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Indian Society Preview

INDIAN SOCIETY

GS Mains Paper I

For Civil Services Exams

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UNIT 1 UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Introduction

This unit deals with unity and diversity in India. You may have heard a lot about unity and diversity in India. But do you know what exactly it means? Here we will explain to you the meaning and content of this phrase. For this purpose, the unit has been divided into three sections.

In the first section, we will specify the meaning of the two terms, diversity and unity. In the second section, we will illustrate the forms of diversity in Indian society. For detailed treatment we will focus on the four forms of diversity, race, language, religion and caste.

In the third section, we will bring out the bonds of unity in India. These are geopolitical, the culture of pilgrimage, tradition of accommodation, and tradition of interdependence.

Above all, we will note that the unity of India is born of a composite culture rather than a uniform culture.

Concepts of Unity and Diversity

We begin by clarifying the meaning of the terms diversity and unity.

Meaning of Diversity

Ordinarily diversity means differences. For our purposes, however, it means something more than mere differences. It means collective differences, that is, differences which mark off one group of people from another. These differences may be of any sort: biological, religious, linguistic etc. On the basis of biological differences, for example, we have racial diversity. On the basis of religious differences, similarly, we have religious diversity. The point to note is that diversity refers to collective differences.

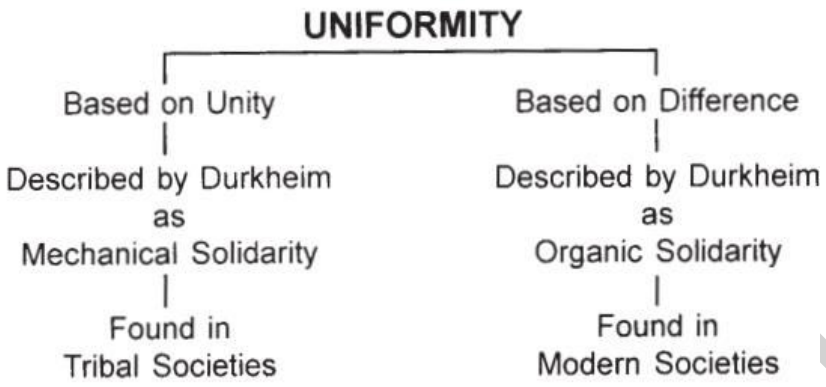
The term diversity is opposite of uniformity. Uniformity means similarity of some sort that characterises a people. 'Uni' refers to one; 'form' refers to the common ways. So when there is something common to all the people, we say they show uniformity. When students of a school, members of the police or the army wear the same type of dress, we say they are in 'uniform'. Like diversity, thus, uniformity is also a collective concept. When a group of people share a similar characteristic, be it language or religion or anything else, it shows uniformity in that respect. But when we have groups of people hailing from different races, religions and cultures, they represent diversity.

Thus, diversity means variety. For all practical purposes it means variety of groups and cultures. We have such a variety in abundance in India. We have here a variety of races, of religions, of languages, of castes and of cultures. For the same reason India is known for its socio-cultural diversity.

Meaning of Unity

Unity means integration. It is a social psychological condition. It connotes a sense of one-ness, a sense of we-ness. It stands for the bonds, which hold the members of a society together.

There is a difference between unity and uniformity. Uniformity presupposes similarity, unity does not. Thus, unity may or may not be based on uniformity. Unity may be born out of uniformity. Durkheim calls this type of unity a mechanical solidarity. We find this type of unity in tribal societies and in traditional societies. However, unity may as well be based on differences. It is such unity, which is described by Durkheim as organic solidarity. This type of unity characterises modern societies. Let us see it in a diagram.



The point to note is that unity does not have to be based on uniformity. Unity, as we noted earlier, implies integration. Integration does not mean absence of differences. Indeed, it stands for the ties that bind the diverse groups with one another.

Forms of Diversity in India

As hinted earlier, we find in India diversity of various sorts. Some of its important forms are the following: racial, linguistic, religious and caste-based. Let us deal with each one of them in some detail.

Racial Diversity

You may have seen people of different races in India. A race is a group of people with a set of distinctive physical features such as skin colour, type of nose, form of hair, etc.

Herbert Risley had classified the people of India into seven racial types. These are (i) Turko-Iranian, (ii) Indo-Aryan, (iii) Scytho-Dravidian, (iv) Aryo-Dravidian, (v) Mongolo-Dravidian, (vi) Mongoloid, and (vii) Dravidian. These seven racial types can be reduced to three basic types-the Indo-Aryan, the Mongolian and the Dravidian. In his opinion the last two types would account for the racial composition of tribal India. He was the supervisor of the census operations held in India in 1891 and it was data from this census, which founded the basis of this classification. As, it was based mainly on language-types rather than physical characteristics; Risley's classification was criticised for its shortcomings.

Other administrative officers and anthropologists, like J.H. Hutton, D.N. Majumdar and B.S. Guha, have given the latest racial classification of the Indian people based on further researches in this field. Hutton's and Guha's classifications are based on 1931 census operations. B.S. Guha (1952) has identified six racial types (1) the Negrito, (2) the Proto Australoid, (3) the Mongoloid, (4) the Mediterranean, (5) the Western Brachycephals, and (6) the Nordic. Besides telling you what the various types denote, we shall not go into the details of this issue, because that will involve us in technical matters pertaining to physical anthropology. Here, we need only to be aware of the diversity of racial types in India.

Negritos: Negritos are the people who belong to the black racial stock as found in Africa. They have black skin colour, frizzle hair, thick lips, etc. In India some of the tribes in South India, such as the Kadar, the Irula and the Paniyan have distinct Negrito strain.

Proto-Australoid: The Proto-Australoid races consist of an ethnic group, which includes the Australian aborigines and other peoples of southern Asia and Pacific Islands. Representatives of this group are the Ainu of Japan, the Vedda of Sri Lanka, and the Sakai of Malaysia. In India the tribes of Middle India belong to this strain. Some of these tribes are the Ho of Singhbhumi, Bihar, and the Bhil of the Vindhya ranges.

