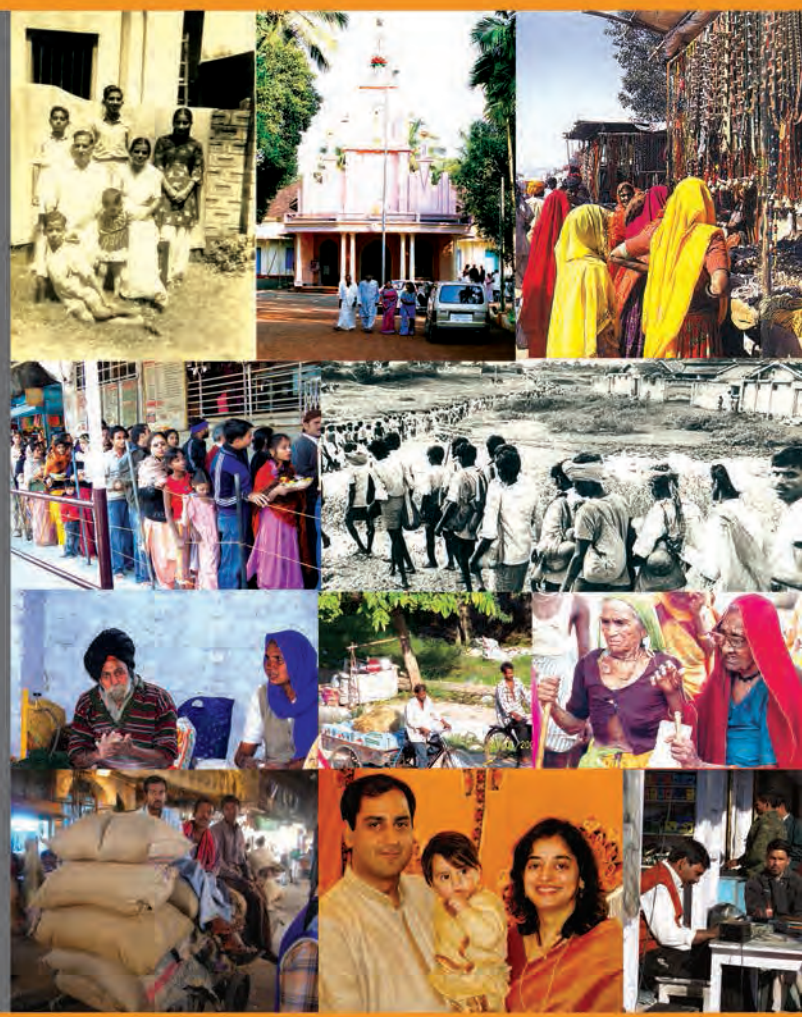
Chapter 1



Introducing Indian Society

2018-19

In one important sense, Sociology is unlike any other subject that you may have studied. It is a subject in which no one starts from zero – everyone already knows something about society. Other subjects are learnt because they are taught (at school, at home, or elsewhere); but much of our knowledge about society is acquired without explicit teaching. Because it is such an integral part of the process of growing up, knowledge about society seems to be acquired "naturally" or "automatically". No child is expected to already know something about History, Geography, Psychology or Economics when they come to school. But even a six year old already knows something about society and social relationships. It is all the more true then, that, as young eighteen year old adults, you know a lot about the society you live in without ever having studied it.

This prior knowledge or familiarity with society is both an advantage and a disadvantage for sociology, the discipline that studies society. The advantage is that students are generally not afraid of Sociology – they feel that it can't be a very hard subject to learn. The disadvantage is that this prior knowledge can be a problem – in order to learn Sociology, we need to "unlearn" what we already know about society. In fact, the initial stage of learning Sociology consists mainly of such unlearning. This is necessary because our prior knowledge about society – our common sense – is acquired from a particular viewpoint. This is the viewpoint of the social group and the social environment that we are socialised into. Our social context shapes our opinions, beliefs and expectations about society and social relations. These beliefs are not necessarily wrong, though they can be. The problem is that they are 'partial'. The word partial is being used here in two different senses – incomplete (the opposite of whole), and biased (the opposite of impartial). So our 'unlearnt' knowledge or common sense usually allows us to see only a part of social reality; moreover, it is liable to be tilted towards the viewpoints and interests of our own social group.

Sociology does not offer a solution to this problem in the form of a perspective that can show us the whole of reality in a completely unbiased way. Indeed sociologists believe that such an ideal vantage point does not exist. We can only see by standing *some*where; and every 'somewhere' offers only a partial view of the world. What sociology offers is to teach us how to see the world from many vantage points – not just our own, but also that of others unlike ourselves. Each vantage point provides only a partial view, but by comparing what the world looks like from the eyes of different kinds of people we get some sense of what the whole might look like, and what is hidden from view in each specific standpoint.

What may be of even more interest to you is that sociology can show you what you look like to others; it can teach you how to look at yourself 'from the outside', so to speak. This is called 'self-reflexivity', or sometimes just **reflexivity**. This is the ability to reflect upon yourself, to turn back your gaze (which is usually directed outward) back towards yourself. But this self-inspection must be critical – i.e., it should be quick to criticise and slow to praise oneself.

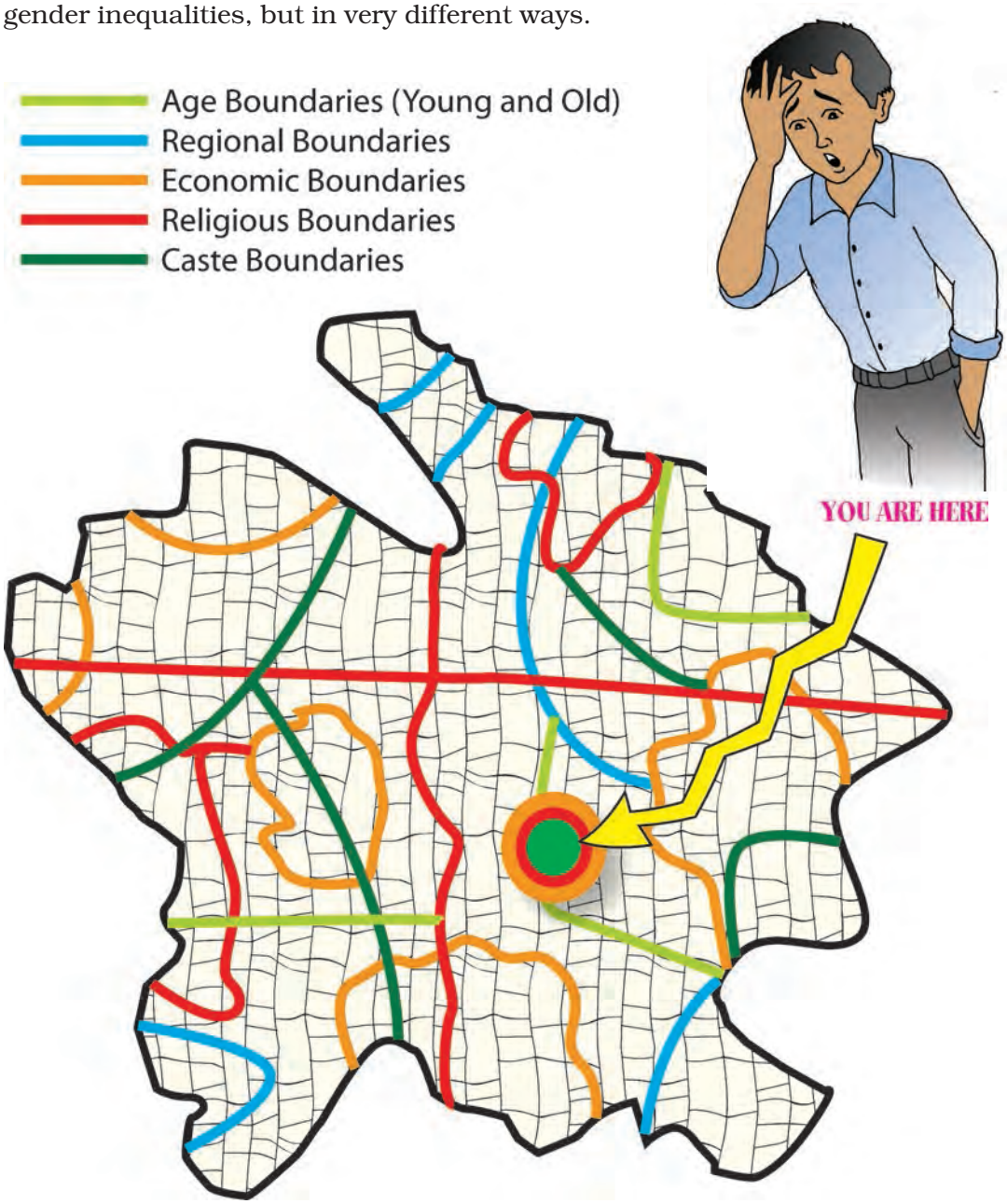
At the simplest level, you could say that understanding Indian society and its structure provides a sort of social map on which you could locate yourself. Like with a geographical map, locating oneself on a social map can be useful in the sense that you know where you are in relation to others in society. For example, suppose you live in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. If you look at a geographical map of India, you know that your state is in the North-eastern corner of India. You also know that your state is small compared to many large states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra or Rajasthan, but that it is larger than many others such as Manipur, Goa, Haryana or Punjab. If you look at a physical features map, it could tell you what kind of terrain Arunachal has (hilly, forested) compared to other states and regions of India, and what natural resources it is rich in, and so on.

A comparable social map would tell you where you are located in society. For example, as a seventeen or eighteen year old, you belong to the social group called "young people". People your age or younger account for about forty per cent of India's population. You might belong to a particular regional or linguistic community, such as a Gujarati speaker from Gujarat or a Telugu speaker from Andhra Pradesh. Depending on your parent's occupation and your family income, you would also be a member of an economic class, such as lower middle class or upper class. You could be a member of a particular religious community, a caste or tribe, or other such social group. Each of these identities would locate you on a social map, and among a web of social relationships. Sociology tells you about what kinds of groups or groupings there are in society, what their relationships are to each other, and what this might mean in terms of your own life.

But sociology can do more than simply help to locate you or others in this simple sense of describing the places of different social groups. As C.Wright Mills, a well-known American sociologist has written, sociology can help you to map the links and connections between "personal troubles" and "social issues". By personal troubles Mills means the kinds of individual worries, problems or concerns that everyone has. So, for example, you may be unhappy about the way elders in your family treat you or how your brothers, sisters or friends treat you. You may be worried about your future and what sort of job you might get. Other aspects of your individual identity may be sources of pride, tension, confidence or embarrassment in different ways. But all of these are about one person and derive meaning from this personalised perspective. A social issue, on the other hand, is about large groups and not about the individuals who make them up.

Thus, the "generation gap" or friction between older and younger generations is a social phenomenon, common to many societies and many time periods. Unemployment or the effects of a changing occupational structure is also a societal issue, that concerns millions of different kinds of people. It includes, for example, the sudden increase in job prospects for information technology

related professions, as well as the declining demand for agricultural labour. Issues of communalism or the animosity of one religious community towards another, or casteism, which is the exclusion or oppression of some castes by others, are again society-wide problems. Different individuals may be implicated in them in different roles, depending on their social location. Thus, a person from a so-called upper caste who believes in the inferiority of the people born into so-called lower castes is involved in casteism as a perpetrator, while a member of a so-called low caste community is also involved, but as a victim. In the same way, both men and women, as distinct social groups, are affected by gender inequalities, but in very different ways.



One version of such a map is already provided to us in childhood by the process of socialisation, or the ways in which we are taught to make sense of the world around us. This is the common sense map. But as pointed out earlier, this kind of map can be misleading, and it can distort. Once we leave our common sense maps behind, there are no other readymade maps available to us, because we have been socialised into only one, not several or all, social groups. If we want other kinds of maps, we must learn how to draw them. A sociological perspective teaches you how to draw social maps.

1.1 Introducing an Introduction...

This entire book is meant to introduce you to Indian society from a sociological rather than common sense point of view. What can be said by way of an introduction to this introduction? Perhaps it would be appropriate at this point to indicate in advance the larger processes that were at work in shaping Indian society, processes that you will encounter in detail in the pages to follow.

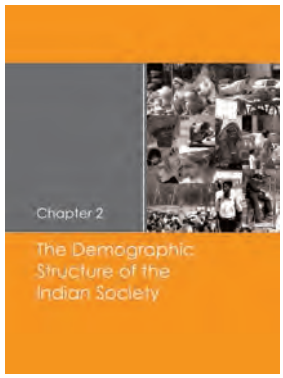
Broadly speaking, it was in the colonial period that a specifically Indian consciousness took shape. Colonial rule unified all of India for the first time, and brought in the forces of modernisation and capitalist economic change. By and large, the changes brought about were irreversible – society could never return to the way things were before. The economic, political and administrative unification of India under colonial rule was achieved at great expense. Colonial exploitation and domination scarred Indian society in many ways. But paradoxically, **colonialism** also gave birth to its own enemy – **nationalism**.

Historically, an Indian nationalism took shape under British colonialism. The shared experience of colonial domination helped unify and energise different sections of the community. The emerging middle classes began, with the aid of western style education, to challenge colonialism on its own ground. Ironically, colonialism and western education also gave the impetus for the rediscovery of tradition. This led to the developments on the cultural and social front which solidified emergent forms of community at the national and regional levels.

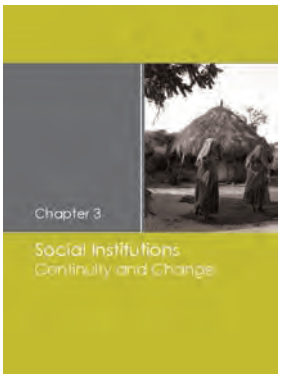
Colonialism created new **classes** and **communities** which came to play significant roles in subsequent history. The urban middle classes were the main carriers of nationalism and they led the campaign for freedom. Colonial interventions also crystallised religious and caste based communities. These too became major players. The complex ways in which the subsequent history of contemporary Indian society evolved is something you will encounter in the following chapters.

1.2 A Preview of this Book

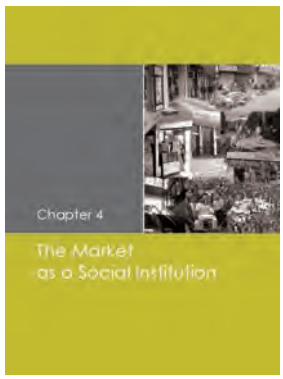
In this, the first of two textbooks on sociology, you will be introduced to the basic structure of Indian society. (The second textbook will be focussed on the specifics of social change and development in India.)



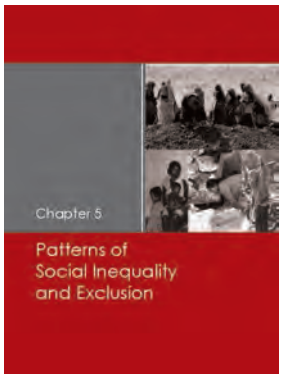
We begin with a discussion of the demographic structure of the Indian population (Chapter 2). As you know, India is currently the second most populous country in the world, and in a few decades is projected to overtake China and become the most populous country in the world. What are the ways in which sociologists and demographers study a population? Which aspects of the population are socially significant, and what has been happening on these fronts in the Indian case? Is our population simply an obstacle to development, or can it also be seen as helping development in some ways? These are some of the questions that this chapter tries to tackle.



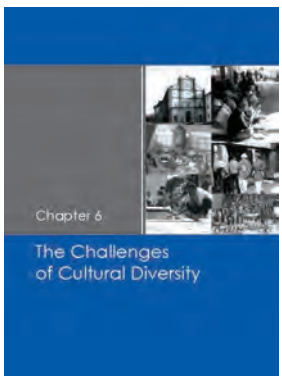
In Chapter 3, we revisit the basic building blocks of Indian society in the form of the institutions of caste, tribe and family. As a unique feature of the Indian subcontinent, caste has always attracted a lot of scholarly attention. How has this institution been changing over the centuries, and what does caste really mean today? What is the context in which the concept of 'tribe' was introduced into India? What sorts of communities are tribes supposed to be, and what is at stake in defining them as such? How do tribal communities define themselves in contemporary India? Finally, the family as an institution has also been subjected to tremendous pressure in these times of rapid and intense social change. What changes do we see in the diverse forms of the family that exist in India? By addressing questions like these, Chapter 3 builds the base for looking at further aspects of Indian society which would pre-suppose caste, tribe and family.



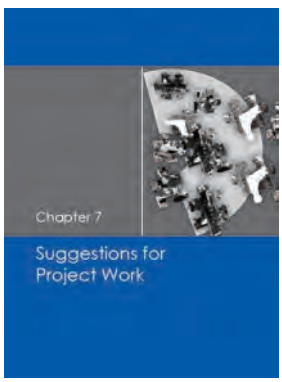
Chapter 4 explores the socio-cultural dimensions of the market as a powerful institution that has been the vehicle of change throughout world history. Given that the most sweeping and rapid economic changes were brought about first by colonialism and then by developmental policies, this chapter looks at how markets of different kinds have evolved in India, and the chain reactions they set in motion.



Among the features of our society that have been the cause of greatest concern are its seemingly unlimited capacity for generating inequality and exclusion. Chapter 5 is devoted to this important subject. Chapter 5 looks at inequality and exclusion in the context of caste, tribe, gender and the 'disabled'. Notorious as an instrument of division and injustice, the caste system has been the object of concerted attempts by the state and by the oppressed castes to reform or even abolish it. What are the concrete problems and issues that this attempt faced? How successful have movements to resist caste exclusion been in our recent past? What have been the special problems of tribal movements? In what context are tribal identities reasserting themselves today? Similar questions are dealt with in the context of gender relations, and the 'disabled'. To what extent is our society responsive to the needs of the disabled? How much of an impact has the women's movement had on the social institutions that have oppressed women?



Chapter 6 deals with the difficult challenges posed by the immense diversity of Indian society. This chapter invites us to step outside our normal, comfortable ways of thinking. The familiar cliches and slogans about India being a land of unity in diversity have a hard and complex side to them. Despite all the failures and inadequacies, India has not done too badly on this front. What have been our strengths and our weaknesses? How may young adults face issues like communal conflict, regional or linguistic chauvinism, and casteism without either wishing them away or being overwhelmed by them? Why is it important for our collective future as a nation that every minority in India not feel that it is insecure or at risk?



Finally, in Chapter 7, some suggestions are provided for you and your teachers to think about the practical component of your course. This can be quite interesting and enjoyable, as you will discover.

