
UNIT 2 RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the time you finish reading this unit you should be able to

- identify various elements of rural social structure in India, in particular the family, caste, class and village
- describe the characteristic features of these four elements of rural social structure
- state and explain the important changes in the family and the caste system
- describe the nature of the village community in India and explain the changes therein.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In unit 1 on Unity and Diversity, you learnt about the cross-cutting networks of uniformity and diversity of races, castes, religions and languages etc. You

will note that as the knowledge of this aspect is crucial to study Indian society, we discuss it through all the units of ESO-12.

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.

In section 2.2 of this unit, our first effort is to understand the concept of **social structure** and then relate it to rural social structure in India. The specific components of rural social structure in India have been identified as family, kinship, caste, class and village. Further, in section 2.3, important features of family and kinship in India have been described and the nature of emerging changes in family discussed. Section 2.4 deals with the important characteristics of the caste system against the backdrop of the *varna* model of society. The pattern of change in the caste system has been taken note of. In section 2.5, the character of agrarian classes during the colonial and post-colonial period has been discussed. Section 2.6 examines the exaggerated notion of village autonomy. Moreover, '*jajmani*' system, which is an important social institution, has been discussed. In addition, we have tried to discern the pattern of changes in the nature of power structure and leadership in villages in India. Lastly, section 2.7 gives a summary of this unit.

2.2 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.

2.2.1 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.

2.2.2 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 co-existed in India.

Rural and urban centres share some common facets of life. They show 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 as shown in figure 2.1. An outlying hamlet or several satellite hamlets are also found to be attached to some villages in this case.

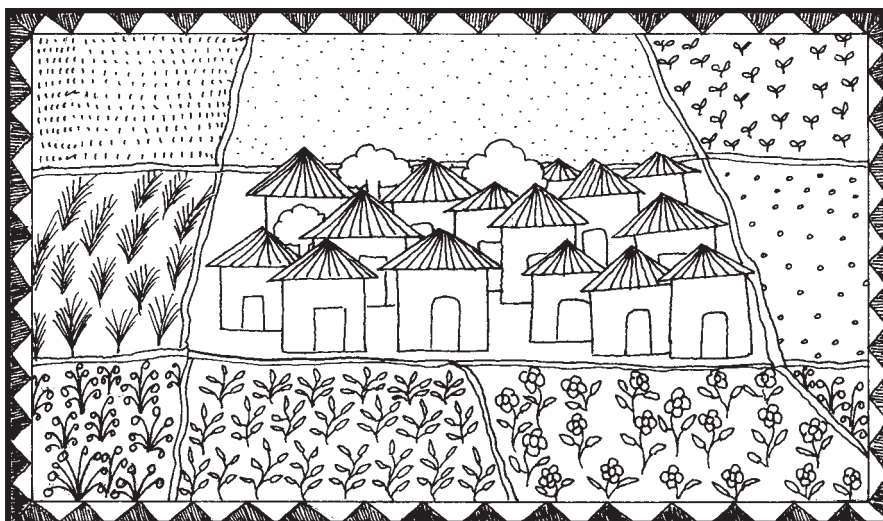


Fig. 2.1: Nucleated type of settlement pattern

- 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

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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.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Define, in four lines, the concept of social structure.

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- ii) According to the 2001 census, how many villages are there in India? Use one line for your answer.

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- iii) How many types of settlement patterns are there in rural areas? Describe one of them in about four lines.

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2.3 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.

2.3.1 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 in sub-section 2.3.3 of this unit.

2.3.2 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. Table 2.1 shows a summarisation of these figures.

Table 2.1: Inter-regional and Intra-regional variations in the distributions of family types

State/Region	Village	Percent of Families	
		Joint	Nuclear
U.P. (Plains)	Senapur (Thakur)	74.5	25.5
“ (Hills)	(Lower Caste)	34	66
	Sirkanda (Rajput)	39	61
Maharashtra	Badalpur	14	86
Andhra Pradesh (Telangana)	Shamirpet	18.5	81.5

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. For further details on the joint and the nuclear family see unit 6 of Block 2 of this course.