They have been divided into three types:
i) the Alpenoid is characterised by broad head with rounded occiput (the back part of the head or skull) prominent nose, medium stature, round face. Skin colour is light; hair on face and body is abundant, body is thickly set. This type is found among the Bania of Gujarat, the Kathi of Kathiawar, the Kayastha of Bengal etc.

ii) Amongst the Dinaric people, the head is broad with rounded occiput and high vault; nose is very long, stature is tall, face is long, forehead is receding; skin colour is darker, eyes and hair are also dark. This type is represented in Bengal, Orissa and Coorg. The Brahmin of Bengal and the Kanarese Brahmin of Mysore are also some of the representatives.

iii) The Armenoid is in most of the characters like the Dinaric. In the former, the shape of occiput is more marked and the nose is more prominent and narrower. The Parsi of Bombay show typical Armenoid characteristics.

Mongoloids: The Mongoloids are a major racial stock native to Asia, including the peoples of northern and eastern Asia. For example, Chinese, Japanese, Burmese, Eskimos, and often American Indians also belong to this race. In India, the North Eastern regions have tribes of brachycephalic Mongoloid strain. A slightly different kind of Mongoloid racial stock is found in the Brahmputra Valley. The Mikir-Bodo group of tribes and the Angami Nagas represent the best examples of Mongoloid racial composition in India.

Mediterranean: The Mediterranean races relate to the caucasian physical type, i.e., the white race. It is characterised by medium or short stature, slender build, long head with cephalic index (the ratio multiplied by 100 of the maximum breadth of the head to its maximum length) of less than 75 and dark (continental) complexion.

Western Brachycephals: The Western Brachycephals are divided into the following three sub-groups: (1) The Alpenoid are characterised by broad head, medium stature and light skin, found amongst Bania castes of Gujarat, the Kayasthas of Bengal, etc. (ii) The Dinaric- They are characterised by broad head, long nose, tall stature and dark skin colour, found amongst the Brahmin of Bengal, the non-Brahmin of Karnataka, (iii) The Armenoid- They are characterised by features similar to Dinaric. The Armenoid have a more marked shape of the back of head, a prominent and narrow nose. The Parsi of Bombay show the typical characteristics of the Armenoid race.

Nordic: Finally, the Nordic races belong to the physical type characterised by tall stature, long head, light skin and hair, and blue eyes. They are found in Scandinavian countries, Europe. In India, they are found in different parts of north of the country, especially in Punjab and Rajputana. The Kho of Chitral, the Red Kaffirs, the Khatash are some of the representatives of this type. Research suggests that the Nordics came from the north, probably from south east Russia and south west Siberia, through central Asia to India.

Linguistic Diversity

Do you know how many languages are there in India? While the famous linguist Grierson noted 179 languages and 544 dialects, the 2011 census on the other hand, reported more than 19,500 languages in India which are spoken as mother tongue. Not all these languages are, however, equally widespread. Many of them are tribal speeches and these are spoken by less than one percent of the total population.

Here you can see that in India there is a good deal of linguistic diversity. Only 22 languages are listed in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution. These are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri.

Out of these 22 languages, Hindi is spoken by 39.85 percent of the total population; Bengali, Telugu and Marathi by around 8 percent each; Tamil and Urdu by 6.26 and 5.22 percent, respectively; and the rest by less than 5 percent each as per 2011 census report.

The above constitutionally recognised languages belong to two linguistic families: Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu are the four major Dravidian languages. The languages of Indo-Aryan family are spoken by 75 percent of India's total population while the languages of Dravidian family are spoken by 20 percent.

This linguistic diversity notwithstanding, we have always had a sort of link language, though it has varied from age to age. In ancient times it was Sanskrit, in medieval age it was Arabic or Persian and in modern times we have Hindi and English as official languages.

Religious Diversity

India is a land of multiple religions. We find here followers of various faiths, particularly of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, among others. You know it that Hinduism is the dominant religion of India. According to the census of 1981 it is professed by 82.64 percent of the total population. Next comes Islam, which is practised by 11.35 percent. This is followed by Christianity having a following of 2.43 percent, Sikhism reported by 1.96 percent, Buddhism by 0.71 percent and Jainism by 0.48 percent. The religions with lesser following are Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Bahaism.

While Hinduism saw a slight reduction in the percentage of their followers by the year 1991, most of the other religions increased their strength though by very narrow margin. According to the 1991 census the Hinduism has 82.41 percent followers to the total population. 11.67 percent followed Islam and 2.32 percent followed Christianity. Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism followed by 1.99, 0.77 and 0.41 percent, respectively. And 0.43 reported to follow other religions.

Then there are sects within each religion. Hinduism, for example, has many sects including Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava. Add to them the sects born or religious reform movements such as Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Ram Krishna Mission. More recently, some new cults have come up such as Radhaswami, Saibaba, etc. Similarly, Islam is divided into Shiya and Sunni; Sikhism into Namdhari and Nirankari; Jainism into Digambar and Shvetambar; and Buddhism into Hinayan and Mahayan.

While Hindu and Muslim are found in almost all parts of India, the remaining minority religions have their pockets of concentration. Christians have their strongholds in the three southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh and in the north-eastern states like Nagaland and Meghalaya. Sikhs are concentrated largely in Punjab, Buddhists in Maharashtra, and Jains are mainly spread over Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Gujarat, but also found in most urban centres throughout the country.

Caste Diversity

India, as you know, is a country of castes. The term caste is generally used in two senses: sometimes in the sense of Varna and sometimes in the sense of Jati. (i) Varna refers to a segment of the four-fold division of Hindu society based on functional criterion. The four Varna are Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra with their specialised functions as learning, defence, trade and manual service. The Varna hierarchy is accepted all over India. (ii) Jati refers to a hereditary endogamous status group practising a specific traditional occupation. You may be surprised to know that there are more than 3,000 jati in India. These are hierarchically graded in different ways in different regions.