Notes

Chapter 2

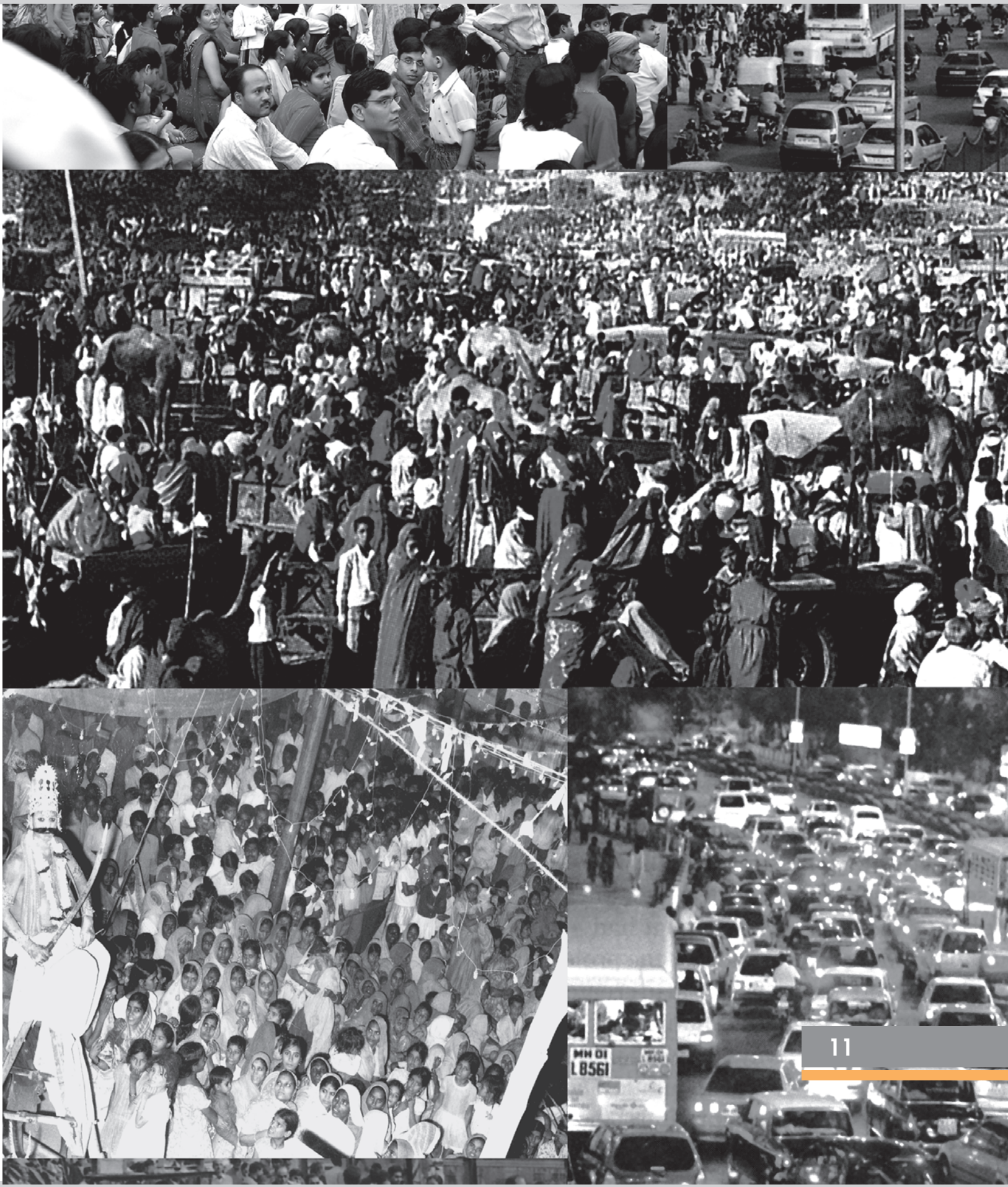
The Demographic Structure of the Indian Society

Demography is the systematic study of population. The term is of Greek origin and is composed of the two words, *demos* (people) and *graphein* (describe), implying the description of people. Demography studies the trends and processes associated with population including – changes in population size; patterns of births, deaths, and migration; and the structure and composition of the population, such as the relative proportions of women, men and different age groups. There are different varieties of demography, including formal demography which is a largely quantitative field, and social demography which focuses on the social, economic or political aspects of populations. All demographic studies are based on processes of counting or enumeration – such as the census or the survey – which involve the systematic collection of data on the people residing within a specified territory.

Demography is a field that is of special importance to sociology – in fact, the emergence of sociology and its successful establishment as an academic discipline owed a lot to demography. Two different processes happened to take place at roughly the same time in Europe during the latter half of the eighteenth century – the formation of nation-states as the principal form of political organisation, and the beginnings of the modern science of statistics. The modern state had begun to expand its role and functions. It had, for instance, begun to take an active interest in the development of early forms of public health management, policing and maintenance of law and order, economic policies relating to agriculture and industry, taxation and revenue generation and the governance of cities.

This new and constantly expanding sphere of state activity required the systematic and regular collection of *social statistics* – or quantitative data on various aspects of the population and economy. The practice of the collection of social statistics by the state is in itself much older, but it acquired its modern form towards the end of the eighteenth century. The American census of 1790 was probably the first modern census, and the practice was soon taken up in Europe as well in the early 1800s. In India, censuses began to be conducted by the British Indian government between 1867-72, and regular ten yearly (or decennial) censuses have been conducted since 1881. Independent India continued the practice, and seven decennial censuses have been conducted since 1951, the most recent being in 2011. The Indian census is the largest such exercise in the world (since China, which has a slightly larger population, does not conduct regular censuses).

Demographic data are important for the planning and implementation of state policies, specially those for economic development and general public welfare. But when they first emerged, social statistics also provided a strong justification for the new discipline of sociology. Aggregate statistics – or the numerical characteristics that refer to a large collectivity consisting of millions of people – offer a concrete and strong argument for the existence of *social* phenomena. Even though country-level or state-level statistics like the number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of deaths per 1,000 population – or the death rate – are made up by aggregating (or adding up) individual deaths, the death rate itself is a social phenomenon and must be explained at the social level. Emile Durkheim's famous study explaining the variation in suicide rates across different countries was a good example of this. Durkheim argued that the rate of suicide (i.e., number of suicides per 100,000 population) had to be explained by social causes even though each particular instance of suicide may have involved reasons specific to that individual or her/his circumstances.

Sometimes a distinction is made between formal demography and a broader field of population studies. Formal demography is primarily concerned with the measurement and analysis of the components of population change. Its focus is on quantitative analysis for which it has a highly developed mathematical methodology suitable for forecasting population growth and changes in the composition of population. Population studies or social demography, on the other hand, enquires into the wider causes and consequences of population structures and change. Social demographers believe that social processes and structures regulate demographic processes; like sociologists, they seek to trace the social reasons that account for population trends.

2.1 Some Theories and Concepts in Demography

The Malthusian Theory of Population Growth

Among the most famous theories of demography is the one associated with the English political economist Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834). Malthus's theory of population growth – outlined in his *Essay on Population* (1798) – was a rather pessimistic one. He argued that human populations tend to grow at a much faster rate than the rate at which the means of human subsistence (specially food, but also clothing and other agriculture-based products) can grow. Therefore humanity is condemned to live in poverty forever because the growth of agricultural production will always be overtaken by population growth. While population rises in **geometric progression** (i.e., like 2, 4, 8, 16, 32 etc.), agricultural production can only grow in **arithmetic progression** (i.e., like 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 etc.). Because population growth always outstrips growth in production of subsistence resources, the only way to increase prosperity is by controlling the growth of population. Unfortunately, humanity has only a limited ability to voluntarily reduce the growth of its population (through '**preventive checks**' such as postponing marriage or practicing sexual abstinence or celibacy). Malthus believed therefore that '**positive checks**' to population growth – in the form of famines and diseases – were inevitable because they were nature's way of dealing with the imbalance between food supply and increasing population.

Malthus's theory was influential for a long time. But it was also challenged by theorists who claimed that economic growth could outstrip population growth.

Box 2.1

"The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and tens of thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear, and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world."

– Thomas Robert Malthus, *An essay on the principle of population, 1798.*

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834)

Malthus studied at Cambridge and trained to become a Christian priest. Later he was appointed Professor of History and Political Economy at the East India Company College at Haileybury near London, which was a training centre for the officers recruited to the Indian Civil Service.

However, the most effective refutation of his theory was provided by the historical experience of European countries. The pattern of population growth began to change in the latter half of nineteenth century, and by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century these changes were quite dramatic. Birth rates had declined, and outbreaks of epidemic diseases were being controlled. Malthus's predictions were proved false because both food production and standards of living continued to rise despite the rapid growth of population.

Malthus was also criticised by liberal and Marxist scholars for asserting that poverty was caused by population growth. The critics argued that problems like poverty and starvation were caused by the unequal distribution of economic resources rather than by population growth. An unjust social system allowed a wealthy and privileged minority to live in luxury while the vast majority of the people were forced to live in poverty.

The Theory of Demographic Transition

Another significant theory in demography is the theory of demographic transition. This suggests that population growth is linked to overall levels of economic development and that every society follows a typical pattern of development-related population growth. There are three basic phases of population growth. The first stage is that of low population growth in a society that is underdeveloped and technologically backward. Growth rates are low because both the death rate and the birth rate are very high, so that the difference between the two (or the net growth rate) is low. The third (and last) stage is also one of low growth in a developed society where both death rate and birth rate have been reduced

Activity 2.1

Read the section on the previous page and the quotation from Malthus in Box 2.1. One reason why Malthus was proved wrong is the substantial increases in the **productivity of agriculture**. Can you find out how these productivity increases occurred – i.e., what were the factors that made agriculture more productive? What could be some of the other reasons why Malthus was wrong? Discuss with your classmates and make a list with the help of your teacher.

considerably and the difference between them is again small. Between these two stages is a transitional stage of movement from a backward to an advanced stage, and this stage is characterised by very high rates of growth of population.

This 'population explosion' happens because death rates are brought down relatively quickly through advanced methods of disease control, public health, and better nutrition. However, it takes longer for society to adjust to change and alter its reproductive behaviour (which was evolved during the period of poverty and high death rates) to suit the new situation of relative prosperity and longer life spans. This kind of transition was effected in Western Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. More or less similar patterns are followed in the less developed countries that are struggling to reduce the birth rate in keeping with the falling mortality rate. In India too, the demographic transition is not yet complete as the mortality rate has been reduced but the birth rate has not been brought down to the same extent.

Common Concepts and Indicators

Most demographic concepts are expressed as rates or ratios – they involve two numbers. One of these numbers is the particular statistic that has been calculated for a specific geographical-administrative unit; the other number provides a standard for comparison. For example, the *birth rate* is the total number of live births in a particular area (an entire country, a state, a district or other territorial unit) during a specified period (usually a year) divided by the total population of that area in thousands. In other words, the birth rate is the number of live births per 1000 population. The *death rate* is a similar statistic, expressed as the number of deaths in a given area during a given time per 1000 population. These statistics depend on the reporting of births and deaths by the families in which they occur. In fact, in most countries including India, people are required by law to report births and deaths to the appropriate authorities – the local police station or primary health centre in the case of villages, and the relevant municipal office in the case of towns and cities.

The *rate of natural increase* or the growth rate of population refers to the difference between the birth rate and the death rate. When this difference is zero (or, in practice, very small) then we say that the population has 'stabilised', or has reached the 'replacement level', which is the rate of growth required for new generations to replace the older ones that are dying out. Sometimes, societies can experience a negative growth rate – that is, their fertility levels are below the replacement rate. This is true of many countries and regions in the world today, such as Japan, Russia, Italy and Eastern Europe. On the other

hand, some societies experience very high growth rates, particularly when they are going through the demographic transition described on the previous page.

The *fertility rate* refers to the number of live births per 1000 women in the child-bearing age group, usually taken to be 15 to 49 years. But like the other rates discussed on the previous page (the birth and death rates) this is a 'crude' rate – it is a rough average for an entire population and does not take account of the differences across age-groups. Differences across age groups can sometimes be very significant in affecting the meaning of indicators. That is why demographers also calculate age-specific rates. The *total fertility rate* refers to the total number of live births that a hypothetical woman would have if she lived through the reproductive age group and had the average number of babies in each segment of this age group as determined by the age-specific fertility rates for that area. Another way of expressing this is that the total fertility rate is the 'the average number of births to a cohort of women up to the end of the reproductive age period (estimated on the basis of the age-specific rates observed during a given period)' (Visaria and Visaria 2003).

ACTIVITY 2.2

Try to find out why the birth rate is slow to decline but the death rate can fall relatively fast. What are some of the factors that might influence a family or couple's decision about the number of children they should have? Ask older people in your family or neighbourhood about the possible reasons why people in the past tended to have more children.

The *infant mortality* rate is the number of deaths of babies before the age of one year per 1000 live births. Likewise, the *maternal mortality* rate is the number of women who die in childbirth per 1000 live births. High rates of infant and maternal mortality are an unambiguous indicator of backwardness and poverty; development is accompanied by sharp falls in these rates as medical facilities and levels of education, awareness and prosperity increase. One concept which is somewhat complicated is that of *life expectancy*. This refers to the estimated number of years that an average person is expected to survive. It is calculated on the basis of data on age-specific death rates in a given area over a period of time.

The *sex ratio* refers to the number of females per 1000 males in a given area at a specified time period. Historically, all over the world it has been found that there are slightly more females than males in most countries. This is despite the fact that slightly more male babies are born than female ones; nature seems to produce roughly 943 to 952 female babies for every 1000 males. If despite this fact the sex ratio is somewhat in favour of females, this seems to be due to two reasons. First, girl babies appear to have an advantage over boy babies in terms of resistance to disease in infancy. At the other end of the life cycle, women have tended to outlive men in most societies, so that there are more older women than men. The combination of these two factors leads to a sex ratio of roughly 1050 females per 1000 males in most contexts. However, it has been found that the sex ratio has been declining in some countries like China, South Korea and specially India. This phenomenon has been linked to prevailing social norms that tend to value males much more than females, which leads to 'son preference' and the relative neglect of girl babies.

The *age structure of the population* refers to the proportion of persons in different age groups relative to the total population. The age structure changes in response to changes in levels of development and the average life expectancy. Initially, poor medical facilities, prevalence of disease and other factors make for a relatively short life span. Moreover, high infant and maternal mortality rates also have an impact on the age structure. With development, quality of life improves and with it the life expectancy also improves. This changes the age structure: relatively smaller proportions of the population are found in the younger age groups and larger proportions in the older age groups. This is also referred to as the ageing of the population.

The *dependency ratio* is a measure comparing the portion of a population which is composed of dependents (i.e., elderly people who are too old to work, and children who are too young to work) with the portion that is in the working age group, generally defined as 15 to 64 years. The dependency ratio is equal to the population below 15 or above 64, divided by population in the 15-64 age group; the ratio is usually expressed as a percentage. A rising dependency ratio is a cause for worry in countries that are facing an ageing population, since it becomes difficult for a relatively smaller proportion of working-age people to carry the burden of providing for a relatively larger proportion of dependents. On the other hand, a falling dependency ratio can be a source of economic growth and prosperity due to the larger proportion of workers relative to non-workers. This is sometimes refered to as the 'demographic dividend', or benefit flowing from the changing age structure. However, this benefit is temporary because the larger pool of working age people will eventually turn into non-working old people.

2.2 Size and Growth of India's Population

India is the second most populous country in the world after China, with a total population of 121 crores (or 1.21 billion) according to the Census of India 2011 (Provisional). As can be seen from Table 1, the growth rate of India's population has not always been very high. Between 1901–1951 the average annual growth rate did not exceed 1.33%, a modest rate of growth. In fact between 1911 and 1921 there was a negative rate of growth of – 0.03%. This was because of the influenza epidemic during 1918–19 which killed about 12.5 million persons or 5% of the total population of the country (Visaria and Visaria 2003: 191). The growth rate of population substantially increased after independence from British rule going up to 2.2% during 1961-1981. Since then although the annual growth rate has decreased it remains one of the highest in the developing world. Chart 1 shows the comparative movement of the crude birth and death rates. The impact of the demographic transition phase is clearly seen in the graph where they begin to diverge from each other after the decade of 1921 to 1931.

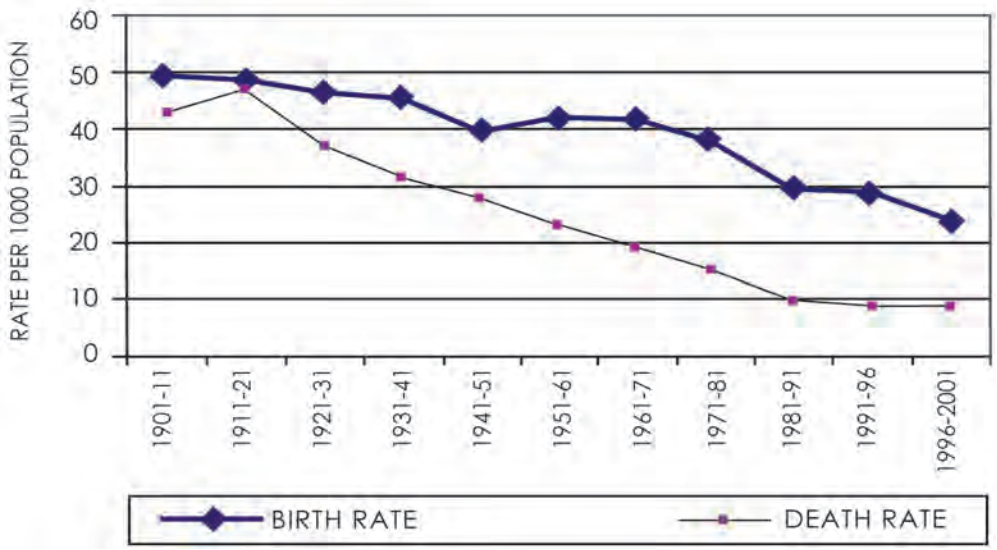
Before 1931, both death rates and birth rates are high, whereas, after this transitional moment the death rates fall sharply but the birth rate only falls slightly.

Table 1: The Population of India and its Growth During the 20th Century

Year	Total Population (in millions)	Average Annual Growth Rate (%)	Decadal Growth Rate (%)
1901	238	–	-
1911	252	0.56	5.8
1921	251	-0.03	-0.3
1931	279	1.04	11.0
1941	319	1.33	14.2
1951	361	1.25	13.3
1961	439	1.96	21.6
1971	548	2.22	24.8
1981	683	2.20	24.7
1991	846	2.14	23.9
2001	1028	1.93	21.5
2011	1210	1.64	17.6

Source: Census of India 2011 (Provisional).
website: http//censusindia.gov.in

Chart 1: Birth and Death Rate in India 1901-2001



Total birth rate was reported to be 20.8 and death rate as 6.5 in India in 2015.
Source: *SRS Bulletin, Registrar General of India, 2016*

Source: *National Commission on Population, Government of India.*
website: http://populationcommission.nic.in/facts1.htm#

The principal reasons for the decline in the death rate after 1921 were increased levels of control over famines and **epidemic** diseases. The latter cause was perhaps the most important. The major epidemic diseases in the past were fevers of various sorts, plague, smallpox and cholera. But the single biggest epidemic was the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, which killed as many as 125 lakh people, or about 5% of the total population of India at that time. (Estimates of deaths vary, and some are much higher. Also known as 'Spanish Flu', the influenza pandemic was a global phenomenon – see the box below. A pandemic is an epidemic that affects a very wide geographical area – see the glossary).

Box 2.2

The Global Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19

Influenza is caused by a virus that attacks mainly the upper respiratory tract – the nose, throat and bronchi and rarely also the lungs. The genetic makeup of influenza viruses allows for both major and minor genetic changes, making them immune to existing vaccines. Three times in the last century, the influenza viruses have undergone major genetic changes, resulting in global pandemics and large tolls in terms of both disease and deaths. The most infamous pandemic was "Spanish Flu" which affected large parts of the world population and is thought to have killed at least 40 million people in 1918-1919. More recently, two other influenza pandemics occurred in 1957 ("Asian influenza") and 1968 ("Hong Kong influenza") and caused significant morbidity and mortality globally.

The global mortality rate from the 1918/1919 Spanish flu pandemic is not known, but is estimated at 2.5 – 5% of the human population, with 20% of the world population suffering from the disease to some extent. Influenza may have killed as many as 25 million in its first 25 weeks; in contrast, AIDS killed 25 million in its first 25 years. Influenza spread across the world, killing more than 25 million in six months; some estimates put the total killed at over twice that number, possibly even 100 million.

In the United States, about 28% of the population suffered, and 500,000 to 675,000 died. In Britain 200,000 died; in France more than 400,000. Entire villages perished in Alaska and southern Africa. In Australia an estimated 10,000 people died and in the Fiji Islands, 14% of the population died during only two weeks, and in Western Samoa 22%. An estimated 17 million died in India, about 5% of India's population at the time. In the British Indian Army, almost 22% of troops who caught the disease died of it.

While World War I did not cause the flu, the close quarters and mass movement of troops quickened its spread. It has been speculated that the soldiers' immune systems were weakened by the stresses of combat and chemical attacks, increasing their susceptibility to the disease.

Source: Compiled from Wikipedia, and World Health Organisation; Webpages:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_flu
http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs211/en/

Improvements in medical cures for these diseases, programmes for mass vaccination, and efforts to improve sanitation helped to control epidemics. However, diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, diarrhoea and dysentery continue to kill people even today, although the numbers are nowhere as high as they used to be in the epidemics of the past. Surat witnessed a small epidemic of plague in September 1994, while dengue and chikungunya epidemics have been reported in various parts of the country in 2006.