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.

Activity 1

Describe various stages of your own family in terms of its developmental cycle. Start with the stage when you were born and its development in terms of family it has so far had.

2.3.3 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 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 unit 6, Block 2 of the first elective course in sociology and will be discussed again in units 8 and 9 of Block 2 of this course. 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.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) List some of the important dimensions of “jointness” of a family. Use about four lines.

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- ii) Define, in four lines, the concept of lineage.

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- iii) What is meant by the ‘developmental cycle’ approach to family in India? Describe it in about four lines.

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2.4 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.

2.4.1 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 table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Different possibilities for using caste names

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 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.

2.4.2 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. (The students are advised to study other units on caste and supplement their readings from them.)

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.

2.4.3 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.

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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 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 a diagram (figure 2.3) thus:

Table 2.3: Possible changes in caste positions

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

(Source: Beteille 1971)

Check Your Progress 3

i) Name the title of the thesis in which G.S. Ghurye has described the six features of caste system in India. Use one line

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ii) What are the main features of caste system in India? Use five lines for your answer.

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iii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.

a) Exogamy means marriage one’s own group.

b) The members of a caste trace their origin from a common ancestor who might be historical, (or)

c) In Tamil Nadu villages the Brahmins reside in the area known as

2.5 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 slid 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. 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 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.

Activity 2

If you live in a rural area, describe the changes in the methods of agriculture, in terms of its mechanisation, in your village. What do you think why farmers in your village have adopted mechanical devices in agriculture? Has this practice given them an increased income? Does this mean that such farmers have also gained in social status in the village?

Or

If you live in an urban area, read last one week's national daily newspapers, one in English and one in Hindi. Underline the news items relating to poor peasantry and agricultural labourers. Describe the main theme of these news items. Compare your notes with other students at your study centre.

2.6 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.

2.6.1 The Issue of Village Autonomy

In the beginning, the studies by Maine (1881), Metcalfe (1833), and Baden-Powell (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 (for further details on this point see unit 3 of this block). 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. (See also units 4 and 5 of this block.)

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.

2.6.2 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 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.

2.6.3 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.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Tick mark the correct answer in the following multiple choice questions.
 - a) Who popularised the concept of 'village autonomy' in India?
 - i) Lord Wellesley
 - ii) Charles Metcalf
 - iii) William Bentinck
 - iv) None of the above
 - b) Identify the important social institutions in rural India among the following.
 - i) Family
 - ii) Caste
 - iii) Village
 - iv) All of these
 - c) Family "jointness" in India is characterised by
 - i) coparcenary
 - ii) coresidentiality
 - iii) commensality
 - iv) all of these.

Social Structure Rural and Urban

- d) Traditional cultural features of caste have radically changed in rural India with regard to
 - i) connubial dimension
 - ii) commensal dimension
 - iii) ritual dimension
 - iv) none of these.
- ii) Describe the '*jajmani* system' in about seven lines.

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2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have made an effort to understand rural social structure in India. We have begun with the concept of social structure and then identified the important institutions of rural social structure in India viz., family and kinship, caste, class and village. Further, important features and types of family in India have been discussed along with change in them. Important difference between the kinship patterns in North and South India has been noted. More over discussion on the caste system has begun with understanding the relations between '*Varna*' and Caste. Then salient features of the caste system have been discussed and the changes occurring especially in the modern period are analysed. Moreover the nature of agrarian structure has been described. Lastly, we have discussed the issue of village autonomy, prevalence of the *jajmani* system and changes in the village power structure and leadership.

2.8 KEYWORDS

Developmental cycle

In terms of the forms of family, with birth, marriage and death of its members and division of property, each family goes through a cycle of development. For example, a joint family may, after partition, be divided into several nuclear families. After the death of persons in grand-parental generation, it may become an extended family. With the marriage of a child, if the newly married persons also reside with parents, a nuclear family may become an

extended family. Again, with the birth of a grandchild, the same unit may become a joint family. This constant process of change from one stage to another is given the name of developmental cycle.