It may also be noted that the practice of caste system is not confined to Hindus alone. We find castes among the Muslim, Christian, Sikh as well as other communities. You may have heard of the hierarchy of Shaikh, Saiyed, Mughal, Pathan among the Muslim. Furthermore, there are castes like teli (oil pressure), dhobi (washerman), darjee (tailor), etc. among the Muslim. Similarly, caste consciousness among the Christian in India is not unknown. Since a vast majority of Christians in India are converted from Hindu fold, the converts have carried the caste system into Christianity. Among the Sikh again you have so many castes including Jat Sikh and Majahabi Sikh (lower castes). In view of this you can well imagine the extent of caste diversity in India. In addition to the above described major forms of diversity, we have diversity of many other sorts like settlement patterns - tribal, rural, urban; marriage and kinship patterns along religious and regional lines; cultural patterns reflecting regional variations, and so on.

Bonds of Unity in India

In the preceding section we have illustrated the diversity of India. But that is not the whole story. There are bonds of unity underlying all this diversity. These bonds of unity may be located in a certain underlying uniformity of life as well as in certain mechanisms of integration. Census Commissioner in 1911, Herbert Risley (1969), was right when he observed: "Beneath the manifold diversity of physical and social type, language, custom and religion which strikes the observer in India there can still be discerned ..... a certain underlying uniformity of life from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin". We will describe the bonds of unity of India in this section. These are geo-political unity, the institution of pilgrimage, tradition of accommodation, and tradition of interdependence. We will now describe each of them in that order.

Geo-political Unity

The first bond of unity of India is found in its geo-political integration. India is known for its geographical unity marked by the Himalayas in the north end and the oceans on the other sides. Politically India is now a sovereign state. The same constitution and same parliament govern every part of it. We share the same political culture marked by the norms of democracy, secularism and socialism. Although it has not been recognised till recently, the geo-political unity of India was always visualized by our seers and rulers. The expressions of this consciousness of the geo-political unity of India are found in Rig-Veda, in Sanskrit literature, in the edicts of Asoka, in Buddhist monuments and in various other sources. The ideal of geo-political unity of India is also reflected in the concepts of Bharatvarsha (the old indigenous classic name for India), Chakravarti (emperor), and Ekchhatradhipatya (under one rule).

The Institution of Pilgrimage

Another source of unity of India lies in what is known as temple culture, which is reflected in the network of shrines and sacred places. From Badrinath and Kedarnath in the north to Rameshwaram in the south, Jagannath Puri in the east to Dwaraka in the west the religious shrines and holy rivers are spread throughout the length and breadth of the country. Closely related to them is the age-old culture of pilgrimage, which has always moved people to various parts of the country and fostered in them a sense of geo-cultural unity.

As well as being an expression of religious sentiment, pilgrimage is also an expression of love for the motherland, a sort of mode of worship of the country. It has played a significant part in promoting interaction and cultural affinity among the people living in different parts of India. Pilgrimage can, therefore, rightly be viewed as a mechanism of geo-cultural unity.

Tradition of Accommodation

Have you heard of the syncretic quality of Indian culture, its remarkable quality of accommodation and tolerance? There is ample evidence of it. The first evidence of it lies in the elastic character of Hinduism, the majority religion of India. It is common knowledge that Hinduism is not a homogeneous religion, a religion having one God, one Book and one Temple. Indeed, it can be best described as a federation of faiths. Polytheistic (having multiple deities) in character, it goes to the extent of accommodating village level deities and tribal faiths.

For the same reason, sociologists have distinguished two broad forms of Hinduism: sanskritic and popular. Sanskritic is that which is found in the texts (religious books like Vedas, etc.) and popular is that which is found in the actual life situation of the vast masses. Robert Redfield has called these two forms as great tradition of Ramayana and Mahabharata and the little tradition of worship of the village deity. And everything passes for Hinduism.

What it shows is that Hinduism has been an open religion, a receptive and absorbing religion, an encompassing religion. It is known for its quality of openness and accommodation.

Another evidence of it lies in its apathy to conversion. Hinduism is not a proselytising religion. That is, it does not seek converts. Nor has it ordinarily resisted other religions to seek converts

from within its fold. This quality of accommodation and tolerance has saved the way to the coexistence of several faiths in India.

Mechanisms of coexistence of people of different faiths have been in existence here for long. Take for example, the case of Hindu-Muslim amity. Hindus and Muslims have always taken part in each other's functions, festivities and feasts. How did they do it? They did it by evolving the mechanism of providing for a separate hearth and a set of vessels for each other so as to respect each other's religious sensibility. This always facilitated mutual visiting and sharing in each other's joy and grief. They have also done so by showing regards for each other's saints and holy men. Thus, both Hindus and Muslims have shown reverence to the saints and Pirs of each other. And this holds as well for the coexistence of other religious groups like Sikh, Jain, Christian and so on.

Tradition of Interdependence

We have had a remarkable tradition of interdependence, which has held us together throughout centuries. One manifestation of it is found in the form of Jajmani system, i.e., a system of functional interdependence of castes. The term "jajman" refers generally to the patron or recipient of specialised services. The relations were traditionally between a food producing family and the families that supported them with goods and services. These came to be called the jajmani relations. Jajmani relations were conspicuous in village life, as they entailed ritual matters, social support as well as economic exchange. The whole of a local social order was involved (the people and their values) in such jajmani links. A patron had jajmani relations with members of a high caste (like a Brahmin priest whose services he needed for rituals). He also required the services of specialists from the lower jati to perform those necessary tasks like washing of dirty clothes, cutting of hair, cleaning the rooms and toilets, delivery of the child etc. Those associated in these interdependent relations were expected to be and were broadly supportive of each other with qualities of ready help that generally close kinsmen were expected to show.