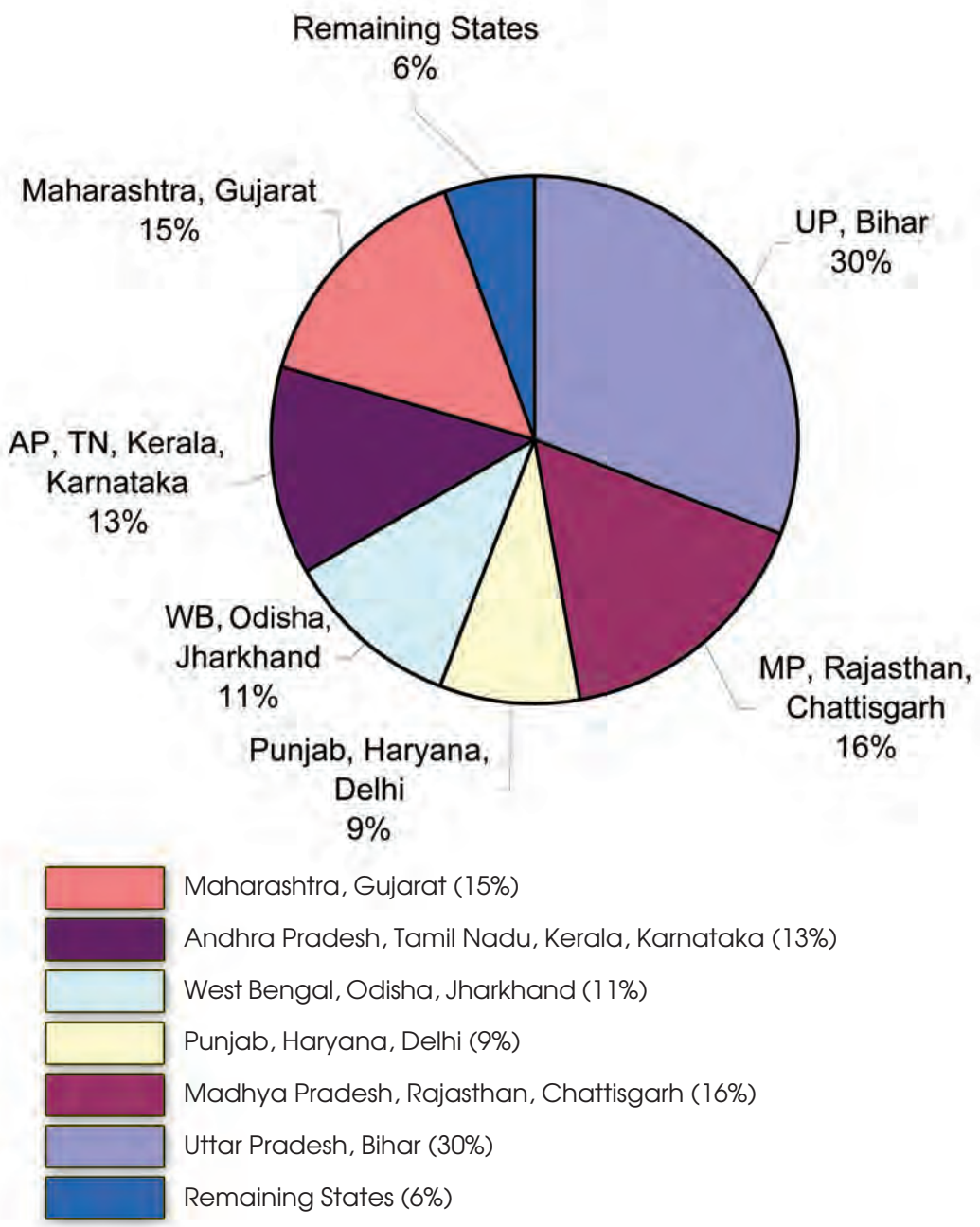
Famines were also a major and recurring source of increased mortality. Famines were caused by high levels of continuing poverty and malnutrition in an agroclimatic environment that was very vulnerable to variations in rainfall. Lack of adequate means of transportation and communication as well as inadequate efforts on the part of the state were some of the factors responsible for famines. However, as scholars like Amartya Sen and others have shown, famines were not necessarily due to fall in foodgrains production; they were also caused by a 'failure of entitlements', or the inability of people to buy or otherwise obtain food. Substantial improvements in the productivity of Indian agriculture (specially through the expansion of irrigation); improved means of communication; and more vigorous relief and preventive measures by the state have all helped to drastically reduce deaths from famine. Nevertheless, starvation deaths are still reported from some backward regions of the country. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is the latest state initiative to tackle the problem of hunger and starvation in rural areas.

Unlike the death rate, the birth rate has not registered a sharp fall. This is because the birth rate is a sociocultural phenomenon that is relatively slow to change. By and large, increased levels of prosperity exert a strong downward pull on the birth rate. Once infant mortality rates decline, and there is an overall increase in the levels of education and awareness, family size begins to fall. There are very wide variations in fertility rates across the States of India, as can be seen in Chart 2 (on page no. 20). Some states, like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have managed to bring down their total fertility rates (TFR) to 1.7 each (2009). This means that the average woman in Kerala and Tamil Nadu produces only 1.7 children, which is below the 'replacement level' and Kerala's TFR is also below the replacement level, which means that the population is going to decline in future. Many other states (like, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Karnataka and Maharashtra) have fairly low TFRs. But there are some states, notably Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, which still have very high TFRs. In 2009, the TFRs of these states were 3.9, 3.3, 3.3 and 3.7, respectively. According to the *SRS Bulletin* in 2015, India's total birth rate is 22.4, among them rural birth rate is 22.4 and urban 17.3. The highest birth rate in India is of Uttar Pradesh (26.7) and Bihar (26.3), and they will also account for about half (50%) of the additions to the Indian population upto the year 2026. Uttar Pradesh alone is expected to account for a little less than one-quarter (22%) of this increase. Chart 3 (on page no.21) shows the relative contribution to population growth from different regional groupings of States.

Chart 2: State-wise Birth Rates in India, 2016

Source: Sample Registration System Bulletin, Government of India, July 2016

Chart 3: Regional Shares of Projected Population Growth upto 2026



Source: Computed from 2001 Census figures and the Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections of the National Commission on Population, 2006.

2.3 Age Structure of the Indian Population

India has a very young population – that is, the majority of Indians tend to be young, and the average age is also less than that for most other countries. Table 2 shows that the share of the under 15 age group in the total population has come down from its highest level of 42% in 1971 to 35% in 2001. The share of the 15-60 age group has increased slightly from 53% to 59%, while the share of the 60+ age group is very small but it has begun to increase (from 5% to 7%) over the same period. But the age composition of the Indian population is expected to change significantly in the next two decades. Most of this change will be at the two ends of the age spectrum – as Table 2 shows, the 0 -14 age group will reduce its share by about 11% (from 34% in 2001 to 23% in 2026) while the 60 plus age group will increase its share by about 5% (from 7% in 2001 to about 12% in 2026.) Chart 4 shows a graphical picture of the 'population pyramid' from 1961 to its projected shape in 2016.

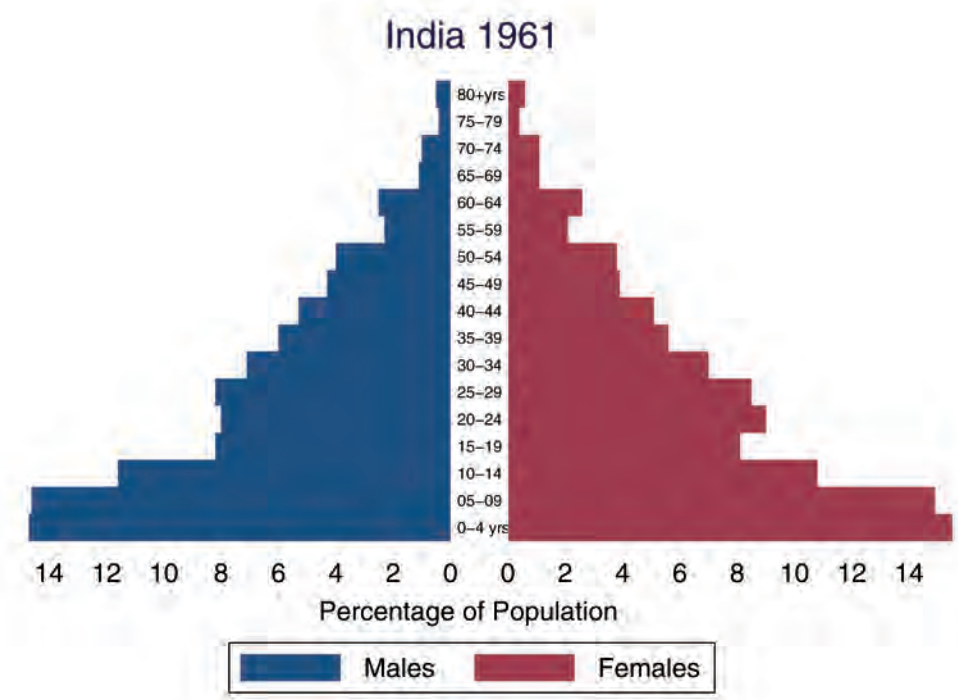
Table 2: Age Composition of the Population of India, 1961-2026

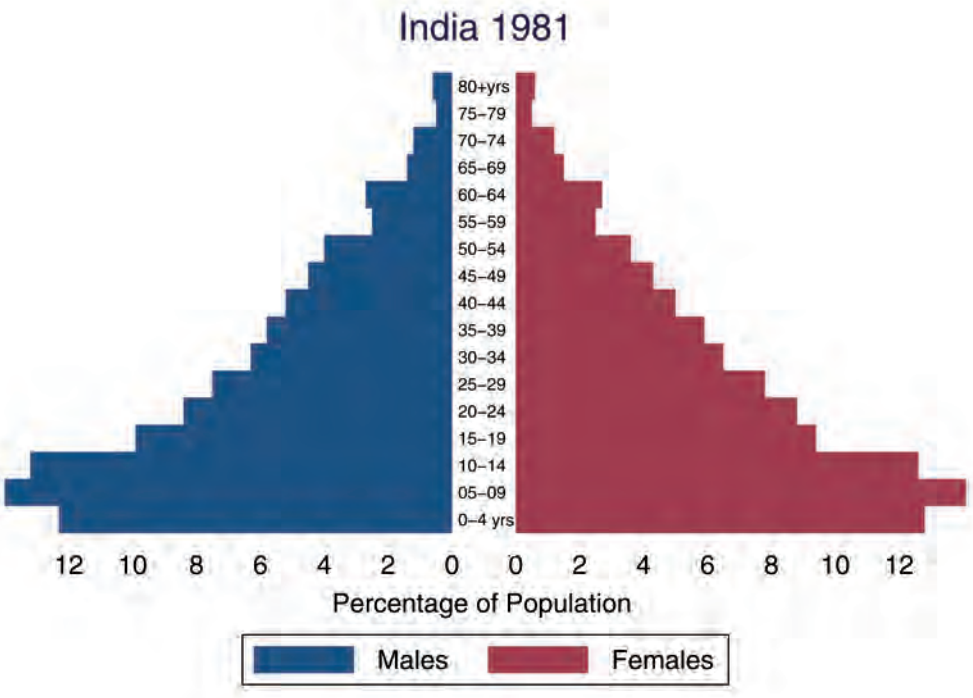
Year	*Age Groups*			Total
	0–14 Years	*15–59 Years*	*60+ Years*	
1961	41	53	6	100
1971	42	53	5	100
1981	40	54	6	100
1991	38	56	7	100
2001	34	59	7	100
2011	29	63	8	100
2026	23	64	12	100

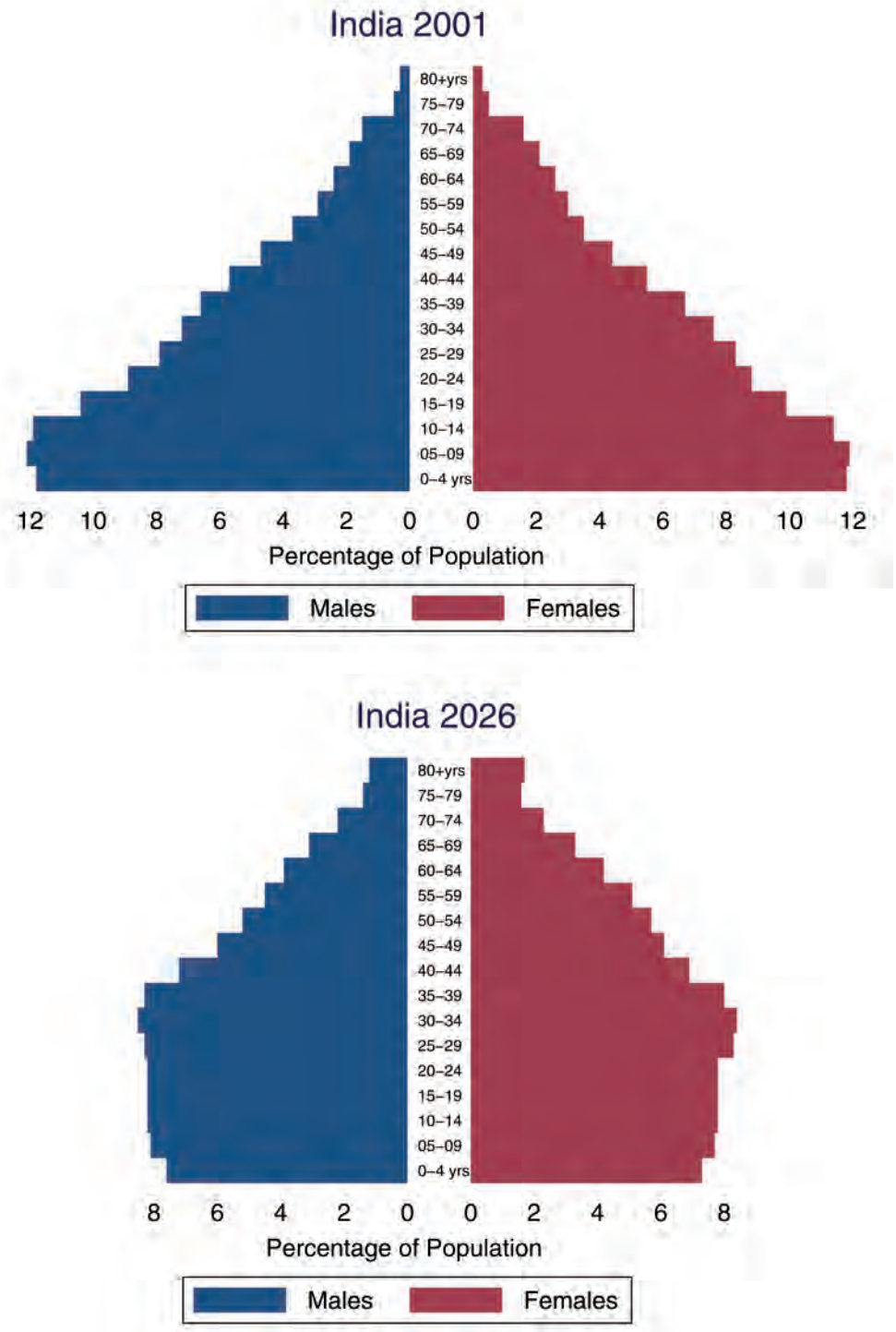
Age Group columns show percentage shares; rows may not add up to 100 because of rounding

Source: Based on data from the Technical Group on Population Projections (1996 and 2006) of the National Commission on Population.
Webpage for 1996 Report: http://populationcommission.nic.in/facts1.htm

Chart 4: Age Group Pyramids, 1961, 1981, 2001 and 2026







Source: Based on data from relevant volumes of the Census of India (1961, 1981 & 2001) and the Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections (2006) of the National Commission on Population.

Exercise for Chart 4

The Age Group 'pyramid' shown in Chart 4 provides a much more detailed version of the kind of age grouped data presented in Table 2. Here, data are shown separately for males (on the left side) and females (on the right side) with the relevant five-year age group in the middle. Looking at the horizontal bars (including both males and females in a particular age group) gives you a visual sense of the age structure of the population. The age groups begin from the 0-4 years group at the bottom of the pyramid and go on to the 80 years and above age group at the top. There are four different pyramids for the decennial census years of 1961, 1981, 2001 and the estimates for 2026. The pyramid for 2026 shows the estimated future size of the relevant age groups based on data on the past rates of growth of each age group. Such estimates are also called 'projections'.

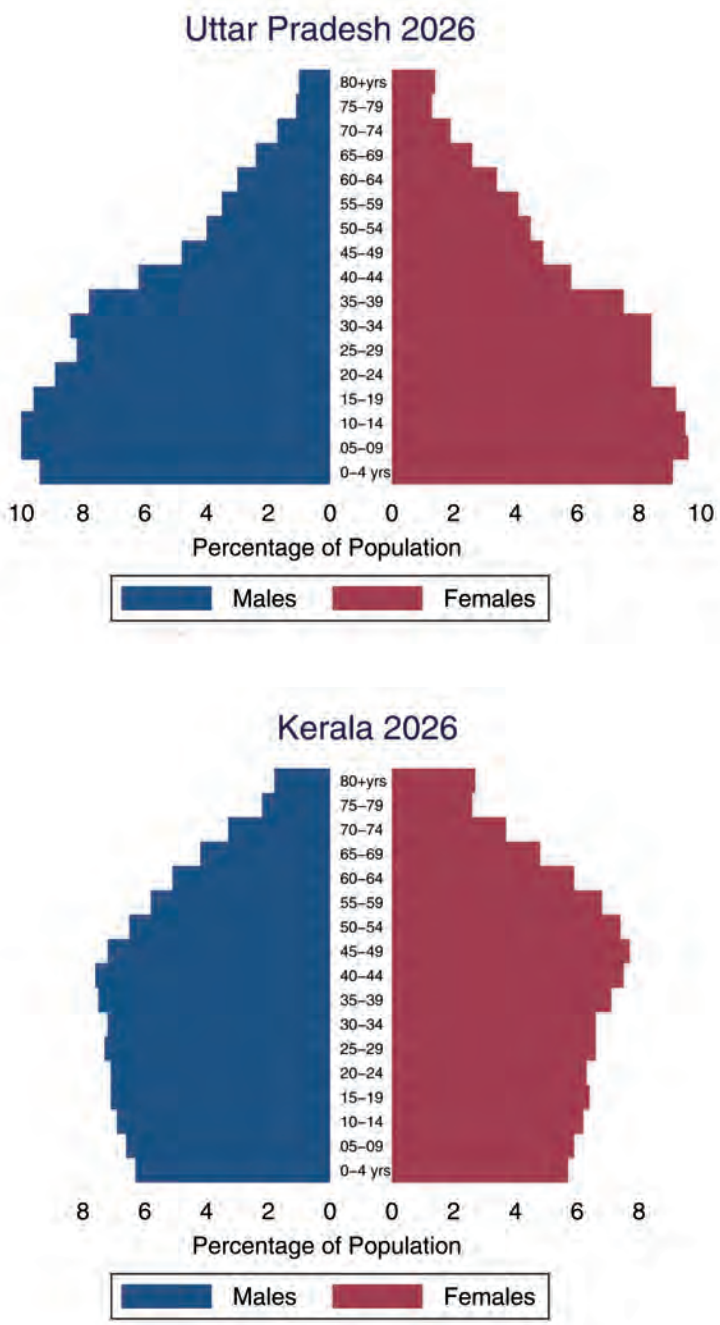
These pyramids show you the effect of a gradual fall in the birth rate and rise in the life expectancy. As more and more people begin to live to an older age, the top of the pyramid grows wider. As relatively fewer new births take place, the bottom of the pyramid grows narrower. But the birth rate is slow to fall, so the bottom doesn't change much between 1961 and 1981. The middle of the pyramid grows wider and wider as its share of the total population increases. This creates a 'bulge' in the middle age groups that is clearly visible in the pyramid for 2026. This is what is refered to as the 'demographic dividend' which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Study this chart carefully. With the help of your teacher, try to trace what happens to the new-born generation of 1961 (the 0-4 age group) as it moves up the pyramid in succesive years.

- Where will the 0-4 age group of 1961 be located in the pyramids for the later years?
- Where – in which age group – is the widest part of the pyramid as you move from 1961 to 2026?
- What do you think the shape of the pyramid might be in the year 2051 and 3001?