Embourgeoisement	Bourgeoisement refers to the phenomenon of upward social mobility of lower class people, e.g., entry of a working class individual into the elite class through acquisition of wealth or power.
Jointness of Family	It refers to various dimensions of jointness in family structure, e.g., coresidentiality, commensality, coparcenary, obligation towards kin and sentiment of jointness.
Kindred of Cooperation	The kindred of cooperation are that population, within a village, in which most economic and ritual activities take place without any formalities. This is a smaller unit, referring to the actual ties of kin.
Kindred of Recognition	The kindred of recognition refer to that population in which cooperation in economic and ritual activities is through information and invitation. This is a larger unit, spread over several villages for each caste.
Proletarianisation	Proletarianisation refers to the process of downward social mobility of upper class people, e.g., a landlord becoming landless labourer.
Social Structure	It is the organised pattern of the inter-related rights and obligations of persons and groups in a system of interaction as seen in terms of statuses, roles, institutions governed by social norms and values.
'Jajmani' System	It is an age-old social institution that refers to the inter-caste and inter-family social, economic, political and ritual ties prevalent in villages.
Varna	The <i>Varna</i> distributes social groups into four categories, all over India. It is a model of social and ritual hierarchy of caste groups. These are four- Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The <i>Varna</i> provides a cultural idiom to the caste system.
Village Exogamy and 'Gotra' Exogamy	Exogamy means marrying outside the group. Village exogamy refers to the tradition of prohibiting marriage within the village in North India. Similarly, 'gotra' exogamy prohibits marriage within one's own <i>gotra</i> (clan).

2.9 FURTHER READING

Beteille, Andre 1986. *Studies in Agrarian Social Structure*. Oxford University Press: Delhi

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2.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Social structure is the pattern of inter-related social statuses and roles found in a society. It is the organised pattern of the inter-related rights and obligations of persons and groups in an institutionalised form having social norms and values.
- ii) According to 2001 census, there are 6,38,365 villages (including uninhabited villages) in India.
- iii) There are three main types of settlement patterns in rural areas. The most common type is the nucleated village found in most areas. Here we find a tight cluster of houses, which are surrounded by the field of the villagers. Sometimes an outlying hamlet or satellite hamlet is also found situated around this type.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Some of the important dimensions of “jointness” of a family are: coresidentiality, commensality, coparcenary, depth of three generations at least, and fulfilment of obligations towards kin.
- ii) Lineage is a group of families, which trace descent from a common ancestor. They have full knowledge of the links, which they have with that common ancestor. The members of a lineage of a generation share a brother and sister relationship with each other.
- iii) Developmental cycle approach to the family in India implies that the family structure in India undergoes demographic change in a period of time. A nuclear family expands due to birth and marriage to form a joint or extended family and with death and partition again reverts back to a nuclear family.

Check Your Progress 3

Rural Social Structure

- i) The title of the thesis written by G.S. Ghurye is Race and Caste in India.
- ii) Caste is an endogamous and hereditary social group. Each caste is traditionally associated with a hereditary occupation and members of a caste are bound by certain social rules and laws. Castes are placed in a hierarchical order. They have rules of commensality and the concept of purity and pollution is very important in caste relationships.
- iii)
 - a) outside
 - b) mythical, divine
 - c) agraharam

Check Your Progress 4

- i)
 - a) (ii)
 - b) (iv)
 - c) (iv)
 - d) (iv)
- ii) The '*jajmani*' system is found in Indian villages. It is the relationship between patrons and clients, or *Jajman* and *Kamin* of different castes, generally within a village. It is a process of exchange of goods and services between castes. Some castes are patrons and some are clients. It is an inherited relationship. The *jajmani* rules are enforced by caste panchayats in rural India.