The jajmani relations usually involved multiple kinds of payment and obligations as well as multiple functions.

We shall also discuss the jajmani system in the next unit on Rural Social Structure. Here it will suffice to note that no caste was self-sufficient. If anything, it depended for many things on other castes. In a sense, each caste was a functional group in that it rendered a specified service to other caste groups. Jajmani system is that mechanism which has formalised and regulated this functional interdependence.

Furthermore, castes cut across the boundaries of religious communities. We have earlier mentioned that notions of caste are found in all the religious communities in India. In its actual practice, thus, the institution of jajmani provides for inter linkages between people of different religious groups. Thus a Hindu may be dependent for the washing of his clothes on a Muslim washerman. Similarly, a Muslim may be dependent for the stitching of his clothes on a Hindu tailor, and vice-versa.

Efforts have been made from time to time by sensitive and sensible leaders of both the communities to synthesise Hindu and Muslim traditions so as to bring the two major

communities closer to each other. Akbar, for example, founded a new religion, Din-e-Ilahi, combining best of both the religions. The contributions made by Kabir, Eknath, Guru Nanak, and more recently Mahatma Gandhi, are well known in this regard.

Similarly, in the field of art and architecture we find such a happy blending of Hindu and Muslim styles. What else is this if not a proof of mutual appreciation for each other's culture? Quite in line with these traditional bonds of unity, the Indian state in postIndependence era has rightly opted for a composite culture model of national unity rather than a uniform culture model. The composite culture model provides for the preservation and growth of plurality of cultures within the framework of an integrated nation. Hence the significance of our choice of the norm of secularism, implying equal regard for all religions, as our policy of national integration.

The above account of the unity of India should not be taken to mean that we have always had a smooth sailing in matters of national unity, with no incidents of caste, communal or linguistic riots. Nor should it be taken to mean that the divisive and secessionist tendencies have been altogether absent. There have been occasional riots, at times serious riots. For example, who can forget the communal riots of partition days, the linguistic riots in Tamil Nadu in protest against the imposition of Hindi, the riots in Gujarat during 1980s between scheduled and non-scheduled castes and communal riots of 2002? The redeeming feature, however, is that the bonds of unity have always emerged stronger than the forces of disintegration.

UNIT 2 RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Introduction

Unit 2 on Rural Social Structures deals with the major element of diversity of social life in India. Rural way of living is the dominant pattern of social life in developing countries like India in contrast to the predominant urban style in the developed countries. Social scientists, especially sociologists and social anthropologists, have made important contributions to the understanding of rural social structure.

The Nature of Rural Social Structure

In order to gain an understanding of rural social structure, we first clarify what we mean by social structure. Then we relate this understanding of the concept to ethnographic description of society in the rural areas of India.

Social Structure

Human world is composed of individuals. Individuals interact with one another for the fulfillment of their needs. In this process, they occupy certain status and roles in social life with accompanying rights and obligations. Their social behaviour is patterned and gets associated with certain norms and values, which provide them guidance in social interaction. There emerge various social units, such as groups, community, associations and institutions in society as a product of social intercourse in human life.

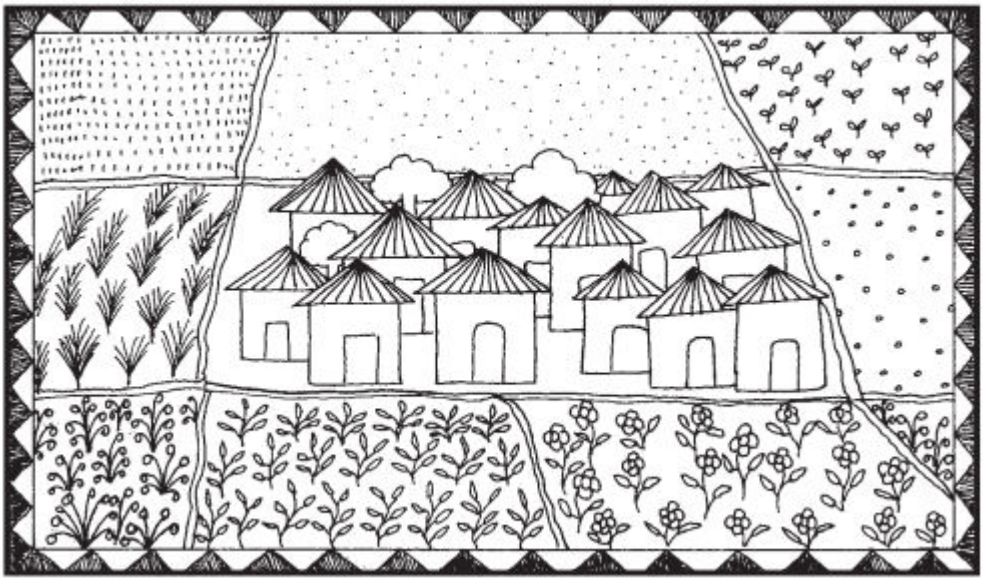
In this scenario, social structure is conceived as the pattern of inter-related statuses and roles found in a society, constituting a relatively stable set of social relations. It is the organised pattern of the inter-related rights and obligations of persons and groups in a system of interaction.

Rural Social Structure in India

India is a country of ancient civilisation that goes back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, which flourished during the third millennium B.C. Since then except for a brief interlude during the Rig-Vedic period (Circa 1500-1000 B.C.) when the urban centres were overrun, rural and urban centres have coexisted in India.