As with fertility rates, there are wide regional variations in the age structure as well. While a state like Kerala is beginning to acquire an age structure like that of the developed countries, Uttar Pradesh presents a very different picture with high proportions in the younger age groups and relatively low proportions among the aged. India as a whole is somewhere in the middle, because it includes states like Uttar Pradesh as well as states that are more like Kerala. Chart 5 shows the estimated population pyramids for Uttar Pradesh and Kerala in the year 2026. Note the difference in the location of the widest parts of the pyramid for Kerala and Uttar Pradesh.

Chart 5: Age Structure Pyramids, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh, 2026



Source: Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections (2006) of the National Commission on Population.

The bias towards younger age groups in the age structure is believed to be an advantage for India. Like the East Asian economies in the past decade and like Ireland today, India is supposed to be benefitting from a 'demographic dividend'. This dividend arises from the fact that the current generation of working-age people is a relatively large one, and it has only a relatively small preceding generation of old people to support. But there is nothing automatic about this advantage – it needs to be consciously exploited through appropriate policies as is explained in Box 2.3 below.

Box 2.3

Does the changing age structure offer a 'demographic dividend' for India?

The demographic advantage or `dividend' to be derived from the age structure of the population is due to the fact that India is (and will remain for some time) one of the youngest countries in the world. A third of India's population was below 15 years of age in 2000. In 2020, the average Indian will be only 29 years old, compared with an average age of 37 in China and the United States, 45 in Western Europe, and 48 in Japan. This implies a large and growing labour force, which can deliver unexpected benefits in terms of growth and prosperity.

The `demographic dividend' results from an increase in the proportion of workers relative to non-workers in the population. In terms of age, the working population is roughly that between 15 and 64 years of age. This working age group must support itself as well as those outside this age group (i.e., children and elderly people) who are unable to work and are therefore dependents. Changes in the age structure due to the demographic transition lower the `dependency ratio', or the ratio of non-working age to working-age population, thus creating the potential for generating growth.

But this potential can be converted into actual growth only if the rise in the working age group is accompanied by increasing levels of education and employment. If the new entrants to the labour force are not educated then their productivity remains low. If they remain unemployed, then they are unable to earn at all and become dependents rather than earners. Thus, changing age structure by itself cannot guarantee any benefits unless it is properly utilised through planned development. The real problem is in defining the dependency ratio as the ratio of the non-working age to working-age population, rather than the ratio of non-workers to workers. The difference between the two is determined by the extent of unemployment and underemployment, which keep a part of the labour force out of productive work. This difference explains why some countries are able to exploit the demographic advantage while others are not.

India is indeed facing a window of opportunity created by the demographic dividend. The effect of demographic trends on the dependency ratio defined in terms of age groups is quite visible. The total dependency ratio fell from 79 in 1970 to 64 in 2005. But the process is likely to extend well into this century with the age-based dependency ratio projected to fall to 48 in 2025 because of continued fall in the proportion of children and then rise to 50 by 2050 because of an increase in the proportion of the aged.

Activity 2.3

What impact do you think the age structure has on inter - generational relationships? For instance, could a high dependency ratio create conditions for increasing tension between older and younger generations? Or would it make for closer relationships and stronger bonds between young and old? Discuss this in class and try to come up with a list of possible outcomes and the reasons why they happen.

The problem, however, is employment. Data from the National Sample Survey studies of 1999-2000 and from the 2001 Census of India reveal a sharp fall in the rate of employment generation (creation of new jobs) across both rural and urban areas. This is true for the young as well. The rate of growth of employment in the 15-30 age group, which stood at around 2.4 per cent a year between 1987 and 1994 for both rural and urban men, fell to 0.7 for rural men and 0.3 per cent for urban men during 1994 to 2004. This suggests that the advantage offered by a young labour force is not being exploited.

Strategies exist to exploit the demographic window of opportunity that India has today. But India's recent experience suggests that market forces by themselves do not ensure that such strategies would be implemented. Unless a way forward is found, we may miss out on the potential benefits that the country's changing age structure temporarily offers.

[Source: Adapted from an article by C.P. Chandrashekhar in Frontline *Volume 23 - Issue 01, January 14-27, 2006]*

2.4 The Declining Sex-ratio in India

The sex ratio is an important indicator of gender balance in the population. As mentioned in the section on concepts earlier, historically, the sex ratio has been slightly in favour of females, that is, the number of females per 1000 males has generally been somewhat higher than 1000. However, India has had a declining sex-ratio for more than a century, as is clear from Table 3. From 972 females per 1000 males at the turn of the twentieth century, the sex ratio has declined to 933 at the turn of the twenty-first century. The trends of the last four decades have been particularly worrying – from 941 in 1961 the sex ratio had fallen to an all-time low of 927 in 1991 before posting a modest increase in 2001. According to the provisional data of Census of India 2011 sex ratio has been increased and now it is 940 females per 1000 males.

But what has really alarmed demographers, policy makers, social activists and concerned citizens is the drastic fall in the child sex ratio. Age specific sex ratios began to be computed in 1961. As is shown in Table 3, the sex ratio for the 0 - 6 years age group (known as the juvenile or child sex ratio) has generally been substantially higher than the overall sex ratio for all age groups, but it has been falling very sharply. In fact the decade 1991-2001 represents an anomaly in that the overall sex ratio has posted its highest ever increase of 6 points from the all time low of 927 to 933, but the child sex ratio has dropped from 945 to 927, a plunge of 18 points taking it below the overall sex ratio for the first time. In 2011 Census (provisional) the child sex ratio again decreased by 13 points and now it is 914.

Table 3: The Declining Sex Ratio in India, 1901–2011

Year	Sex ratio (all age groups)	Variation over previous decade	Child Sex ratio (0–6 years)	Variation over previous decade
1901	972	–	–	–
1911	964	–8		
1921	955	–9	–	–
1931	950	–5	–	–
1941	945	–5	–	–
1951	946	+1	–	–
1961	941	–5	976	–
1971	930	–11	964	–12
1981	934	+4	962	–2
1991	927	–7	945	–17
2001	933	+6	927	–18
2011*	940	+7	914	–13
2017	945	–	919	–

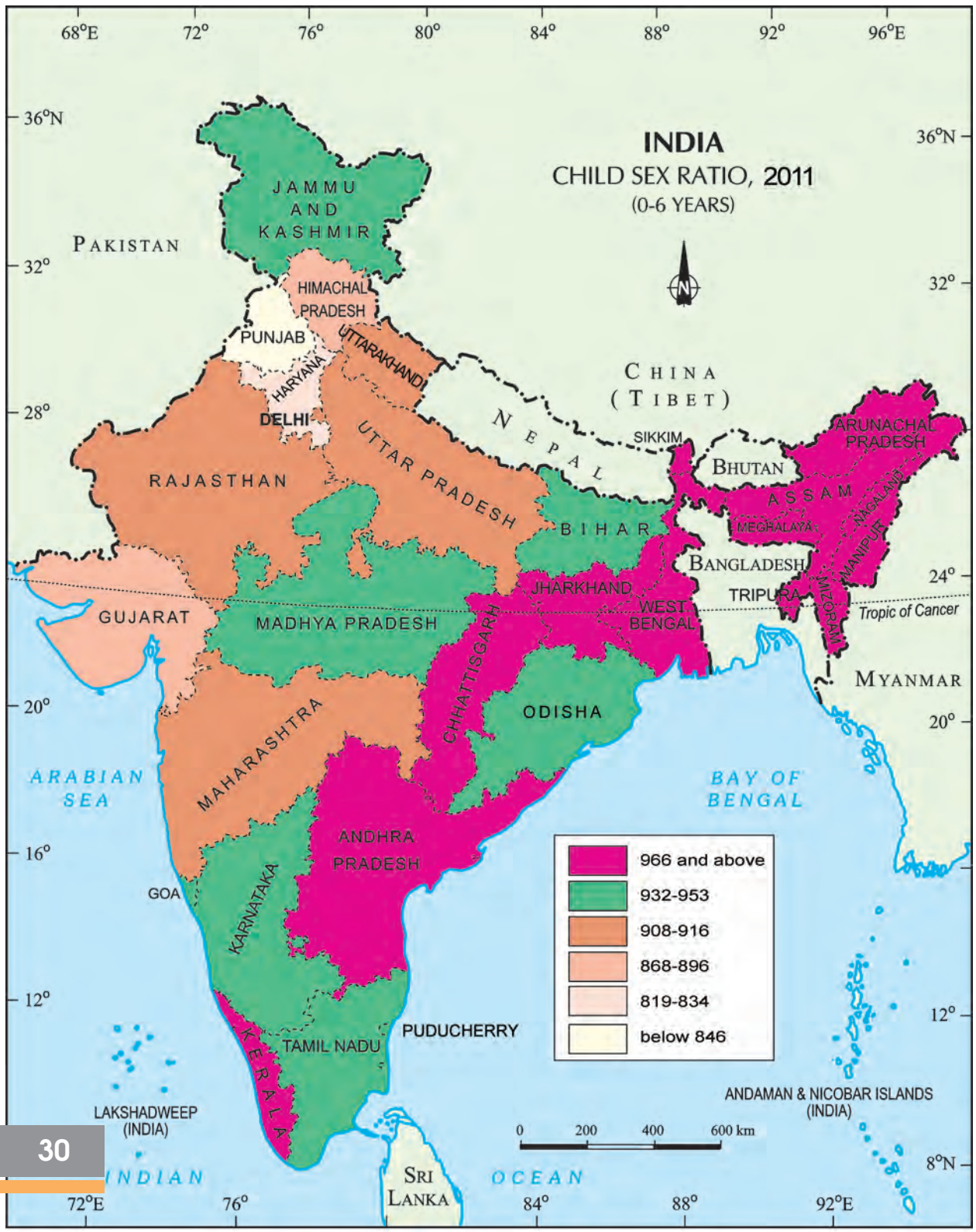
Note: The sex ratio is defined as the number of females per 1000 males
Data on age-specific sex ratios is not available before 1961

Source: **Census of India 2011 (Provisional) Government of India*

The state-level child sex ratios offer even greater cause for worry. As many as six States and Union Territories have a child sex ratio of under 900 females per 1000 males. Punjab is the worst with an incredibly low child sex ratio of 793 (the only state below 800), followed by Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. As Chart 6 shows, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra are all under 925, while Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Odisha are above the national average of 927 but below the 950-mark. Even Kerala, the state with the best overall sex ratio does not do too well at 963, while the highest child sex ratio of 986 is found in Sikkim.

Demographers and sociologists have offered several reasons for the decline in the sex ratio in India. The main health factor that affects women differently from men is childbearing. It is relevant to ask if the fall in the sex ratio may be partly due to the increased risk of death in childbirth that only women face. However, maternal mortality is supposed to decline with development, as levels of nutrition, general education and awareness, as well as, the availability of medical and communication facilities improves. Indeed, maternal mortality rates have been coming down in India even though they remain high by international standards. So, it is difficult to see how maternal mortality could have been responsible for the worsening of the sex ratio over time. Combined with the fact that the decline in the child sex ratio has been much steeper than the overall figure, social scientists believe that the cause has to be sought in the differential treatment of girl babies.

Chart 6: Map of Child Sex Ratios Across States, 2011



Source: Census Report of 2011

Several factors may be held responsible for the decline in the child sex ratio, including severe neglect of girl babies in infancy, leading to higher death rates; sex-specific abortions that prevent girl babies from being born; and female infanticide (or the killing of girl babies due to religious or cultural beliefs). Each of these reasons point to a serious social problem, and there is some evidence that all of these have been at work in India. Practices of female infanticide have been known to exist in many regions, while increasing importance is being attached to modern medical techniques by which the sex of the baby can be determined in the very early stages of pregnancy. The availability of the sonogram (an x-ray like diagnostic device based on ultra-sound technology), originally developed to identify genetic or other disorders in the foetus, may be used to identify and selectively abort female foetuses.

The regional pattern of low child sex ratios seems to support this argument. It is striking that the lowest child sex ratios are found in the most prosperous regions of India. According to the data of Census 2011, Maharashtra is still number one in case of per capita income. Now, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi are having high per capita income and the child sex ratio of these states is still low. So the problem of selective abortions is not due to poverty or ignorance or lack of resources. For example, if practices like dowry mean that parents have to make large dowry payments to marry off their daughters, then prosperous parents would be the ones most able to afford this. However, we find the sex ratio to be the lowest in the most prosperous regions.

Women's Agitation

It is also possible (though this issue is still being researched) that as economically prosperous families decide to have fewer children – often only one or two now – they may also wish to choose the sex of their child. This becomes possible with the availablity of ultra-sound technology, although the government has passed strict laws banning this practice and imposing heavy fines and imprisonment as punishment. Known as the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, this law has been in force since 1996, and has been further strengthened in 2003. However, in the long run, the solution to problems, like bias against girl children, depends more on how social attitudes evolve, even though laws and rules can also help. Recently, the Government of India has introduced the programme, *'Beti-Bachao, Beti-Padhao'*. It can prove to be an important policy to increase the child sex ratio in the country.

2.5 Literacy

Literacy as a prerequisite to education is an instrument of empowerment. The more literate the population the greater the consciousness of career options, as well as participation in the knowledge economy. Further, literacy can lead to health awareness and fuller participation in the cultural and economic well being of the community. Literacy levels have improved considerably after independence, and almost two-thirds of our population is now literate. But improvements in the literacy rate have to struggle to keep up with the rate of growth of the Indian population, which is still quite high. Enormous effort is needed to ensure the literacy of the new generations – which are only just beginning to be smaller in numbers than in the past (remember the discussion on age structure and the population pyramids earlier in this chapter).

Literacy varies considerably across gender, across regions, and across social groups. As can be seen from Table 4, the literacy rate for women is 16.7% less than the literacy rate for men (Census of India 2011-Provisional). However, female literacy has been rising faster than male literacy, partly because it started from relatively low levels. Female literacy rose by about 11.2 per cent between 2001 and 2011 compared to the rise in male lieracy of 6.2 per cent in the same period (Provisional). Literacy increased approximately 9% in total. Male literacy rose about 6% whereas female literacy rose about 10%. Again female literacy has been rising faster than male literacy. Literacy rates also vary by social group – historically disadvantaged communities like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have lower rates of literacy, and rates of female literacy within these groups are even lower. Regional variations are still very wide, with states like Kerala approaching universal literacy, while states like Bihar are lagging far behind. The inequalities in the literacy rate are specially important because they tend to reproduce inequality across generations. Illiterate parents are at a severe disadvantage in ensuring that their children are well educated, thus perpetuating existing inequalities.

Table 4: Literacy Rate in India

(Percentage of population 7 years of age and above)

Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male-Female gap in literacy rate
1951	18.3	27.2	8.9	18.3
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4	25.1
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0	24.0
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8	26.6
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3	24.8
2001	65.4	75.9	54.2	21.7
2011*	74.0	82.1	65.4	16.7

*Source: Bose (2001:22) *Census of India 2011 (Provisional).*

2.6 Rural-Urban Differences

The vast majority of the population of India has always lived in the rural areas, and that continues to be true. According to Census of India 2011 (Provisional) still more people are living in rural areas but the population of urban areas has increased. Now 68.8% population lives in rural areas while 31.2% people live in urban areas. However, as Table 5 shows, the urban population has been increasing its share steadily, from about 11% at the beginning of the twentieth century to about 28% at the beginning of the twenty-first century, an increase of about two-and-a-half times. It is not a question of numbers alone; processes of modern development ensure that the economic and social significance of the agrarian-rural way of life declines relative to the significance of the industrial-urban way of life. This has been broadly true all over the world, and it is true in India as well.

Table 5: Rural and Urban Population

Year	Population (Millions)		Percentage of Total Population	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
1901	213	26	89.2	10.8
1911	226	26	89.7	10.3
1921	223	28	88.8	11.2
1931	246	33	88.0	12.0
1941	275	44	86.1	13.9
1951	299	62	82.7	17.3
1961	360	79	82.0	18.0
1971	439	109	80.1	19.9
1981	524	159	76.7	23.3
1991	629	218	74.3	25.7
2001	743	286	72.2	27.8
2011*	833	377	68.8	31.2

Source: India 2006, A Reference Annual **Census of India 2011 (Provisional)*

Agriculture used to be by far the largest contributor to the country's total economic production, but today it only contributes about one-fourth of the gross domestic product. While the majority of our people live in the rural areas and make their living out of agriculture, the relative economic value of what they produce has fallen drastically. Moreover, more and more people who live in villages may no longer work in agriculture or even in the village. Rural

people are increasingly engaged in non-farm rural occupations like transport services, business enterprises or craft manufacturing. If they are close enough, then they may travel daily to the nearest urban centre to work while continuing to live in the village.

Mass media and communication channels are now bringing images of urban life styles and patterns of consumption into the rural areas. Consequently, urban norms and standards are becoming well known even in the remote villages, creating new desires and aspirations for consumption. Mass transit and mass communication are bridging the gap between the rural and urban areas. Even in the past, the rural areas were never really beyond the reach of market forces and today they are being more closely integrated into the consumer market. (The social role of markets will be discussed in Chapter 4).

ACTIVITY 2.4

Do a small survey in your school to find out when (i.e., how many generations ago) the families of your fellow students came to live in a city. Tabulate the results and discuss them in class. What does your survey tell you about rural-urban migrations?

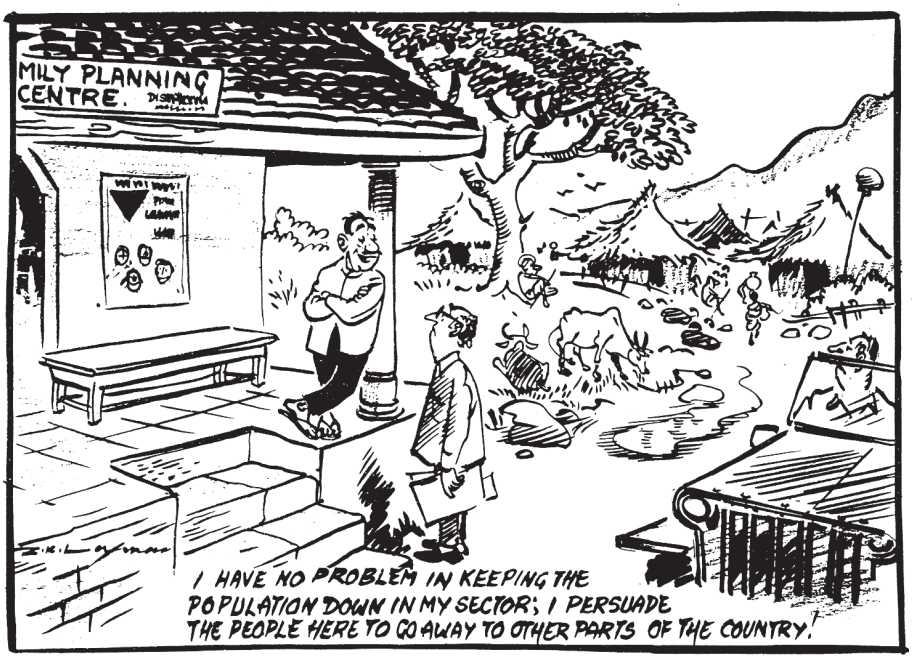
Considered from an urban point of view, the rapid growth in urbanisation shows that the town or city has been acting as a magnet for the rural population. Those who cannot find work (or sufficient work) in the rural areas go to the city in search of work. This flow of rural-to-urban migration has also been accelerated by the continuous decline of common property resources like ponds, forests and grazing lands. These common resources enabled poor people to survive in the villages although they owned little or no land. Now, these resources have been turned into private property, or they are exhausted. (Ponds may run dry or no longer provide enough fish; forests may have been cut down and have vanished...). If people no longer have access to these resources, but on the other hand have to buy many things in the market that they used to get free (like fuel, fodder or supplementary food items), then their hardship increases. This hardship is worsened by the fact that opportunities for earning cash income are limited in the villages.

