struggles, and getting patron's protection in exigencies. Yet the fact is that the traditional *jajmani* relations have weakened in recent years. Hardly any village economy is now carried on through *jajmani* arrangements. Biedleman too is of the opinion that it is doubtful if the *jajmani* system will survive in the coming years.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. What is the *jajmani* system?
5. Who used the term *jajmani* for the first time?
6. Differentiate between *kamins* and *jajmans*.
7. What are the main disadvantages of the *jajmani* system?
8. What is an important change to affect the *jajmani* system?

3.5 THE INDIAN AGRARIAN CONTEXT

India has been a predominantly agricultural country with agriculture being the backbone of rural economy. According to Census 2001, 56.6 per cent of the population are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Agriculture has been a dominant mode of occupation and one of the largest contributors (18.5 per cent) to GDP. A rural economy relies on agriculture and the allied activities of agriculture are dairy, poultry, fishery, goat and sheep, sericulture, etc. In this context, the study of agrarian economy becomes an important aspect of social sciences. In fact, agrarian studies have not occupied a central position in sociological discourse like studies on caste, kinship, gender, etc. Though some sociologists who have worked on developmental studies have made some references, yet agrarian studies came to the core of the discipline of sociology with the publication of Andre Beteille's 'Studies in Agrarian Social Structure' in 1974. Beteille pointed out that the Indian village was characterized by a baffling variety of land relations and a complex hierarchy of ownership rights over land. By defining little communities not in relation to land but through other social institutions like kinship, religion and social organization of caste, there was a shift away from looking at the rural population in relation to agriculture and land (there were some notable exceptions to the broad trend such as Bailey, 1958; Gough, 1955; Mukherjee, 1971).

Much before village studies were initiated by professional anthropologists during the early 1950s, social life in the Indian village and its agrarian structures