Rural and urban centres share some common facets of life. They show Rural Social Structure interdependence especially in the sphere of economy, urbanward migration, and townsmen or city dwellers' dependence on villages for various products (e.g., foodgrains, milk, vegetables, raw materials for industry) and increasing dependence of villagers on towns for manufactured goods and market. Despite this interdependence between the two there are certain distinctive features which separate them from each other in terms of their size, demographic composition, cultural moorings, style of life, economy, employment and social relations. Rural people live in settled villages. Three main types of settlement patterns have been observed in rural areas:

i) The most common type is the nucleated village found all over the country. Here, a tight cluster of houses is surrounded by the fields of the villagers. An outlying hamlet or several satellite hamlets are also found to be attached to some villages in this case.



ii) Secondly, there are linear settlements in some parts of the country, e.g. in Kerala, in Konkan and in the delta lands of Bengal. In such settlements, houses are strung out, each surrounded by its own compound. However, there is little to physically demarcate where one village ends and another begins.

iii) The third type of settlement is simply a scattering of homesteads or clusters of two or three houses. In this case also physical demarcation of villages is not clear. Such settlements are found in hill areas, in the Himalayan foothills, in the highlands of Gujarat and in the Satpura range of Maharashtra.

Further, we find that the size of village population is small and density of population low in comparison with towns and cities. India is rightly called a country of villages. According to 1981 Census, there were 4029 towns and 5,57,137 inhabited villages in the country. By the year 1991 this number increased to 4689 towns and 5,80,781 villages. According to 2001 census there are 5161 towns and 6,38,365 villages (including uninhabited villages) in India (Census of India (provisional), 2001). Moreover, as per 2001 census figures about 72 percent of the total population live in villages. Further, rural life is characterised by direct relationship of people to nature i.e., land, animal and plant life. Agriculture is their main occupation. For example, in India agriculture provides livelihood to about 58 percent of the labour force.

Long enduring rural social institutions in India continue to be family, kinship, caste, class, and village. They have millennia old historical roots and structures. They encompass the entire field of life: social, economic, political and cultural of the rural people. The complexity of social norms and values, statuses and roles, rights and obligations is reflected in them. Therefore, now we will discuss them separately in the subsequent sections.

Family and Kinship

Family is the basic unit of almost all societies. It is especially true in India where the very identity of a person is dependent on the status and position of his or her family and its social status.

Family in Rural India

Family is one of the most important social institution which constitutes the rural society. It caters to needs and performs functions, which are essential for the continuity, integration and change in the social system, such as, reproduction, production and socialisation.

Broadly speaking there are two types of family: (a) nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and unmarried children, and (b) joint or extended family comprising a few more kins than the nuclear type. Important dimensions of 'jointness' of family are coresidentiality, commensality, coparcenary, generation depth (three), and fulfillment of obligation towards kin and sentimental aspect.

Coresidentiality means that members of a family live under the same roof. Commensality implies that they eat together i.e., have a common kitchen. Coparcenary means that they have joint ownership of property. Further, generation depth encompasses three generations or more, i.e., grandfather, father and the son or more. Members of the family also have obligations toward their kin. Moreover, they have a sentimental attachment to the ideal of joint family.

Rural family works as the unit of economic, cultural, religious, and political activities. Collectivity of the family is emphasized in social life, and feelings of individualism and personal freedom are very limited. Marriage is considered an inter-familial matter rather than an inter-personal affair. It is governed by rules of kinship, which are discussed further in this unit.

Changes in Family

Traditional joint family occupied a predominant position in rural areas in India. It was largely prevalent among the landed gentry and priestly caste. But nuclear family also existed in India. Lower caste families whose main occupation was agricultural labour were mostly nuclear. However, they appreciated the ideal of joint family.

Various studies have been conducted to diagnose the change taking place in family in India with increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, changes in economy, technology, politics, education and law in modern times. There are two approaches. The first assumes that the family structure in India has undergone the process of unilinear change from the joint to nuclear form as in the West.

Secondly, I.P. Desai (1964), S.C. Dube (1955), T.N. Madan (1965), and others argue that it is necessary to observe family as a process. They adopt developmental cycle approach to understand changes in the family structure in India. They advocate that the presence of nuclear family households should be viewed as units, which will be growing into joint families when the sons grow up and marry. The 'developmental cycle' approach implies that a family structure keeps expanding, with birth and marriage, and depleting with death and partition in a cyclical order during a period of time.

Further, empirical studies show inter-regional and intra-regional variations in the distribution of family types. This is evident from the study by Pauline Kolenda (1967) who has made a comparative study of family structures in thirteen regions of India on the basis of 32 publications. In Uttar Pradesh, among the Thakurs of Senapur, joint families constitute 74.4 percent and nuclear families only 25.5 percent; but untouchables have 34 percent joint families

and 66 percent nuclear families. In the hilly region of the state of Uttar Pradesh in Sirkanda village, where most of the population is that of Rajputs, the joint families comprise only 39 percent and there are 61 percent nuclear families. In Maharashtra, Badlapur village has 14 percent joint and 86 percent nuclear families. In Andhra Pradesh, in Shamirpet village the proportion of joint families is 18.5 percent and that of nuclear is 81.5 percent.

Here, Kolenda has made a few generalisations. She observes that between regions, the rural areas of the Gangetic plains have higher proportion of joint families than those in the Central India, Maharashtra, Andhra and Tamil Nadu. In the Gangetic plains itself, joint families are more common among the Rajputs and nuclear families predominate among the lower castes.

It has been observed that with the changes in the larger society, the structure and function of joint family in India are undergoing a reconciliatory pattern of change. The traditional world-view of the joint family still prevails.

Lineage and Kinship

Within the village, a group of families tracing descent from a common ancestor with knowledge of all the links constitute a lineage; and the children of the same generation behave as brothers and sisters. They form a unit for celebrating major ritual events. Sometimes the word Kul is used to describe these units. Usually, these families live in closeness and a guest of one (e.g. a son-in-law) could be treated as such in all these families. These bonds of families may go back to 3 to 7 generations. People do not marry within this group. Beyond the known links, there are further connections? people know the common ancestor but are unable to trace every link. Such families use a more generic term like being "bhai-bandh" of one another. They are also exogamous. The word Gotra or clan may be used for them.