Sometimes the city may also be preferred for social reasons, specially the relative anonymity it offers. The fact that urban life involves interaction with strangers can be an advantage for different reasons. For the socially oppressed groups like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, this may offer some partial protection from the daily humiliation they may suffer in the village where everyone knows their caste identity. The anonymity of the city also allows the poorer sections of the socially dominant rural groups to engage in low status work that they would not be able to do in the village. All these reasons make the city an attractive destination for the villagers. The swelling cities bear testimony to this flow of population. This is evident from the rapid rate of urbanisation in the post-Independence period.

While urbanisation has been occurring at a rapid pace, it is the biggest cities – the metropolises – that have been growing the fastest. These metros attract

migrants from the rural areas as well as from small towns. There are now 5,161 towns and cities in India, where 286 million people live. What is striking, however, is that more than two-thirds of the urban population lives in 27 big cities with million-plus populations. Clearly the larger cities in India are growing at such a rapid rate that the urban infrastructure can hardly keep pace. With the mass media's primary focus on these cities, the public face of India is becoming more and more urban rather than rural. Yet in terms of the political power dynamics in the country, the rural areas remain a decisive force.

2.7 Population Policy in India



It will be clear from the discussion in this chapter that population dynamics is an important matter and that it crucially affects the developmental prospects of a nation as well as the health and well being of its people. This is particularly true of developing countries who have to face special challenges in this regard. It is hardly surprising therefore that India has had an official population policy for more than a half century. In fact, India was perhaps the first country to explicitly announce such a policy in 1952.

The population policy took the concrete form of the National Family Planning Programme. The broad objectives of this programme have remained the same – to try to influence the rate and pattern of population growth in socially desirable directions. In the early days, the most important objective was to slow down the rate of population growth through the promotion of various birth control methods, improve public health standards, and increase public awareness about population and health issues. Over the past half-century or so, India has many significant achievements to her credit in the field of population, as summarised in Box 2.4.

The Family Planning Programme suffered a setback during the years of the National Emergency (1975-76). Normal parliamentary and legal procedures were suspended during this time and special laws and ordinances issued directly by the government (without being passed by Parliament) were in force. During this time the government tried to intensify the effort to bring down the growth

India's Demographic Transition

Box 2.4

Census data from India (i.e., Registrar of India) suggests that population growth is on the decline since 1991. The average number of children a woman expected was 3.8 in 1990, and this has fallen to 2.7 children per woman today (Bloom, 2011). Even though the fertility and population growth rates are declining, India's population is projected to increase from 1.2 billion today to an estimated 1.6 billion by 2050 due to **population momentum.** Population momentum refers to a situation, where a large cohort of women of reproductive age will fuel population growth over the next generation, even if each woman has fewer children than previous generations did. Additionally, the drop in Crude Death (CDR) and Birth Rates (CBR) for the past four decades indicates that India is progressing towards a post-transitional phase. From 1950 to 1990, the drop in CBR was less steep than the drop in the CDR. However, during 1990s, the decline in CBR has been steeper than the decline in CDR, which has resulted in reduced annual population growth rate of 1.4% today.

National Socio-Demographic Goals for 2010

Box 2.5

- Address the unmet needs for basic reproductive and child health services, supplies and infrastructure.
- Make school education up to the age of 14 years free and compulsory, and reduce dropouts at primary and secondary school levels to below 20 per cent for both boys and girls.
- Reduce infant mortality rate to below 30 per 1000 live births.
- Reduce maternal mortality ratio to below 100 per 100,000 live births.
- Achieve universal immunisation of children against all vaccine preventable diseases.
- Promote delayed marriage for girls, not earlier than age 18 and preferably after 20 years of age.
- Achieve 80 per cent institutional deliveries and 100 per cent deliveries by trained persons.
- Achieve universal access to information/counselling, and services for fertility regulation and contraception with a wide basket of choices.
- Achieve 100 per cent registration of births, deaths, marriage and pregnancy.
- Contain the spread of Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and promote greater integration between the management of reproductive tract infections (RTI) and sexually transmitted infections (STI) and the National AIDS Control Organisation.
- Prevent and control communicable diseases.
- Integrate Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM) in the provision of reproductive and child health services, and in reaching out to households.
- Promote vigorously the small family norm to achieve replacement levels of TFR.
- Bring about convergence in the implementation of related social sector programmes so that family welfare becomes a people-centred programme.

Source: National Commission on Population.

Aren't you proud? We are the world's biggest democracy and soon we will be a still bigger democracy!

rate of population by introducing a coercive programme of mass sterilisation. Here sterilisation refers to medical procedures like vasectomy (for men) and tubectomy (for women) which prevent conception and childbirth. Vast numbers of mostly poor and powerless people were forcibly sterilised and there was massive pressure on lower level government officials (like school teachers or office workers) to bring people for sterilisation in the camps that were organised for this purpose. There was widespread popular opposition to this programme, and the new government elected after the Emergency abandoned it.

The National Family Planning Programme was renamed as the National Family Welfare Programme after the Emergency, and coercive methods were no longer used. The programme now has a broad-based set of socio-demographic objectives. A new set of guidelines were formulated as part of the National Population Policy of the year 2000. These are summarised in Box 2.5 in the form of the policy targets set for the year 2010.

The history of India's National Family Welfare Programme teaches us that while the state can do a lot to try and create the conditions for demographic change, most demographic variables (specially those related to human fertility) are ultimately matters of economic, social and cultural change.

Questions

1. Explain the basic argument of the theory of demographic transition. Why is the transition period associated with a 'population explosion'?
2. Why did Malthus believe that catastrophic events like famines and epidemics that cause mass deaths were inevitable?
3. What is meant by 'birth rate' and 'death rate'? Explain why the birth rate is relatively slow to fall while the death rate declines much faster.
4. Which states in India have reached or are very near the 'replacement levels' of population growth? Which ones still have very high rates of population growth? In your opinion, what could be some of the reasons for these regional differences?
5. What is meant by the 'age structure' of the population? Why is it relevant for economic development and growth?
6. What is meant by the 'sex ratio'? What are some of the implications of a declining sex ratio? Do you feel that parents still prefer to have sons rather than daughters? What, in your opinion, could be some of the reasons for this preference?

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Notes

Chapter 3

Social Institutions
Continuity and Change

2018-19

Having studied the structure and dynamics of the population of India in Chapter 2, we turn now to the study of social institutions. A population is not just a collection of separate, unrelated individuals, it is a society made up of distinct but interlinked classes and communities of various kinds. These communities are sustained and regulated by social institutions and social relationships. In this chapter we will be looking at three institutions that are central to Indian society, namely caste, tribe and family.

3.1 Caste and the Caste System

Like any Indian, you already know that 'caste' is the name of an ancient social institution that has been part of Indian history and culture for thousands of years. But like any Indian living in the twenty-first century, you also know that something called 'caste' is definitely a part of Indian society today. To what extent are these two 'castes' – the one that is supposed to be part of India's past, and the one that is part of its present – the same thing? This is the question that we will try to answer in this section.

Caste in the Past

Caste is an institution uniquely associated with the Indian sub-continent. While social arrangements producing similar effects have existed in other parts of the world, the exact form has not been found elsewhere. Although it is an institution characteristic of Hindu society, caste has spread to the major non-Hindu communities of the Indian sub-continent. This is specially true of Muslims, Christians and Sikhs.

As is well-known, the English word 'caste' is actually a borrowing from the Portuguese *casta*, meaning pure breed. The word refers to a broad institutional arrangement that in Indian languages (beginning with the ancient Sanskrit) is referred to by two distinct terms, *varna* and *jati*. *Varna*, literally 'colour', is the name given to a four-fold division of society into *brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya* and *shudra*, though this excludes a significant section of the population composed of the 'outcastes', foreigners, slaves, conquered peoples and others, sometimes refered to as the *panchamas* or fifth category. *Jati* is a generic term referring to species or kinds of anything, ranging from inanimate objects to plants, animals and human beings. *Jati* is the word most commonly used to refer to the institution of caste in Indian languages, though it is interesting to note that, increasingly, Indian language speakers are beginning to use the English word 'caste'.

The precise relationship between varna and jati has been the subject of much speculation and debate among scholars. The most common interpretation is to treat varna as a broad all-India aggregative classification, while jati is taken to be a regional or local sub-classification involving a much more complex system consisting of hundreds or even thousands of castes and sub-castes.

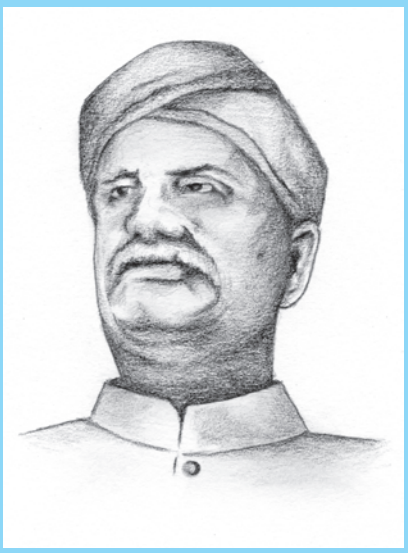
This means that while the four varna classification is common to all of India, the jati hierarchy has more local classifications that vary from region to region.

Opinions also differ on the exact age of the caste system. It is generally agreed, though, that the four varna classification is roughly three thousand years old. However, the 'caste system' stood for different things in different time periods, so that it is misleading to think of the same system continuing for three thousand years. In its earliest phase, in the late Vedic period roughly between 900 — 500 BC, the caste system was really a varna system and consisted of only four major divisions. These divisions were not very elaborate or very rigid, and they were not determined by birth. Movement across the categories seems to have been not only possible but quite common. It is only in the post-Vedic period that caste became the rigid institution that is familiar to us from well known definitions.

The most commonly cited defining features of caste are the following:

1. Caste is determined by birth – a child is "born into" the caste of its parents. Caste is never a matter of choice. One can never change one's caste, leave it, or choose not to join it, although there are instances where a person may be expelled from their caste.
2. Membership in a caste involves strict rules about marriage. Caste groups are "endogamous", i.e. marriage is restricted to members of the group.
3. Caste membership also involves rules about food and food-sharing. What kinds of food may or may not be eaten is prescribed and who one may share food with is also specified.
4. Caste involves a system consisting of many castes arranged in a hierarchy of rank and status. In theory, every person has a caste, and every caste has a specified place in the hierarchy of all castes. While the hierarchical position of many castes, particularly in the middle ranks, may vary from region to region, there is always a hierarchy.
5. Castes also involve sub-divisions within themselves, i.e., castes almost always have sub-castes and sometimes sub-castes may also have sub-sub-castes. This is referred to as a segmental organisation.
6. Castes were traditionally linked to occupations. A person born into a caste could only practice the occupation associated with that caste, so that occupations were hereditary, i.e. passed on from generation to

Ayyankali
(1863 - 1914)



Ayyankali, born in Kerala, was a leader of the lower castes and Dalits. With his efforts, Dalits got the freedom to walk on public roads, and Dalit children were allowed to join schools.

Jotirao Govindrao Phule (1827-1890)

Jotirao Govindrao Phule denounced the injustice of the caste system and scorned its rules of purity and pollution. In 1873 he founded the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers Society), which was devoted to securing human rights and social justice for low-caste people.

generation. On the other hand, a particular occupation could only be pursued by the caste associated with it – members of other castes could not enter the occupation.

These features are the prescribed rules found in ancient scriptural texts. Since these prescriptions were not always practiced, we cannot say to what extent these rules actually determined the empirical reality of caste – its concrete meaning for the people living at that time. As you can see, most of the prescriptions involved prohibitions or restrictions of various sorts. It is also clear from the historical evidence that caste was a very unequal institution – some castes benefitted greatly from the system, while others were condemned to a life of endless labour and subordination. Most important, once caste became rigidly determined by birth, it was in principle impossible for a person to ever change their life circumstances. Whether they deserved it or not, an upper caste person would always have high status, while a lower caste person would always be of low status.

Theoretically, the caste system can be understood as the combination of two sets of principles, one based on difference and separation and the other on wholism and hierarchy. Each caste is supposed to be different from – and is therefore strictly separated from – every other caste. Many of the scriptural rules of caste are thus designed to prevent the mixing of castes – rules ranging from marriage, food sharing and social interaction to occupation. On the other hand, these different and separated castes do not have an individual existence – they can only exist in relation to a larger whole, the totality of society consisting of all castes. Further, this societal whole or system is a hierarchical rather than egalitarian system. Each individual caste occupies not just a distinct place, but also an ordered rank – a particular position in a ladder-like arrangement going from highest to lowest.

The hierarchical ordering of castes is based on the distinction between 'purity' and 'pollution'. This is a division between something believed to be closer to the sacred (thus connoting ritual purity), and something believed to be distant from or opposed to the sacred, therefore considered ritually polluting. Castes that are considered ritually pure have high status, while those considered less pure or impure have low status. As in all societies, material power (i.e., economic or military power) is closely associated with social status, so that those in power tend to be of high status, and vice versa. Historians believe that those who were defeated in wars were often assigned low caste status.

Finally, castes are not only unequal to each other in ritual terms, they are also supposed to be complementary and non-competing groups. In other words,

each caste has its own place in the system which cannot be taken by any other caste. Since caste is also linked with occupation, the system functions as the social division of labour, except that, in principle, it allows no mobility.

Not surprisingly, our sources of knowledge about the past and specially the ancient past are inadequate. It is difficult to be very certain about what things were like at that time, or the reasons why some institutions and practices came to be established. But even if we knew all this, it still cannot tell us about what should be done today. Just because something happened in the past or is part of our tradition, it is not necessarily right or wrong forever. Every age has to think afresh about such questions and come to its own collective decision about its social institutions.

Colonialism and Caste

Compared to the ancient past, we know a lot more about caste in our recent history. If modern history is taken to begin with the nineteenth century, then Indian Independence in 1947 offers a natural dividing line between the colonial period (roughly 150 years from around 1800 to 1947) and the post-Independence or post-colonial period (the six decades from 1947 to the present day). The present form of caste as a social institution has been shaped very strongly by both the colonial period as well as the rapid changes that have come about in independent India.

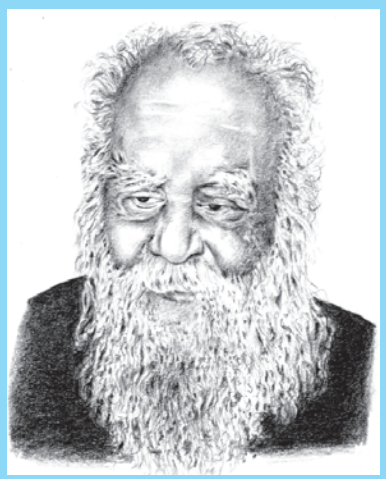
Savitri Bai Phule (1831-1897)

Savitri Bai Phule was the first headmistress of the country's first school for girls in Pune. She devoted her life to educating Shudras and Ati-Shudras. She started a night school for agriculturists and labourers. She died while serving plague patients.

Scholars have agreed that all major social institutions and specially the institution of caste underwent major changes during the colonial period. In fact, some scholars argue that what we know today as caste is more a product of colonialism than of ancient Indian tradition. Not all of the changes brought about were intended or deliberate. Initially, the British administrators began by trying to understand the complexities of caste in an effort to learn how to govern the country efficiently. Some of these efforts took the shape of very methodical and intensive surveys and reports on the 'customs and manners' of various tribes and castes all over the country. Many British administrative officials were also amateur ethnologists and took great interest in pursuing such surveys and studies.

But by far the most important official effort to collect information on caste was through the census. First begun in the 1860s, the census became a regular ten-yearly exercise conducted by the British Indian government from 1881 onwards. The 1901 Census under the direction of Herbert Risley was particularly important as it sought to collect information on the social hierarchy of caste – i.e., the social order of precedence in particular regions, as to the position of

Periyar (E.V. Ramasami Naickar) (1879-1973)



Periyar (E.V. Ramasami Naickar) is known as a rationalist and the leader of the lower caste movement in South India. He aroused people to realise that all men are equal, and that it is the birthright of every individual to enjoy liberty and equality.

each caste in the rank order. This effort had a huge impact on social perceptions of caste and hundreds of petitions were addressed to the Census Commissioner by representatives of different castes claiming a higher position in the social scale and offering historical and scriptural evidence for their claims. Overall, scholars feel that this kind of direct attempt to count caste and to officially record caste status changed the institution itself. Before this kind of intervention, caste identities had been much more fluid and less rigid; once they began to be counted and recorded, caste began to take on a new life.

Other interventions by the colonial state also had an impact on the institution. The land revenue settlements and related arrangements and laws served to give legal recognition to the customary (caste-based) rights of the upper castes. These castes now became land owners in the modern sense rather than feudal classes with claims on the produce of the land, or claims to revenue or tribute of various kinds. Large scale irrigation schemes like the ones in the Punjab were accompanied by efforts to settle populations there, and these also had a caste dimension. At the other end of the scale, towards the end of the colonial period, the administration also took an interest in the welfare of downtrodden castes, referred to as the 'depressed classes' at that time. It was as part of these efforts that the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed which gave legal recognition to the lists or 'schedules' of castes and tribes marked out for special treatment by the state. This is how the terms 'Scheduled Tribes' and the 'Scheduled Castes' came into being. Castes at the bottom of the hierarchy that suffered severe discrimination, including all the so-called 'untouchable' castes, were included among the Scheduled Castes. (You will read more on untouchability and the struggles against it in Chapter 5 on social exclusion.)

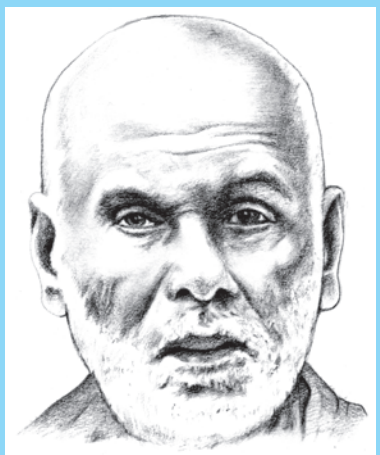
Thus colonialism brought about major changes in the institution of caste. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the institution of caste underwent fundamental changes during the colonial period. Not just India, but the whole world was undergoing rapid change during this period due to the spread of capitalism and modernity.

Caste in the Present

Indian Independence in 1947 marked a big, but ultimately only partial break with the colonial past. Caste considerations had inevitably played a role in the mass mobilisations of the nationalist movement. Efforts to organise the

"depressed classes" and particularly the untouchable castes predated the nationalist movement, having begun in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was an initiative taken from both ends of the caste spectrum – by upper caste progressive reformers as well as by members of the lower castes such as Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar in western India, Ayyankali, Sri Narayana Guru, Iyotheedass and Periyar (E.V. Ramaswamy Naickar) in the South. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar began organising protests against untouchability from the 1920s onwards. Anti-untouchability programmes became a significant part of the Congress agenda so that, by the time Independence was on the horizon, there was a broad agreement across the spectrum of the nationalist movement to abolish caste distinctions. The dominant view in the nationalist movement was to treat caste as a social evil and as a colonial ploy to divide Indians. But the nationalist leaders, above all, Mahatma Gandhi, were able to simultaneously work for the upliftment of the lower castes, advocate the abolition of untouchability and other caste restrictions, and, at the same time, reassure the landowning upper castes that their interests, too, would be looked after.

Sri Narayana Guru (1856-1928)



Sri Narayana Guru, born in Kerala, preached brotherhood for all and fought against the ill effects of the caste system. He led a quiet but significant social revolution and gave the watchwords 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for all men'.

The post-Independence Indian state inherited and reflected these contradictions. On the one hand, the state was committed to the abolition of caste and explicitly wrote this into the Constitution. On the other hand, the state was both unable and unwilling to push through radical reforms which would have undermined the economic basis for caste inequality. At yet another level, the state assumed that if it operated in a caste-blind manner, this would automatically lead to the undermining of caste based privileges and the eventual abolition of the institution. For example, appointments to government jobs took no account of caste, thus leaving the well-educated upper castes and the ill-educated or often illiterate lower castes to compete on "equal" terms. The only exception to this was in the form of reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In other words, in the decades immediately after Independence, the state did not make sufficient effort to deal with the fact that the upper castes and the lower castes were far from equal in economic and educational terms.

The development activity of the state and the growth of private industry also affected caste indirectly through the speeding up and intensification of economic change. Modern industry created all kinds of new jobs for which there were no caste rules. Urbanisation and the conditions of collective living in the cities made it difficult for the caste-segregated patterns of social interaction to survive. At a different level, modern educated Indians attracted to the liberal

ideas of individualism and meritocracy, began to abandon the more extreme caste practices. On the other hand, it was remarkable how resilient caste proved to be. Recruitment to industrial jobs, whether in the textile mills of Mumbai (then Bombay), the jute mills of Kolkata (then Calcutta), or elsewhere, continued to be organised along caste and kinship-based lines. The middle men who recruited labour for factories tended to recruit them from their own caste and region so that particular departments or shop floors were often dominated by specific castes. Prejudice against the untouchables remained quite strong and was not absent from the city, though not as extreme as it could be in the village.

Not surprisingly, it was in the cultural and domestic spheres that caste has proved strongest. Endogamy, or the practice of marrying within the caste, remained largely unaffected by modernisation and change. Even today, most marriages take place within caste boundaries, although there are more intercaste marriages. While some boundaries may have become more flexible or porous, the borders between groups of castes of similar socio-economic status are still heavily patrolled. For example, inter-caste marriages within the upper castes (eg., brahmin, bania, rajput) may be more likely now than before; but marriages between an upper caste and backward or scheduled caste person remain rare even today. Something similar may have occurred with regard to rules of food sharing.

Perhaps, the most eventful and important sphere of change has been that of politics. From its very beginnings in independent India, democratic politics has been deeply conditioned by caste. While its functioning has become more and more complex and hard to predict, it cannot be denied that caste remains central to electoral politics. Since the 1980s we have also seen the emergence of explicitly caste-based political parties. In the early general elections, it seemed as though caste solidarities were decisive in winning elections. But the situation soon got very complicated as parties competed with each other in utilising the same kind of caste calculus.

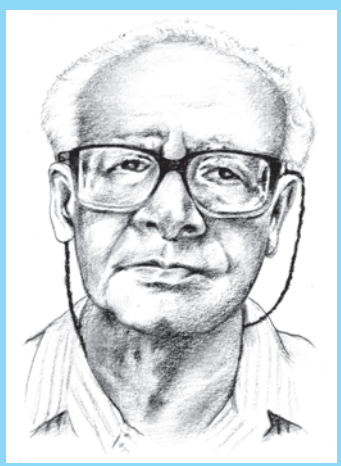
Sociologists and social anthropologists coined many new concepts to try and understand these processes of change. Perhaps the most common of these are 'sanskritisation' and 'dominant caste', both contributed by M.N. Srinivas, but discussed extensively and criticised by other scholars.

'Sanskritisation' refers to a process whereby members of a (usually middle or lower) caste attempt to raise their own social status by adopting the ritual, domestic and social practices of a caste (or castes) of higher status. Although this phenomenon is an old one and predates Independence and perhaps even the colonial period, it has intensified in recent times. The patterns for emulation chosen most often were the brahmin or kshatriya castes; practices included adopting vegetarianism, wearing of sacred thread, performance of specific prayers and religious ceremonies, and so on. Sanskritisation usually accompanies or follows a rise in the economic status of the caste attempting it, though it may also occur independently. Subsequent research has led to many modifications and revisions being suggested for this concept. These include the argument that sanskritisation may be a defiant claiming of previously

prohibited ritual/social privileges (such as the wearing of the sacred thread, which used to invite severe punishment) rather than a flattering imitation of the 'upper' castes by the 'lower' castes.

'Dominant caste' is a term used to refer to those castes which had a large population and were granted landrights by the partial land reforms effected after Independence. The land reforms took away rights from the erstwhile claimants, the upper castes who were 'absentee landlords' in the sense that they played no part in the agricultural economy other than claiming their rent. They frequently did not live in the village either, but were based in towns and cities. These land rights now came to be vested in the next layer of claimants, those who were involved in the management of agriculture but were not themselves the cultivators. These intermediate castes in turn depended on the labour of the lower castes including specially the 'untouchable' castes for tilling and tending the land. However, once they got land rights, they acquired considerable economic power. Their large numbers also gave them political power in the era of electoral democracy based on universal adult franchise. Thus, these intermediate castes became the 'dominant' castes in the country side and played a decisive role in regional politics and the agrarian economy. Examples of such dominant castes include the Yadavs of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the Vokkaligas of Karnataka, the Reddys and Khammas of Andhra Pradesh, the Marathas of Maharashtra, the Jats of Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh and the Patidars of Gujarat.

M. N. Srinivas (1916-1999)



Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas was one of India's foremost sociologists and social anthropologists. He was known for his works on the caste system and terms such as 'sanskritisation' and 'dominant caste'. His book *The Remembered Village* is one of the best known village studies in Social Anthropology.

One of the most significant yet paradoxical changes in the caste system in the contemporary period is that it has tended to become 'invisible' for the upper caste, urban middle and upper classes. For these groups, who have benefited the most from the developmental policies of the post-colonial era, caste has appeared to decline in significance precisely because it has done its job so well. Their caste status had been crucial in ensuring that these groups had the necessary economic and educational resources to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by rapid development. In particular, the upper caste elite were able to benefit from subsidised public education, specially professional education in science, technology, medicine and management. At the same time, they were also able to take advantage of the expansion of state sector jobs in the early decades after Independence. In this initial period, their lead over the rest of society (in terms of education) ensured that they did not face any serious competition. As their privileged status got consolidated in the second and third generations, these groups began to believe that their advancement

had little to do with caste. Certainly for the third generations from these groups their economic and educational capital alone is quite sufficient to ensure that they will continue to get the best in terms of life chances. For this group, it now seems that caste plays no part in their public lives, being limited to the personal sphere of religious practice or marriage and kinship. However, a further complication is introduced by the fact that this is a differentiated group. Although the privileged as a group are overwhelmingly upper caste, not all upper caste people are privileged, some being poor.

For the so called scheduled castes and tribes and the backward castes – the opposite has happened. For them, caste has become all too visible, indeed their caste has tended to eclipse the other dimensions of their identities. Because they have no inherited educational and social capital, and because they must compete with an already entrenched upper caste group, they cannot afford to abandon their caste identity for it is one of the few collective assets they have. Moreover, they continue to suffer from discrimination of various kinds. The policies of reservation and other forms of protective discrimination instituted by the state in response to political pressure serve as their lifelines. But using this lifeline tends to make their caste the all-important and often the only aspect of their identity that the world recognises.

The juxtaposition of these two groups – a seemingly caste-less upper caste group and an apparently caste-defined lower caste group – is one of the central aspects of the institution of caste in the present.

3.2 Tribal Communities

'Tribe' is a modern term for communities that are very old, being among the oldest inhabitants of the sub-continent. Tribes in India have generally been defined in terms of what they were *not*. Tribes were communities that did not practice a religion with a written text; did not have a state or political form of the normal kind; did not have sharp class divisions; and, most important, they did not have caste and were neither Hindus nor peasants. The term was introduced in the colonial era. The use of a single term for a very disparate set of communities was more a matter of administrative convenience.

Classifications of Tribal Societies

In terms of positive characteristics, tribes have been classified according to their 'permanent' and 'acquired' traits. Permanent traits include region, language, physical characteristics and ecological habitat.

Permanent Traits

The tribal population of India is widely dispersed, but there are also concentrations in certain regions. About 85% of the tribal population lives in

'middle India', a wide band stretching from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the west to West Bengal and Odisha in the east, with Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and parts of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh forming the heart of this region. Of the remaining 15%, over 11% is in the North Eastern states, leaving only a little over 3% living in the rest of India. If we look at the share of tribals in the state population, then the North Eastern states have the highest concentrations, with all states, except Assam, having concentrations of more than 30%, and some, like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland with more than 60% and upto 95% of tribal population. In the rest of the country, however, the tribal population is very small, being less than 12% in all states except Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. The ecological habitats covered includes hills, forests, rural plains and urban industrial areas.

In terms of language, tribes are categorised into four categories. Two of them, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian, are shared by the rest of the Indian population as well, and tribes account for only about 1% of the former and about 3% of the latter. The other two language groups, the Austric and Tibeto-Burman, are primarily spoken by tribals, who account for all of the first and over 80% of the second group. In physical-racial terms, tribes are classified under the Negrito, Australoid, Mongoloid, Dravidian and Aryan categories. The last two are again shared with the rest of the population of India.

In terms of size, tribes vary a great deal, ranging from about seven million to some Andamanese islanders who may number less than a hundred persons. The biggest tribes are the Gonds, Bhils, Santhals, Oraons, Minas, Bodos and Mundas, all of whom are at least a million strong. The total population of tribes amounts to about 8.2% of the population of India, or about 84 million persons according to the 2001 Census. According to Census Report 2011, it is 8.6% of the population of India, or about 104 million tribal persons in the country.

Acquired Traits

Classifications based on acquired traits use two main criteria – mode of livelihood, and extent of incorporation into Hindu society – or a combination of the two.

On the basis of livelihood, tribes can be categorised into fishermen, food gatherers and hunters, shifting cultivators, peasants and plantation and industrial workers. However, the dominant classification both in academic sociology as well as in politics and public affairs is the degree of assimilation into Hindu society. Assimilation can be seen either from the point of view of the tribes, or (as has been most often the case) from the point of view of the dominant Hindu mainstream. From the tribes' point of view, apart from the extent of assimilation, attitude towards Hindu society is also a major criterion, with differentiation between tribes that are positively inclined towards Hinduism and those who resist or oppose it. From the mainstream point of view, tribes may be viewed in terms of the status accorded to them in Hindu society, ranging from the high status given to some, to the generally low status accorded to most.

Tribe – The Career of a Concept

During the 1960s scholars debated whether tribes should be seen as one end of a continuum with caste-based (Hindu) peasant society, or whether they were an altogether different kind of community. Those who argued for the continuum saw tribes as not being fundamentally different from caste-peasant society, but merely less stratified (fewer levels of hierarchy) and with a more community-based rather than individual notion of resource ownership. However, opponents argued that tribes were wholly different from castes because they had no notion of purity and pollution which is central to the caste system.

A tribal village fair

In short, the argument for a tribe-caste distinction was founded on an assumed cultural difference between Hindu castes, with their beliefs in purity and pollution and hierarchical integration, and 'animist' tribals with their more egalitarian and kinship based modes of social organisation.

By the 1970s all the major definitions of tribe were shown to be faulty. It was pointed out that the tribe-peasantry distinction did not hold in terms of any of the commonly advanced criteria: size, isolation, religion, and means of livelihood. Some Indian "tribes" like Santhal, Gonds, and Bhils are very large and spread over extensive territory. Certain tribes like Munda, Hos and others have long since turned to settled agriculture, and even hunting gathering tribes, like the Birhors of Bihar employ specialised households to make baskets, press oil etc. It has also been pointed out in a number of cases, that in the absence of other alternatives, "castes" (or non-tribals) have turned to hunting and gathering.

The discussion on caste-tribe differences was accompanied by a large body of literature on the mechanisms through which tribes were absorbed into Hindu society, throughout the ages – through Sanskritisation, acceptance into the Shudra fold following conquest by caste Hindus, through acculturation and so on. The whole span of Indian history is often seen as an absorption of different tribal groups into caste Hindu society at varying levels of the hierarchy, as their lands were colonised and the forests cut down. This is seen as either natural, parallel to the process by which all groups are assimiliated into Hinduism as sects; or it is seen as exploitative. The early school of anthropologists tended to emphasise the cultural aspects of tribal absorption

into the mainstream, while the later writers have concentrated on the exploitative and political nature of the incorporation.

Some scholars have also argued that there is no coherent basis for treating tribes as "pristine" – i.e., original or pure – societies uncontaminated by civilisation. They propose instead that tribes should really be seen as "secondary" phenomena arising out of the exploitative and colonialist contact between pre-existing states and non-state groups like the tribals. This contact itself creates an ideology of "tribalism" – the tribal groups begin to define themselves as tribals in order to distinguish themselves from the newly encountered others.

Nevertheless, the idea that tribes are like stone age hunting and gathering societies that have remained untouched by time is still common, even though this has not been true for a long time. To begin with, adivasis were not always the oppressed groups they are now – there were several Gond kingdoms in Central India such as that of Garha Mandla, or Chanda. Many of the so-called Rajput kingdoms of central and western India actually emerged through a process of stratification among adivasi communities themselves. adivasis often exercised dominance over the plains people through their capacity to raid them, and through their services as local militias. They also occupied a special trade niche, trading forest produce, salt and elephants. Moreover, the capitalist economy's drive to exploit forest resources and minerals and to recruit cheap labour has brought tribal societies in contact with mainstream society a long time ago.

Mainstream Attitudes Towards Tribes

Although the early anthropological work of the colonial era had described tribes as isolated cohesive communities, colonialism had already brought irrevocable changes in their world. On the political and economic front, tribal societies were faced with the incursion of money lenders. They were also losing their land to non-tribal immigrant settlers, and their access to forests because of the government policy of reservation of forests and the introduction of mining operations. Unlike other areas, where land rent was the primary source of surplus extraction, in these hilly and forested areas, it was mostly appropriation of natural resources – forests and minerals – which was the main source of income for the colonial government. Following the various rebellions in tribal areas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the colonial government set up 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas, where the entry of non-tribals was prohibited or regulated. In these areas, the British favoured indirect rule through local kings or headmen.

The famous isolation versus integration debate of the 1940s built upon this standard picture of tribal societies as isolated wholes. The isolationist side argued that tribals needed protection from traders, moneylenders and Hindu and Christian missionaries, all of whom were intent on reducing tribals to detribalised landless labour. The integrationists, on the other hand, argued that tribals were merely backward Hindus, and their problems had to be

addressed within the same framework as that of other backward classes. This opposition dominated the Constituent Assembly debates, which were finally settled along the lines of a compromise which advocated welfare schemes that would enable controlled integration. The subsequent schemes for tribal development – five year plans, tribal sub-plans, tribal welfare blocks, special multipurpose area schemes all continue with this mode of thinking. But the basic issue here is that the integration of tribes has neglected their own needs or desires; integration has been on the terms of the mainstream society and for its own benefit. The tribal societies have had their lands, forests taken away and their communities shattered in the name of development.

National Development versus Tribal Development

The imperatives of 'development' have governed attitudes towards tribes and shaped the policies of the state. National development, particularly in the Nehruvian era, involved the building of large dams, factories and mines. Because the tribal areas were located in mineral rich and forest covered parts of the country, tribals have paid a disproportionate price for the development of the rest of Indian society. This kind of development has benefited the mainstream at the expense of the tribes. The process of dispossessing tribals of their land has occurred as a necessary byproduct of the exploitation of minerals and the utilisation of favourable sites for setting up hydroelectric power plants, many of which were in tribal areas.

The loss of the forests on which most tribal communities depended has been a major blow. Forests started to be systematically exploited in British times and the trend continued after Independence. The coming of private property in land has also adversely affected tribals, whose community-based forms of collective ownership were placed at a disadvantage in the new system. The most recent such example is the series of dams being built on the Narmada, where most of the costs and benefits seem to flow disproportionately to different communities and regions.

Many tribal concentration regions and states have also been experiencing the problem of heavy in-migration of non-tribals in response to the pressures of development. This threatens to disrupt and overwhelm tribal communities and cultures, besides accelerating the process of exploitation of tribals. The industrial areas of Jharkhand for example have suffered a dilution of the tribal share of population. But the most dramatic cases are probably in the North-East. A state like Tripura had the tribal share of its population halved within a single decade, reducing them to a minority. Similar pressure is being felt by Arunachal Pradesh.

Tribal Identity Today

Forced incorporation of tribal communities into mainstream processes has had its impact on tribal culture and society as much as its economy. Tribal identities

today are formed by this interactional process rather than any primordial (orginal, ancient) characteristics peculiar to tribes. Because the interaction with the mainstream has generally been on terms unfavourable to the tribal communities, many tribal identities today are centred on ideas of resistance and opposition to the overwhelming force of the non-tribal world.

Agitation by tribal women

The positive impact of successes – such as the achievement of statehood for Jharkhand and Chattisgarh after a long struggle – is moderated by continuing problems. Many of the states of the North-East, for example, have been living for decades under special laws that limit the civil liberties of citizens. Thus, citizens of states like Manipur or Nagaland don't have the same rights as other citizens of India because their states have been declared as 'disturbed areas'. The vicious circle of armed rebellions provoking state repression which in turn fuels further rebellions has taken a heavy toll on the economy, culture and society of the North-eastern states. In another part of the country, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh are yet to make full use of their new-found statehood, and the political system there is still not autonomous of larger structures in which tribals are powerless.

Another significant development is the gradual emergence of an educated middle class among tribal communities. Most visible in the North-eastern states, this is now a segment beginning to be seen in the rest of the country as well, particularly among members of the larger tribal communities. In conjunction with policies of reservation (about which you will learn more in Chapter 5), education is creating an urbanised professional class. As tribal societies get more differntiated – i.e., develop class and other divisions within themselves – different bases are growing for the assertion of tribal identity.

Two broad sets of issues have been most important in giving rise to tribal movements. These are issues relating to control over vital economic resources like land and specially forests, and issues relating to matters of ethnic-cultural identity. The two can often go together, but with differentiation of tribal society they may also diverge. The reasons why the middle classes within tribal societies may assert their tribal identity may be different from the reasons why poor and uneducated tribals join tribal movements. As with any other community, it is the relationship between these kinds of internal dynamics and external forces that will shape the future.

Box 3.1

Assertions of tribal identity are on the rise. This can be laid at the door of the emergence of a middle class within the tribal society. With the emergence of this class in particular, issues of culture, tradition, livelihood, even control over land and resources, as well as demands for a share in the benefits of the projects of modernity, have become an integral part of the articulation of identity among the tribes. There is, therefore, a new consciousness among tribes now, coming from its middle classes. The middle classes themselves are a consequence of modern education and modern occupations, aided in turn by the reservation policies…

(Source: Virginius Xaxa, 'Culture, Politics and Identity: The Case of the Tribes in India', in John et al 2006)

3.3 Family and Kinship

Each one of us is born into a family, and most of us spend long years within it. Usually we feel very strongly about our family. Sometimes we feel very good about our parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins, whereas at others we don't. On the one hand, we resent their interference, and yet we miss their overbearing ways when we are away from them. The family is a space of great warmth and care. It has also been a site of bitter conflicts, injustice and violence. Female infanticide, violent conflicts between brothers over property and ugly legal disputes are as much part of family and kinship as are stories of compassion, sacrifice and care.

The structure of the family can be studied both as a social institution in itself and also in its relationship to other social institutions of society. In itself a family can be defined as nuclear or extended. It can be male-headed or female-headed. The line of descent can be matrilineal or patrilineal. This internal structure of the family is usually related to other structures of society, namely political, economic, cultural etc. Thus the migration of men from the villages of the Himalayan region can lead to an unusual proportion of women-headed families in the village. Or the work schedules of young parents in the software industry in India may lead to increasing number of grandparents moving in as care-givers to young grandchildren. The composition of the family and its structure thereby changes. And these changes can be understood in relation to other changes in society. The family (the private sphere) is linked to the economic, political, cultural, and educational (the public) spheres.

The family is an integral part of our lives. We take it for granted. We also assume that other people's families must be like our own. (This and other dimensions of the family have been discussed in Chapter 1, of your Class XI textbook, *Introducing Society*) As we saw however, families have different structures and these structures change. Sometimes these changes occur

accidentally, as when a war takes place or people migrate in search of work. Sometimes these changes are purposely brought about, as when young people decide to choose their spouses instead of letting elders decide. Or when same sex love is expressed openly in society.

Box 3.2

The present study…deals with a Muslim *biradri* (community) called the Multani Lohars. ... Karkhanedar is a vernacular term used for a person engaged in the business of manufacturing of which he is generally the owner…The karkhanas under study operate in domestic conditions and, therefore, have certain pervasive effects on the life of the karkhanedars who work in them. …The following case illustrates this.

Mahmood, aged forty years, was living with his two younger brothers, one of whom was married. He had three children and was the head of the complex household. …All the three brothers were employed in various karkhanas and factories as skilled workers. Mahmood succesfully fabricated replica of a motor part the import of which had been banned. This greatly encouraged him to start his own karkhana…Later it was decided that two karkhanas should be set up to manufacture the motor part. One was to be owned by the two elder brothers, and the other by the youngest, provided he set up a separate household. Rasheed set up an independent household, consisting of his wife and unmarried children. Therefore, one complex household, comprising three married brothers, gave birth to a simple household as a result of new entrepreneurial opportunities.