Adrian Mayer (1960) studied a village in Malwa and distinguished between the kindred of cooperation and kindred of recognition. The first of these is the smaller unit, where cooperation is offered and taken without formalities. The second one is a larger unit that comes together on specific occasions through information and invitation. These relations can be spread over several villages for each caste. This is why Mayer studied them within a caste and its Rural Social Structure region, a point that we need to remember in order to understand the spread of a caste/subcaste across villages and towns. This is also known as horizontal spread of the caste.

With regard to rules of marriage there are some differences between the north and south India. These have been pointed out in the next units. Irawati Karve (1965) noted these differences. Later, an American anthropologist, David Mandelbaum, included them in his popular work on Society in India (1972). He reiterates the position "broadly put, in the South a family tries to strengthen existing kin ties through marriage, while in the North a family tends to affiliate with a separate set of people to whom it is not already linked".

This is witnessed in the prevalence of the rules of village exogamy and 'gotra' exogamy in the North but not in the South. In the North, nobody is permitted to marry in his/her own village. Marriage alliances are concluded with the people from other villages belonging to similar caste. But no such proscriptions exist in the South. Further, in the North one cannot marry within his/her own gotra. On the contrary, cross cousin marriage i.e., marriage between the

children of brother and sister, is preferred in the South. Thus, there is a centrifugal tendency in North India, i.e., the direction of marriage is outward or away from the group. In contrast in South India we find a centripetal tendency in making marriage alliances and building kinship ties. In other words, marriages take place inwardly or within the group.

Caste Groups

So far we have learnt about smaller units of social structure, groups within which marriage is avoided by tradition. These groups can be called exogamous ('gamy' refers to marriage, and 'exo' means outside); thus exogamy is the practice of marrying outside a group. When members of a group marry within a group, it is called endogamy (endo= within, inside). Thus, family, lineage and clan are exogamous groups. Sub-castes/castes are endogamous groups and we turn our attention to these groups.

Caste

People usually marry within the caste or sub-caste. Members of a caste trace their origin from a common ancestor — historical, mythical or divine. The properties of that ancestor are worthy of being remembered by people; and these are well known to such an extent that a mere mention of that name is enough to recognise the group to which a person belongs. Among various views on caste in India, according to the context discussed here, we mention six characteristics of caste, offered by G.S. Ghurye. In his thesis to Cambridge University on Race and Caste in India, which has been revised and published several times, G.S. Ghurye (1961) suggested that caste names could indicate six different possibilities. Brij Raj Chauhan used these categories to illustrate the situation in his study, A Rajasthan Village, (1968) as shown in the following table:

Basis	Examples
1) Principle profession or crafts	Gadaria (shepherd), Nai (barber); Meghwal (leather worker), Suthar (carpenter), Dholi (drum beater)
2) Tribal/ethnic	Bhil
3) Religious movement	Sadhu- (Ramdasi, Kabirpanthi) (satnami in other parts)
4) Specific peculiarity or nick names	Bhangi, Kalal
5) Miscegenation (mixed descent)	Daroga

Here, we have identified two characteristics of caste so far: (i) it is an endogamous group; (ii) it has a common ancestor. As a part of this arrangement descendents of a common ancestor are divided into two groups, the smaller exogamous group, and the wider endogamous group. The first of these groups knows the stages of the links; the second treats it as given.

There are four other characteristics of caste as identified by Ghurye. Occupation is in some ways connected with caste, but not to the extent of prescribing it. Hence Ghurye used the

phrase — lack of choice regarding occupation. It has been known for instance that agriculturists, soldiers and confectioners have come from different castes. In some ways however, occupational connection is a ready reference for other groups to identify a person. Each caste has its own social rules regarding things it can take or not take, use or not use. These relate to dress, ornaments, and even place for living. In southern India, the Rural Social Structure ecology of the village reflects the caste divisions, the status going down as one moves from the north-east to the south or south-west. For example, in his study of a village in Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu, Beteille (1962) has shown that the Brahman live in an agraharam located in the north, non-Brahman somewhere in the middle, and at a distance to the south there is cheri or the colony for the lowest castes.

Some of the activities of the castes relate to the wider social setting which is based on the principle of ascription, birth determining the membership of a person and the status of the group. Each group in certain ways represents a segment of the society, and regulates its affairs. This has been called the

segmental division of society. In case of the caste-based society as a whole, each group is assigned a particular place on the social ladder. This arrangement reflects the hierarchy of castes, and in that sense other writers, like Kingsley Davis, say that the caste system represents the extreme degree of 'institutionalised inequality' in the world.

Sub-caste

A sub-caste is considered a smaller unit within a caste. In the village setting usually we find that there is only one sub-caste living there. A larger number of sub-castes indicate the late arrivals to a village. Thus for all practical purposes a sub-caste represents the caste in the village. In the wider setting of a region, however, we find many sub-castes. One example from Maharashtra is of kumbhar (potters). There are several groups among them; those who tap the clay, those who use the large wheel, those who use the small wheel. All the three are endogamous groups. Should they be called castes or sub-castes? Ghurye favours the second use, Karve the first one.

Both agree that the groups are endogamous, the difference of opinion is about origin. If one group broke into three parts — sub-caste would be a proper usage, and Ghurye thought that was the way things happened. If the three groups had independent origin then they could be called castes — and that is how Karve thought things had occurred. She points out that even linguistic differences exist among the groups and to the extent physical characteristics could help, they show a variation. In conclusion it can be said that sub-caste is the smallest endogamous group and it has some mechanisms like panchayats to regulate the behaviour of members in the traditional setting. In a village, the difference between caste and sub-caste does not come to the surface but in a region, the difference is visible.

This picture of castes and sub-castes relates to the traditional setting. New forces of change have begun to affect that picture at several points. Some of these points may now be looked in the next sub-section.