Excerpted from S.M. Akram Rizvi, 'Kinship and Industry among the Muslim Karkhanedars in Delhi', in Imtiaz Ahmad, ed. *Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1976, pp. 27-48.

It is evident from the kind of changes that take place that not only have family structures changed, but cultural ideas, norms and values also change. These changes are however not so easy to bring about. Both history and contemporary times suggest that often change in family and marriage norms are resisted violently. The family has many dimensions to it. In India however discussions on the family have often revolved around the nuclear and extended family.

Nuclear and Extended Family

A nuclear family consists of only one set of parents and their children. An extended family (commonly known as the 'joint family') can take different forms, but has more than one couple, and often more than two generations, living together. This could be a set of brothers with their individual families, or an elderly couple with their sons and grandsons and their respective families. The extended family often is seen as symptomatic of India. Yet this is by no means the dominant form now or earlier. It was confined to certain sections and certain regions of the community. Indeed the term 'joint family' itself is not a native category. As I.P. Desai observes, "The expression 'joint family' is not the translation of any Indian word like that. It is interesting to note that the words used for joint family in most of the Indian languages are the equivalents of translations of the English word 'joint family'." (Desai 1964:40)

The Diverse Forms of the Family

Studies have shown how diverse family forms are found in different societies. With regard to the rule of *residence,* some societies are *matrilocal* in their marriage and family customs while others are *patrilocal.* In the first case, the newly married couple stays with the woman's parents, whereas in the second case the couple lives with the man's parents. With regard to the rules of inheritance, *matrilineal* societies pass on property from mother to daughter while *patrilineal* societies do so from father to son. A *patriarchal* family structure exists where the men exercise authority and dominance, and *matriarchy* where the women play a similarly dominant role. However, matriarchy – unlike patriarchy – has been a theoretical rather than an empirical concept. There is no historical or anthropological evidence of matriarchy – i.e., societies where women exercise dominance. However, there do exist *matrilineal* societies, i.e., societies where women inherit property from their mothers but do not exercise control over it, nor are they the decision makers in public affairs.

The account of Khasi matriliny in Box 3.3 clarifies the distinction between matriliny and matriarchy. It shows the structural tensions created by matrilinear system which affect both men and women in Khasi society today.

Khasi matrilineal family

Box 3.3

The Meghalaya Succession Act (passed by an all-male Meghalaya legislative assembly) received the President's assent in 1986. The Succession Act applies specifically to the Khasi and Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya and confers on 'any Khasi and Jaintia of sound mind not being a minor, the right to dispose of his self-acquired property by will'. The practice of making out a **will** does not exist in Khasi custom. Khasi custom prescribes the devolution of ancestral property in the female line.

There is a feeling, specially among the educated Khasi, that their rules of kinship and inheritance are biased in favour of women and are too restrictive. The Succession Act is therefore seen as an attempt at removing such restrictions and at correcting the perceived female bias in the Khasi tradition. To assess whether the popular perception of female bias in the Khasi tradition is indeed valid, it is necessary to view the Khasi matrilineal system in the context of the prevalent gender relations and definitions of gender roles.

Several scholars have highlighted the inherent contradictions in matrilineal systems. One such contradiction arises from the separation of the line of descent and inheritance on the one hand and the structure of authority and control on the other. The former, which links the mother to the daughter, comes in conflict with the latter, which links the mother's brother to the sister's son. (In other words, a woman inherits property from her mother and passes it on to her daughter, while a man controls his sister's property and passes on control to his sister's son. Thus, inheritance passes from mother to daughter whereas control passes from (maternal) uncle to nephew.)

Khasi matriliny generates intense role conflict for men. They are torn between their responsibilities to their natal house on the one hand, and to their wife and children on the other. In a way, the strain generated by such role conflict affects Khasi women more intensely. A woman can never be fully assured that her husband does not find his sister's house a more congenial place than her own. Similarly a sister will be apprehensive about her brother's commitment to her welfare because the wife with whom he lives can always pull him away from his responsibilities to his natal house.

The women are more adversely affected than men by the role conflict generated in the Khasi matrilineal system not only because men wield power and women are deprived of it, but also because the system is more lenient to men when there is a transgression of rules. Women possess only token authority in Khasi society; it is men who are the defacto power holders. The system is indeed weighted in favour of male matri-kin rather than male patri-kin. (In other words, despite matriliny, men are the power holders in Khasi society; the only difference is that a man's relatives on his mother's side matter more than his relatives on his father's side.)

(Source: Adapted from Tiplut Nongbri, 'Gender and the Khasi Family Structure' in Uberoi 1994.)

Questions

1. What is the role of the ideas of separation and hierarchy in the caste system?
2. What are some of the rules that the caste system imposes?
3. What changes did colonialism bring about in the caste system?
4. In what sense has caste become relatively 'invisible' for the urban upper castes?
5. How have tribes been classified in India?
6. What evidence would you offer against the view that 'tribes are primitive communities living isolated lives untouched by civilisation'?
7. What are the factors behind the assertion of tribal identities today?
8. What are some of the different forms that the family can take?
9. In what ways can changes in social structure lead to changes in the family structure?
10. Explain the difference between matriliny and matriarchy.

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Chapter 4

The Market as a Social Institution

We usually think of markets as places where things are bought and sold. In this common everyday usage, the word 'market' may refer to particular markets that we may know of, such as the market next to the railway station, the fruit market, or the wholesale market. Sometimes we refer not to the physical place, but to the gathering of people – buyers and sellers – who constitute the market. Thus, for example, a weekly vegetable market may be found in different places on different days of the week in neighbouring villages or urban neighbourhoods. In yet another sense, 'market' refers to an area or category of trade or business, such as the market for cars or the market for readymade clothes. A related sense refers to the demand for a particular product or service, such as the market for computer professionals.

What all of these meanings have in common is that they refer to a specific market, whose meaning is readily understandable from the context. But what does it mean to speak of 'the market' in a general way without refering to any particular place, gathering of people, or field of commercial activity? This usage includes not only all of the specific senses mentioned above, but also the entire spectrum of economic activities and institutions. In this very broad sense, then, 'the market' is almost equivalent to 'the economy'. We are used to thinking of the market as an economic institution, but this chapter will show you that the market is also a *social* institution. In its own way, the market is comparable to more obviously social institutions like caste, tribe or family discussed in Chapter 3.

4.1 Sociological Perspectives on Markets and the Economy

The discipline of economics is aimed at understanding and explaining how markets work in modern capitalist economies – for instance, how prices are determined, the probable impact of specific kinds of investment, or the factors that influence people to save or spend. So what does sociology have to contribute to the study of markets that goes beyond what economics can tell us?

To answer this question, we need to go back briefly to eighteenth century England and the beginnings of modern economics, which at that time was called 'political economy'. The most famous of the early political economists was Adam Smith, who in his book, *The Wealth of Nations*, attempted to understand the market economy that was just emerging at that time. Smith argued that the market economy is made up of a series of individual exchanges or transactions, which automatically create a functioning and ordered system. This happens even though none of the individuals involved in the millions of transactions had intended to create a system. Each person looks only to their own self-interest, but in the pursuit of this self-interest the interests of all – or of society – also seem to be looked after. In this sense, there seems to be some

sort of an unseen force at work that converts what is good for each individual into what is good for society. This unseen force was called 'the invisible hand' by Adam Smith. Thus, Smith argued that the capitalist economy is driven by individual self-interest, and works best when individual buyers and sellers make rational decisions that serve their own interests. Smith used the idea of the 'invisible hand' to argue that society overall benefits when individuals pursue their own self-interest in the market, because it stimulates the economy and creates more wealth. For this reason, Smith supported the idea of a 'free market', that is, a market free from all kinds of regulation whether by the state or otherwise. This economic philosophy was also given the name ***laissez-faire,*** a French phrase that means 'leave alone' or 'let it be'.

Adam Smith (1723-90)

Adam Smith is known as the fountainhead of contemporary economic thought. Smith's reputation rests on his five-book series 'The Wealth of Nations' which explained how rational self-interest in a free-market economy leads to economic well being.

Modern economics developed from the ideas of early thinkers such as Adam Smith, and is based on the idea that the *economy* can be studied as a separate part of society that operates according to its own laws, leaving out the larger social or political context in which markets operate. In contrast to this approach, sociologists have attempted to develop an alternative way of studying economic institutions and processes within the larger social framework.

Sociologists view markets as social institutions that are constructed in culturally specific ways. For example, markets are often controlled or organised by particular social groups or classes, and have specific connections to other institutions, social processes and structures. Sociologists often express this idea by saying that economies are socially 'embedded'. This is illustrated by two examples, one of a weekly tribal *haat*, and the other of a 'traditional business community' and its trading networks in colonial India.

A Weekly 'Tribal Market' in Dhorai Village, Bastar, Chattisgarh

In most agrarian or 'peasant' societies around the world, periodic markets are a central feature of social and economic organisation. Weekly markets bring together people from surrounding villages, who come to sell their agricultural or other produce and to buy manufactured goods and other items that are not available in their villages. They attract traders from outside the local area, as well as moneylenders, entertainers, astrologers, and a host of other specialists offering their services and wares. In rural India there are also specialised markets that take place at less frequent intervals, for instance, cattle markets. These periodic markets link different regional and local economies together, and link them to the wider national economy and to towns and metropolitan centres.

A weekly market in tribal area

The weekly *haat* is a common sight in rural and even urban India. In hilly and forested areas (especially those inhabited by adivasis), where settlements are far-flung, roads and communications poor, and the economy relatively undeveloped, the weekly market is the major institution for the exchange of goods as well as for social intercourse. Local people come to the market to sell their agricultural or forest produce to traders, who carry it to the towns for resale, and they buy essentials such as salt and agricultural implements, and consumption items such as bangles and jewellery. But for many visitors, the primary reason to come to the market is social – to meet kin, to arrange marriages, exchange gossip, and so on.

While the weekly market in tribal areas may be a very old institution, its character has changed over time. After these remote areas were brought under the control of the colonial state, they were gradually incorporated into the wider regional and national economies. Tribal areas were 'opened up' by building roads and 'pacifying' the local people (many of whom resisted colonial rule through their so-called 'tribal rebellions'), so that the rich forest and mineral resources of these areas could be exploited. This led to the influx of traders, moneylenders, and other non-tribal people from the plains into these areas. The local tribal economy was transformed as forest produce was sold to outsiders, and money and new kinds of goods entered the system. Tribals were also recruited as labourers to work on plantations and mines that were established under colonialism. A 'market' for tribal labour developed during the colonial period. Due to all these changes, local tribal economies became linked into wider markets, usually with very negative consequences for local people. For example, the entry of traders and moneylenders from outside the local area led to the impoverishment of adivasis, many of whom lost their land to outsiders.

The weekly market as a social institution, the links between the local tribal economy and the outside, and the exploitative economic relationships between adivasis and others, are illustrated by a study of a weekly market in Bastar district. This district is populated mainly by Gonds, an adivasi group. At the weekly market, you find local people, including tribals and non-tribals (mostly Hindus), as well as outsiders – mainly Hindu traders of various castes. Forest officials also come to the market to conduct business with adivasis who work for the Forest Department, and the market attracts a variety of specialists selling their goods and services. The major goods that are exchanged in the market are manufactured goods (such as jewellery and trinkets, pots and knives), non-local foods (such as salt and *haldi* (turmeric)), local food and agricultural produce and manufactured items (such as bamboo baskets), and forest produce (such as tamarind and oil-seeds). The forest produce that is brought by the

adivasis is purchased by traders who carry it to towns. In the market, the buyers are mostly adivasis while the sellers are mainly caste Hindus. Adivasis earn cash from the sale of forest and agricultural produce and from wage labour, which they spend in the market mainly on low-value trinkets and jewellery, and consumption items such as manufactured cloth.

According to Alfred Gell (1982), the anthropologist who studied Dhorai, the market has significance much beyond its economic functions. For example, the layout of the market symbolises the hierarchical inter-group social relations in this region. Different social groups are located according to their position in the caste and social hierarchy as well as in the market system. The wealthy and high-ranking Rajput jeweller and the middle-ranking local Hindu traders sit in the central 'zones', and the tribal sellers of vegetables and local wares in the outer circles. The quality of social relations is expressed in the kinds of goods that are bought and sold, and the way in which transactions are carried out. For instance, interactions between tribals and non-tribal traders are very different than those between Hindus of the same community: they express hierarchy and social distance rather than social equality.

Box 4.1

An Adivasi Village Market in Bastar

Dhorai is the name of a market village located deep in the hinterland of North Bastar district, Chattisgarh … On non-market days Dhorai is a sleepy, tree-shaded hamlet straddling an unscaled road which winds it's way through the forest … Social life in Dhorai revolves around two primitive tea-shops with a clientele of low-ranking employees of the State Forest service, whose misfortune it has been to be stationed in such a distant and insignificant spot … Dhorai on non-market days – every day except Friday, that is – hardly exists at all; but Dhorai on a market day might be a totally different place. Parked trucks jam the road … The lowly Forest Guards bustle about in smart, newly-pressed uniforms, while the more important officials of the Forest service, down for the day, oversee operations from the verandah of the Forest Rest House. They disburse payments to the tribal labourers …

While the officials hold court in the Rest House, files of tribals continue to pour in from all directions, laden with the produce of the forest, of their fields, and of their own manufacture. They are joined by Hindu vegetable sellers, and by specialised craftsmen, potters, weavers and blacksmiths. The general impression is one of richness and confusion, compounded by the fact that a religious ceremony, as well as a market, is in process … The whole world, it seems, is at the market, men and their Divinities alike. The marketplace is a roughly quadrangular patch of ground, about 100 yards square, at the centre of which there grows a magnificent banyan tree. The thatched market stalls are arranged in a concentric pattern, and are divided by narrow streets or defiles, along which customers manoeuvre themselves as best they can in the crush, trying to avoid treading on the goods of less established traders, who make use of every nook and cranny between the permanent stalls to display their wares.

Source: Gell 1982:470-71.

Exercise for Box 4.1

Read the excerpt in the box and answer the questions below.

1. What does this passage tell you about the relationship between the adivasis and the state (represented by the Forest Department officials)? Why are Forest Guards so important in adivasi districts? Why are they making payments to the tribal labourers?
2. What does the layout of the market suggest to you about its organisation and functioning? What kinds of people would have permanent stalls, and who are the "less established traders" sitting on the ground?
3. Who are the main buyers in the market, and who are the sellers? What kinds of goods flow through the market, and who are the buyers and sellers of different kinds of goods? What does this tell you about the nature of the local economy in this area and the relationship of adivasis to the larger society and economy?

Caste-Based Markets and Trading Networks in Precolonial and Colonial India

In some traditional accounts of Indian economic history, India's economy and society are seen as unchanging. Economic transformation was thought to have begun only with the advent of colonialism. It was assumed that India consisted of ancient village communities that were relatively self-sufficient, and that their economies were organised primarily on the basis of non-market exchange. Under colonialism and in the early post-independence period, the penetration of the commercial money economy into local agrarian economies, and their incorporation into wider networks of exchange, was thought to have brought about radical social and economic changes in rural and urban society. While colonialism certainly brought about major economic transformations, for example due to the demand that land revenue be paid in cash, recent historical research has shown that much of India's economy was already extensively monetised (trade was carried out using money) in the late pre-colonial period. And while various kinds of non-market exchange systems (such as the '***jajmani* system**') did exist in many villages and regions, even during the precolonial period villages were incorporated into wider networks of exchange through which agricultural products and other goods circulated (Bayly 1983, Stein and Subrahmanyam 1996). It now seems that the sharp line that was often drawn between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' (or the pre-capitalist and capitalist) economy is actually rather fuzzy. Recent historical research has also highlighted the extensive and sophisticated trading networks that existed in pre-colonial India. Of course, we know that for centuries India was a

major manufacturer and exporter of handloom cloth (both ordinary cotton and luxury silks), as well as the source of many other goods (such as spices) that were in great demand in the global market, especially in Europe. So it is not surprising that pre-colonial India had well-organised manufacturing centres as well as indigenous merchant gr
systems that enabled trade to take place within India, and between India and the rest of the world. These traditional trading communities or castes had their own systems of banking and credit. For instance, an important instrument of exchange and credit was the *hundi*, or bill of exchange (like a credit note), which allowed merchants to engage in long-distance trade. Because trade took place primarily within the caste and kinship networks of these communities, a merchant in one part of the country could issue a *hundi* that would be honoured by a merchant in another place.

The Nattukottai Chettiars (or Nakarattars) of Tamil Nadu, provide an interesting illustration of how these indigenous trading networks were organised and worked. A study of this community during the colonial period shows how its banking and trade activities were deeply embedded in the social organisation of the community. The structures of caste, kinship, and family were oriented towards commercial activity, and business activity was carried out within these social structures. As in most 'traditional' merchant communities, Nakarattar banks were basically *joint family* firms, so that the structure of the business firm was the same as that of the family. Similarly, trading and banking activities were organised through caste and kinship relationships. For instance, their extensive caste-based social networks allowed Chettiar merchants to expand their activities into Southeast Asia and Ceylon. In one view, the economic activities of the Nakarattars represented a kind of indigenous capitalism. This interpretation raises the question of whether there are, or were, forms of 'capitalism' apart from those that arose in Europe (Rudner 1994).

Box 4.2

Caste-based trade among the Nakarattars of Tamil Nadu

This is not to say that the Nakarattar banking system resembled an economist's model of Western-style banking systems … the Nakarattars loaned and deposited money with one another in caste-defined social relationships based on business territory, residential location, descent, marriage, and common cult membership. Unlike in modern Western banking systems, it was the reputation, decisions, and reserve deposits shared among exchange spheres defined according to these principles, and not a government-controlled central bank, that … assured public confidence in individual Nakarattars as representatives of the caste as a whole. In other words, the Nakarattar banking system was a caste-based banking system. Individual Nakarattars organised their lives around participation in and management of various communal institutions adapted to the task of accumulating and distributing reserves of capital.

Source: Rudner 1994:234.

Exercise for Box 4.2

Read the extracts from *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India* (Rudner 1994) in the box and answer the following questions.

1. What are the significant differences between the Nakarattar banking system and the modern Western banking system, according to the author?
2. What are the different ways in which Nakarattar trading and banking activities are linked to other social structures?
3. Can you think of examples within the modern capitalist economy where economic activities are similarly 'embedded' in social structures?

Social Organisation of Markets – 'Traditional Business Communities'

Many sociological studies of the Indian economy have focused on 'traditional merchant communities' or castes such as the Nakarattars. As you have already learned, there is a close connection between the caste system and the economy, in terms of landholding, occupational differentiation, and so on. This is also true in the case of trade and markets. In fact, 'Vaisyas' constitute one of the four *varnas* – an indication of the importance of the merchant and of trade or business in Indian society since ancient times. However, like the other *varnas*, 'Vaisya' is often a status that is *claimed* or aspired to rather than a fixed identity or social status. Although there are 'Vaisya' communities (such as *banias* in North India), whose traditional occupation has been trade or commerce for a long time, there are some caste groups that have entered into trade. Such groups tend to acquire or claim 'Vaisya' status in the process of upward mobility. Like the history of all caste communities, in most cases there is a complex relationonship between caste status or identity, and caste practices, including occupation. The 'traditional business communities' in India include not only 'Vaisyas', but also other groups with distinctive religious or other community identities, such as the Parsis, Sindhis, Bohras, or Jains. Merchant communities did not always have a high status in society; for instance, during the colonial period the long-distance trade in salt was controlled by a marginalised 'tribal' group, the

Agricultural work in a village

Banjaras. In each case, the particular nature of community institutions and ethos gives rise to a different organisation and practice of business.

To understand the operation of markets in India, both in earlier periods and at present, we can examine how specific arenas of business are controlled by particular communities. One of the reasons for this caste-based specialisation is that trade and commerce often operate through caste and kinship networks, as we have seen in the case of the Nakarattars. Because businessmen are more likely to trust others of their own community or kin group, they tend to do business within such networks rather than with others outside – and this tends to create a caste monopoly within certain areas of business.