Changes in the Caste System

Studies by historians and sociologists, namely, Romila Thapar (1979), Burton Stein (1968), Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1957), A.R. Desai (1987) and M.N. Srinivas (1969 and 1978) have shown that Indian society was never static.

The main traditional avenues of social mobility were Sanskritisation, migration and religious conversion. Lower castes or tribes could move upward in the caste hierarchy through acquisition of wealth and political power. They could consequently claim higher caste status along with Sanskritising their way of life, i.e., emulating the life-style and customs of higher castes.

Some important changes have taken place in the caste system in rural areas in the contemporary period due to the new forces of industrialisation, urbanisation, politicisation, modern education and legal system, land reforms, development programmes and government policy of positive discrimination in favour of the lower castes.

Occupational association of caste has marginally changed in rural areas. Brahmins may still work as priests. In addition, they have taken to agriculture. Landowning dominant castes belonging to both upper and middle rung of caste hierarchy generally work as supervisory farmers. Other non-landowning lower castes, including small and marginal peasants, work as wage labourers in agriculture. Artisan castes, namely, carpenters and iron-smith continue with their traditional occupations. However, migration to urban areas has enabled individuals from all castes including untouchables to enter into non-traditional occupations in industry, trade and commerce, and services.

Further, inter-caste marriage is almost non-existent in rural areas. Inter-caste restrictions on food, drink and smoking continue but to a lesser degree because of the presence of tea stalls in villages which are patronised by nearly all castes. The hold of untouchability has lessened. Distinction in dress has become more a matter of income than caste affiliation. In traditional India, the upper castes were also upper classes but it is not absolutely true today because now new occupational opportunities to gain income have developed in villages. People migrate to cities and bring money back to their villages. This has changed the traditional social structure. Caste has acquired an additional role of operating as interest groups and associations in politics with the introduction of representative parliamentary politics. This has been noted by M.N. Srinivas (1982), Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) and Paul Brass (1965). Various caste associations have been formed transcending sub-caste boundaries to articulate caste interests. Moreover, caste has also witnessed growth of intra-caste factions with differential support to political parties and personal interest of the factional leaders. Thus, caste has undergone both the processes of fusion (merging of different castes) and fission (breaking up of a caste into parts) in the arena of politics.

There is a change in rural power structure in the period since Independence, which has led to some changes in inter-caste relationship. The Brahmins have lost their traditional dominance in South India. Kamma and Reddi in Andhra, Lingayat and Okkaliga in Karnataka, and Ahir, Jat and Kurmi in North India have emerged as the new dominant castes at local and regional levels through acquisition of economic and political power. Some traditional backward castes e.g. Nadar, Vanniyar of Tamil Nadu and Mahar of Maharashtra also have improved their social status.

In his study of Sripuram village in Tanjore district, Andre Beteille (1971) noticed the phenomenon of status incongruence. Traditionally, the upper castes owned land and monopolised political power in the village. But now, due to various institutional changes, they have lost control in political affairs to intermediate Rural Social Structure castes without losing their land to any substantial extent.

Thus, we find that caste has undergone adaptive changes. Its traditional basic features, i.e. connubial (matrimonial), commensal (eating together) and ritual, still prevail in rural areas. The core characteristics of the castes, which have affected the social relations, are still operative. However the status quo of the intermediate and low castes has changed due to their acquiring political and/or economic power. High caste, high class and more power went together in the traditional village setting. This hegemony of the high castes has given way to differentiation of these statuses in some regions in India (Beteille 1971 & 1986), so that now high caste does not necessarily occupy a higher-class position or power. It can be shown in the table below:

Possible changes in caste positions

Earlier position		New Position	
		a	b
Castes	High	High	Medium
Class	High	Medium	High
Power	High	Low	High

Agrarian Class Structure

So far we have seen how social structure can be described through institutions based on birth, the family, lineage, sub-caste and caste. An alternate way of describing the structure is through class and here there are two views (i) class is a better spring board for describing structure and (ii) both caste and class are necessary to describe the structure. K.L. Sharma (1980) elaborates the second position, "caste incorporates the element of class and class has a cultural (caste) style, hence the two systems cannot be easily separated even analytically".

In the modern period, the British land revenue system gave rise to a more or less similar agrarian class structure in villages in India. They were the three classes of the landowners (zamindars), the tenants and the agricultural labourers. The landowners (zamindars) were tax gatherers and non-cultivating owners of land. They belonged to the upper caste groups. The agricultural labourers were placed in a position of bondsmen and hereditarily attached labourers. They belonged to the lower caste groups.

The impact of land reforms and rural development programmes introduced after independence has been significant. Land reforms led to the eviction of smaller tenants on a large scale. But the intermediate castes of peasants, e.g., the Ahir, Kurmi etc. in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh benefited. Power of the feudal landed families started declining all over the country. The onset of the Green Revolution in the 1960s led to the emergence of commercially oriented landlords. Rich farmers belonging generally to upper and intermediate castes prospered. But

the fortune of the poor peasantry and the agricultural labourers did not improve. This has led to accentuation of class conflicts and tensions. Agrarian unrest in India has now become a common feature in various parts of the country.

P.C. Joshi (1971) has summarised in the following manner the trends in the agrarian class structure and relationships. (i) It led to the decline of feudal and customary types of tenancies. It was replaced by a more exploitative and insecure lease arrangement. (ii) It gave rise to a new commercial based rich peasant class who were part owners and part tenants. They had resource and enterprise to carry out commercial agriculture. (iii) It led to the decline of feudal landlord class and another class of commercial farmers emerged for whom agriculture was a business. They used the non-customary type of tenancy.

The process of social mobility has been seen in two directions. In his study of six villages in Rajasthan, K.L. Sharma (1980) observed that in some villages, not only the agricultural labourers but quite a few of the ex-landlords have slided down in class status, almost getting proletarianised. On the contrary, the neo-rich peasantry has emerged as the new rural bourgeoisie replacing the older landlords. Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1957) in his work Dynamics of a Rural Society dealt with the changes in the agrarian structure suggesting that a number of classes (categories) were reduced, and that small cultivators were becoming landless workers.

Further, Kotovsky (1964) has noted the process of increasing proletarianisation of the peasantry in villages. Proletarianisation refers to the process of downward social mobility of upper class people, e.g., a landlord becoming landless labourer. According to him, "with the agriculture developing along capitalist lines the process of ruination and proletarianisation of the bulk of the peasantry is growing more intensely all the time". This is substantiated Rural Social Structure by the fact that in the two decades between 1961 and 1981 the share of cultivators came down from 52.3 percent to 41.5 percent while during the same period the share of agricultural labourers increased from 17.2 percent to 25.2 percent of the total labour force. During the two decades the proportion of peasants operating less than two hectare increased from 40 percent to 55 percent of the total. By the year 2001 the share of cultivators to the total work force further declined to 31.7 percent and the share of agricultural labourers became 26.7 percent (Census Report (provisional), 2001). The increase in proportion (and certainly numbers) of agricultural labourers has gone along with a general increase in wage labourers in the rural economy.

The process of social mobility and transformation in rural India has been explained by sociologists by the terms embourgeoisement and proletarianisation. Embourgeoisement refers to the phenomenon of upward mobility of the intermediate class peasantry i.e., their emergence as new landlords. Proletarianisation describes the process of downward mobility, i.e., depeasantisation of small and marginal peasants and a few landlords and their entry into the rank of the rural landless agricultural labourers.

The Village

We now come to the last of the six components of rural social structure. Here, we discuss the essential nature of Indian villages and mention some of the changes taking place in village power structure and leadership.

The Issue of Village Autonomy

In the beginning, the studies by Maine (1881), Metcalfe (1833), and BadenPowell (1896) gave an exaggerated notion of village autonomy. The Indian village was portrayed as a 'closed' and 'isolated' system. In a report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, Charles Metcalfe (1833), a British administrator in India, depicted the Indian village as a monolithic, atomistic and unchanging entity. He observed, "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations". Further, he stated that wars pass over it, regimes come and go, but the village as a society always emerges 'unchanged, unshaken, and self-sufficient'.

Recent historical, anthropological and sociological studies have however shown that Indian village was hardly ever a republic. It was never self-sufficient. It has links with the wider society. Migration, village exogamy, movement for work and trade, administrative connection, interregional market, inter-village economic and caste links and religious pilgrimage were prevalent in the past, connecting the village with the neighbouring villages and the wider society. Moreover, new forces of modernisation in the modern period augmented inter-village and rural-urban interaction.

But despite increasing external linkages village is still a fundamental social unit (Mandelbaum 1972, Orenstein 1965). People living in a village have a feeling of common identity. They have intra-village ties at familial, caste and class levels in social, economic, political and cultural domains. In fact, village life is characterised by reciprocity, cooperation, dominance and competition.

The Jajmani System

A very important feature of traditional village life in India is the 'jajmani' system. It has been studied by various sociologists, viz., Willian Wiser (1936), S.C. Dube (1955), Opler and Singh (1986), K. Ishwaran (1967), Lewis and Barnouw (1956). The term 'jajman' refers to the patron or recipient of specialised services and the term 'jajmani' refers to the whole relationship. In fact, the jajmani system is a system of economic, social and ritual ties among different caste groups in a village. Under this system some castes are patrons and others are serving castes. The serving castes offer their services to the landowning upper and intermediate caste and in turn are paid both in cash and kind. The patron castes are the landowning dominant castes, e.g., Rajput, Bhumihar, Jat in the North, and Kamma, Lingayat and Reddi in Andhra Pradesh and Patel in Gujarat. The service castes comprise Brahmin (priest), barber, carpenter, blacksmith, water-carrier, leatherworker etc.

The jajmani relations essentially operate at family level (Mandelbaum 1972). A Rajput land-owning family has its jajmani ties with one family each from Brahmin, barber, carpenter etc., and a family of service caste offers its services to specific families of jajmans. However, jajmani rules are enforced by caste panchayats.

The jajmani relationship is supposed to be and often is durable, exclusive and multiple. Jajmani tie is inherited on both sides i.e. patron and client (the Jajman and the Kamin). The relationship is between specific families. Moreover, it is more than exchange of grain and money in lieu of service. On various ritual occasions, such as marriage, birth and death, the service-castes render their services to their jajman and get gifts in addition to customary payments. In

factional contests each side tries to muster the support of its jajmani associates. Hence the jajmani system involves interdependence, reciprocity and cooperation between jati and families in villages.

But the jajmani system also possesses the elements of dominance, exploitation and conflict (Beidelman 1959 and Lewis and Barnouw 1956). There is a vast difference in exercise of power between landowning dominant patrons and Rural Social Structure poor artisans and landless labourers who serve them. The rich and powerful jajmans exploit and coerce the poor 'kamins' (client) to maintain their dominance. In fact, there is reciprocity as well as dominance in the jajmani system.

Further, it has been observed that the jajmani system has weakened over the years due to market forces, increased urban contact, migration, education and social and political awareness on the part of the service castes.

Changes in Village Power Structure and Leadership

Marginal changes of adaptive nature have occurred in power structure and leadership in villages after gaining independence due to various factors e.g. land reforms, panchayati raj, parliamentary politics, development programmes and agrarian movements. According to Singh (1986), upper castes now exercise power not by traditional legitimisation of their authority but through manipulation and cooption of lower caste people. The traditional power structure itself has not changed. New opportunities motivate the less powerful class to aspire for power. But their economic backwardness thwarts their desires. B.S. Cohn (1962), in his comparative study of twelve villages of India, found a close fit between land-ownership and degree of domination of groups. Now younger and literate people are found increasingly acquiring leadership role. Moreover, some regional variations also have been observed in the pattern of change in power structure in rural areas.