ACTIVITY 4.1

Visit a market or shopping area in the town or city where you live. Find out who the important traders are. To which community do they belong? Are there particular areas of business that are controlled by particular communities, for instance, jewellery shops, *kirana* (provisions) shops, the hardware trade, furniture making shops, and so on? Visit some of these shops and find out about the traders who run them and their communities. Are they hereditary family businesses?

COLONIALISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW MARKETS

The advent of colonialism in India produced major upheavals in the economy, causing disruptions in production, trade, and agriculture. A well-known example is the demise of the handloom industry due to the flooding of the market with cheap manufactured textiles from England. Although pre-colonial India already had a complex monetised economy, most historians consider the colonial period to be the turning point. In the colonial era India began to be more fully linked to the world capitalist economy. Before being colonised by the British, India was a major supplier of manufactured goods to the world market. After colonisation, she became a source of raw materials and agricultural products and a consumer of manufactured goods, both largely for the benefit of industrialising England. At the same time, new groups (especially the Europeans) entered into trade and business, sometimes in alliance with existing merchant communities and in some cases by forcing them out. But rather than completely overturning existing economic institutions, the expansion of the market economy in India provided new opportunities to some merchant communities, which were able to improve their position by re-orienting themselves to changing economic circumstances. In some cases, new communities emerged to take advantage of the economic opportunities provided by colonialism, and continued to hold economic power even after Independence.

A good example of this process is provided by the Marwaris, probably the most widespread and best-known business community in India. Represented by leading industrial families such as the Birlas, the community also includes shopkeepers and small traders in the bazaars of towns throughout the country. The Marwaris became a successful business community only during the colonial period, when they took advantage of new opportunities in colonial cities such

New markets

as Calcutta and settled throughout the country to carry out trade and moneylending. Like the Nakarattars, the success of the Marwaris rested on their extensive social networks, which created the relations of trust necessary to operate their banking system. Many Marwari families accumulated enough wealth to become moneylenders, and by acting as bankers also helped the commercial expansion of the British in India (Hardgrove 2004). In the late colonial period and after Independence, some Marwari families transformed themselves into modern industrialists, and even today Marwaris control more of India's industry than any other community. This story of the emergence of a new business community under colonialism, and its transformation from small migrant traders to merchant bankers to industrialists, illustrates the importance of the social context to economic processes.

4.2 Understanding Capitalism as a Social System

One of the founders of modern sociology, Karl Marx, was also a critic of modern capitalism. Marx understood capitalism as a system of **commodity** production, or production for the market, through the use of wage labour. As you have already learned, Marx wrote that all economic systems are also social systems. Each **mode of production** consists of particular relations of production, which in turn give rise to a specific class structure. He emphasised that the economy does not consist of *things* (goods circulating in the market), but is made up of *relations* between *people* who are connected to one another through the process of production. Under the capitalist mode of production, labour itself becomes a commodity, because workers must sell their **labour power** in the market to earn a wage. This gives rise to two basic classes – capitalists, who own the means of production (such as the factories), and workers, who sell their labour to the capitalists. The capitalist class is able to profit from this system by paying the workers less than the value of what they actually produce, and so extracting **surplus value** from their labour. Marx's theory of capitalist economy and society provided the inspiration for numerous theories and debates about the nature of capitalism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Commoditisation and Consumption

The growth of capitalism around the world has meant the extension of markets into places and spheres of life that were previously untouched by this system.

Commodification occurs when things that were earlier not traded in the market become commodities. For instance, labour or skills become things that can be bought and sold. According to Marx and other critics of capitalism, the process of commodification has negative social effects. The commodification of labour is one example, but there are many other examples in contemporary society. For instance, there is a controversy about the sale of kidneys by the poor to cater to rich patients who need kidney transplants. According to many people, human organs should not become commodities. In earlier times, human beings themselves were bought and sold as slaves, but today it is considered immoral to treat people as commodities. But in modern society, almost everyone accepts the idea that a person's labour can be bought, or that other services or skills can be provided in exchange for money. This is a situation that is found only in capitalist societies, according to Marx.

In contemporary India, we can observe that things or processes that earlier were not part of market exchange become commodified. For example, traditionally, marriages were arranged by families, but now there are professional marriage bureaus and websites that help people to find brides and grooms for a fee. Another example are the many private institutes that offer courses in 'personality development', spoken English, and so on, that teach students (mostly middle class youth) the cultural and social skills required to succeed in the

Activity 4.2

Commoditisation or commodification – these are big words that sound very complicated. But the process they refer to is a familiar one and it is present in our everyday life. Here is a common example – bottled water.

In cities and towns and even in most villages now it is possible to buy water packed in sealed plastic bottles of 2 litres, 1 litre or smaller capacity. These bottles are marketed by a wide variety of companies and there are innumerable brand names. But this is a new phenomenon, not more than ten or fifteen years old. It is possible that you yourself may remember a time when bottled water was not around. Ask older people. Your parents' generation will certainly remember the initial feeling of novelty when bottled water became widely available. In your grandparents' generation, it was unthinkable that anyone could *sell* drinking water, charge money for it. But today we take bottled water for granted as a normal, convenient thing, a *commodity* that we can buy (or sell).

This is commoditisation/commodification – the process by which something which was not a commodity is made into a commodity and becomes part of the market economy.

Can you think of other examples of things that have been commodified relatively recently? Remember, a commodity need not only be a thing or object; it can also be a service. Try also to think of things that are not commodities today but could become commodities in the future. What are the reasons why this could happen? Finally, try to think of things that were commodities in the past but have stopped being commodities today (i.e., they used to have market or exchange value before but do not have it now). When and why do commodities stop being commodities?


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You'll agree, it's addictive.

contemporary world. In earlier times, social skills such as good manners and etiquette were imparted mainly through the family. Or we could think of the burgeoning of privately owned schools and colleges and coaching classes as a process of commodification of education.

Another important feature of capitalist society is that **consumption** becomes more and more important, not just for economic reasons but because it has symbolic meaning. In modern societies, consumption is an important way in which social distinctions are created and communicated. The consumer conveys a message about his or her socio-economic status or cultural preferences by buying and displaying certain goods, and companies try to sell their goods by appealing to symbols of status or culture. Think of the advertisements that we see every day on television and roadside hoardings, and the meanings that advertisers try to attach to consumer goods in order to sell them.

One of sociology's founders, Max Weber, was among the first to point out that the goods that people buy and use are closely related to their status in society. He coined the term *status symbol* to describe this relationship. For example, among the middle class in India today, the brand of cell phone or the model of car that one owns are important markers of socio-economic status. Weber also wrote about how classes and status groups are differentiated on the basis of their **lifestyles.** Consumption is one aspect of lifestyle, but it also includes the way you decorate your home and the way you dress, your leisure activities, and many other aspects of daily life. Sociologists study consumption patterns and lifestyles because of their cultural and social significance in modern life.

ACTIVITY 4.3

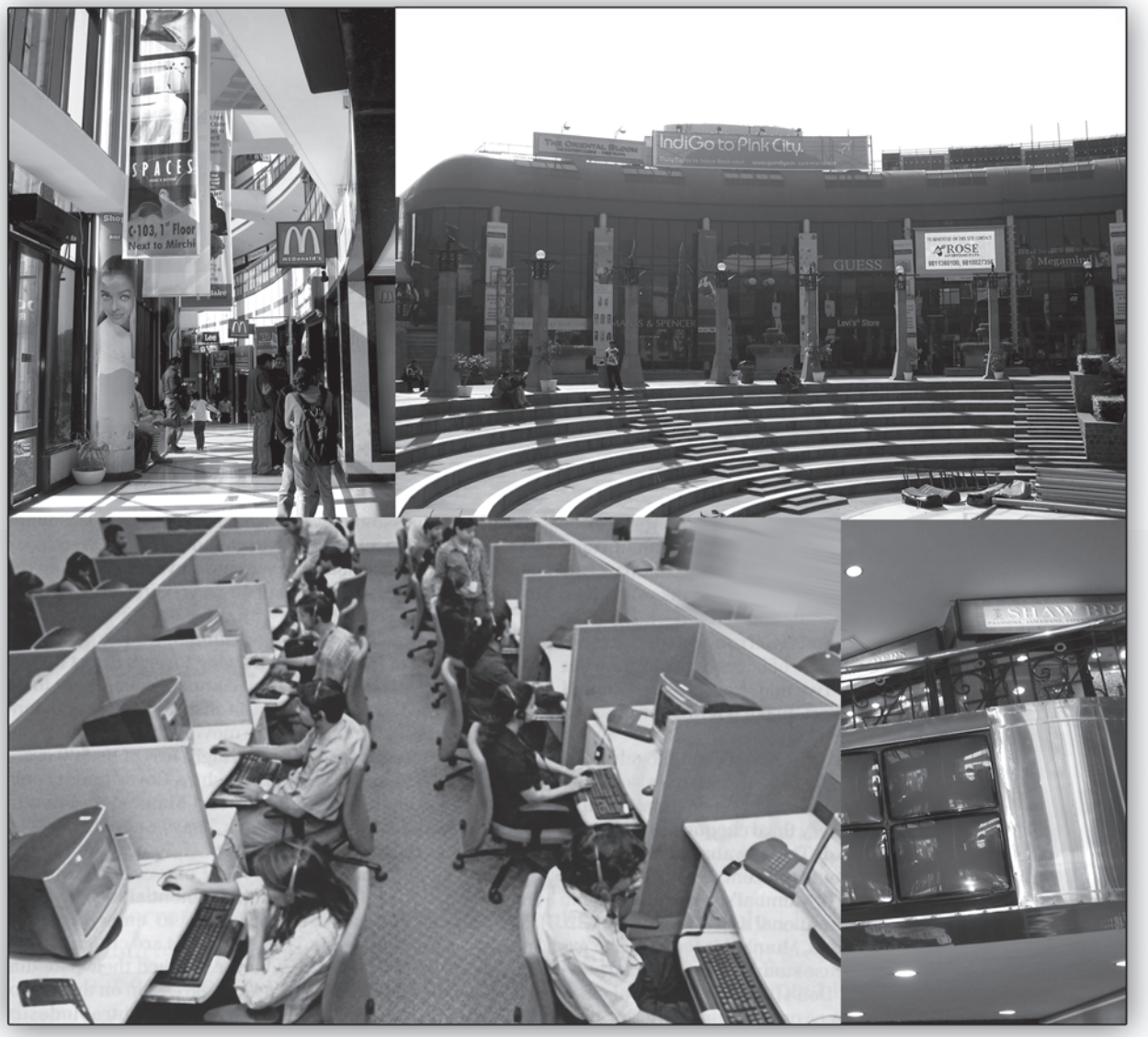
Interpretation of Advertisements

Make a collection of advertisements from newspapers and magazines. From the collection, choose two or three that you find interesting. For each of these advts., try to answer the following questions.

1. What is the product that is being advertised, and what image has been created of that product?
2. How has the advertiser tried to relate this product to a desirable lifestyle or social status?

4.3 GLOBALISATION – INTERLINKING OF LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

Since the late 1980s, India has entered a new era in its economic history, following the change in economic policy from one of state-led development to **liberalisation.** This shift also ushered in the era of **globalisation**, a period in which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected — not only economically but also culturally and politically. The term globalisation includes a number of trends, especially the increase in international movement of commodities, money, information, and people, as well as the development of technology (such as in computers, telecommunications, and transport) and other infrastructure to allow this movement.



Technological development in different areas

A central feature of globalisation is the increasing extension and integration of markets around the world. This integration means that changes in a market in one part of the globe may have a profound impact somewhere else far away. For instance, India's booming software industry may face a slump if the U.S. economy does badly (as happened after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York), leading to loss of business and jobs here. The software services industries and business process outsourcing (**BPO**) industries (such as call centres) are some of the major avenues through which India is getting connected to the global economy. Companies based in India provide low-cost services and labour to customers located in the developed countries of the West. We can say that there is now a global market for Indian software labour and other services.

The Virtual Market – Conquering Time and Space?

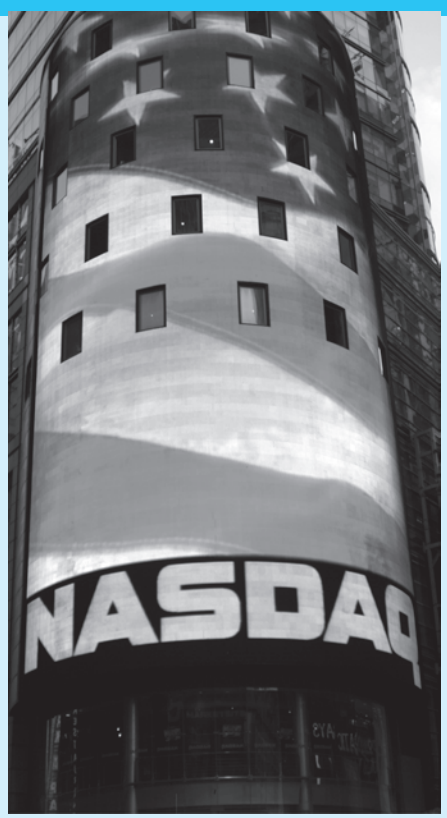
Box 4.3

Nasdaq Rings from Mysore – Infy's Remote Operation Scripts Record, Opens US Market

Mysore: If you still don't believe that the world is flat, then consider this: Infosys Technologies rang the Nasdaq opening bell remotely from Mysore. At 7 pm sharp (9.30 am US East Coast time), Infosys chairman and chief mentor N.R. Narayana Murthy pressed a button to mark the opening of Monday's trading session at Nasdaq's MarketSite Tower in Times Square, New York. …. The opening bell is a ceremonial event that represents the essence of Nasdaq's virtual market model. Since Nasdaq's operations are entirely electronic, it can be opened from any location around the world, symbolically bringing together investors and market participants at the beginning of each trading day.

Source: *News item in the* Times of India, *Bangalore, August 1, 2006*

Exercise for Box 4.3



NASDAQ is the name of a major electronic stock exchange based in New York. It operates exclusively through computerised electronic communications. It allows stock brokers and investors from around the world to buy and sell shares in the companies it lists. These transactions are conducted 'in real time' – i.e., they take effect within seconds, and they involve no paper – no paper documents or paper currency. Read the news item carefully and answer the questions below.

1. How is trading in a stock market (like NASDAQ or the Bombay Stock Exchange) different from trading in other markets? You can find out more about stock exchanges from newspapers, magazines and the internet.
2. What does this event – the opening of the US-based Nasdaq market located in New York by the Infosys chairman Narayana Murthy located in Mysore – tell you about the nature of markets (especially share and financial markets) in today's world, and about India's connection to the global economy?
3. The article describes the opening event as 'ceremonial'. Can you think of similar ceremonial practices or rituals that are important in other kinds of markets?

Under globalisation, not only money and goods, but also people, cultural products, and images circulate rapidly around the world, enter new circuits of exchange, and create new markets. Products, services, or elements of culture

When a market becomes a commodity: The Pushkar camel fair **Box 4.4**

"Come the month of Kartika …, Thar camel drivers spruce up their ships of the desert and start the long walk to Pushkar in time for Kartik Purnima … Each year around 200,000 people converge here, bringing with them some 50,000 camels and cattle. The place becomes an extraordinary swirl of colour, sound and movement, thronged with musicians, mystics, tourists, traders, animals and devotees. It's a camel-grooming nirvana, with an incredible array of cornrows, anklets, embroidery and pom poms."

"The religious event builds in tandem with the Camel Fair in a wild, magical crescendo of incense, chanting and processions to dousing day, the last night of the fair, when thousands of devotees wash away their sins and set candles afloat on the holy water."

(From the Lonely Planet *tourist guidebook for* India, *11th edition)*

Exercise for Box 4.4

Cattle market in Pushkar fair

Read the passages in Box 4.4, which are taken from a guide book meant for foreign tourists. The passage illustrates the way in which a market – in this case the traditional annual cattle market and fair at Pushkar – can itself become a kind of product for sale in another market, in this case the market for tourism. (Look up any unfamiliar words in a dictionary. For your information: `cornrows' is a kind of hairstyle, and in this passage it refers to decorative braiding of camel hair; `dousing day' means the day (Kartik Poornima) when pilgrims take a holy bath in the Pushkar lake.) Discuss the passages in class before you go on to answer the questions:

1. What are the new circuits of goods, services, money, and people that have been created at Pushkar because it is now a part of the international tourist circuit?
2. How do you think the coming of large numbers of foreign and Indian tourists has changed the way in which this fair operates?
3. How does the religiosity of the place add to its marketability? Can we say that there is a market for spirituality in India?
4. Can you think of other examples of how religions, traditions, knowledge, or even images (for instance, of a Rajasthani woman in traditional dress) become commodities in the global market?

that were earlier outside of the market system are drawn into it. An example is the marketing of Indian spirituality and knowledge systems (such as yoga and ayurveda) in the West. The growing market for international tourism also suggests how culture itself may become a commodity. An example is the famous annual fair in Pushkar, Rajasthan, to which pastoralists and traders come from distant places to buy and sell camels and other livestock. While the Pushkar fair continues to be a major social and economic event for local people, it is also marketed internationally as a major tourist attraction. The fair is all the more attractive to tourists because it comes just before a major Hindu religious festival of Kartik Poornima, when pilgrims come to bathe in the holy Pushkar lake. Thus, Hindu pilgrims, camel traders, and foreign tourists mingle at this event, exchanging not only livestock and money but also cultural symbols and religious merit.

Debate on Liberalisation – Market versus State

The globalisation of the Indian economy has been due primarily to the policy of liberalisation that was started in the late 1980s. Liberalisation includes a range of policies such as the privatisation of public sector enterprises (selling government-owned companies to private companies); loosening of government regulations on capital, labour, and trade; a reduction in tariffs and import duties so that foreign goods can be imported more easily; and allowing easier access for foreign companies to set up industries in India. Another word for such changes is **marketisation,** or the use of markets or market-based processes (rather than government regulations or policies) to solve social, political, or economic problems. These include relaxation or removal of economic controls (deregulation), privatisation of industries, and removing government controls over wages and prices. Those who advocate marketisation believe that these steps will promote economic growth and prosperity because private industry is more efficient than government-owned industry.

The changes that have been made under the liberalisation programme have stimulated economic growth and opened up Indian markets to foreign companies. For example, many foreign branded goods are now sold, which were not previously available. Increasing foreign investment is supposed to help economic growth and employment. The privatisation of public companies is supposed to increase their efficiency and reduce the government's burden of running these companies. However, the impact of liberalisation has been mixed. Many people argue that liberalisation and globalisation have had, or will have, a negative net impact on India – that is, the costs and disadvantages will be more than the advantages and benefits. Some sectors of Indian industry (like software and information technology) or agriculture (like fish or fruit) may benefit from access to a global market, but other sectors (like automobiles, electronics or oilseeds) will lose because they cannot compete with foreign producers.

For example, Indian farmers are now exposed to competition from farmers in other countries because import of agricultural products is allowed. Earlier,

Indian agriculture was protected from the world market by support prices and subsidies. Support prices help to ensure a minimum income for farmers because they are the prices at which the government agrees to buy agricultural commodities. Subsidies lower the cost of farming because the government pays part of the price charged for inputs (such as fertilisers or diesel oil). Liberalisation is against this kind of government interference in markets, so support prices and subsidies are reduced or withdrawn. This means that many farmers are not able to make a decent living from agriculture. Similarly, small manufacturers have been exposed to global competition as foreign goods and brands have entered the market, and some have not been able to compete. The privatisation or closing of public sector industries has led to loss of employment in some sectors, and to growth of unorganised sector employment at the expense of the organised sector. This is not good for workers because the organised sector generally offers better paid and more regular or permanent jobs. (See the chapters on agrarian change and industry in the other textbook for Class XII, *Social Change and Development in India)*.

In this chapter we have seen that there are many different kinds of markets in contemporary India, from the village haat to the virtual stock exchange. These markets are themselves social institutions, and are connected to other aspects of the social structure, such as caste and class, in various ways. In addition, we have learned that exchange has a social and symbolic significance that goes far beyond its immediate economic purpose. Moreover, the ways in which goods and services are exchanged or circulate is rapidly changing due to the liberalisation of the Indian economy and globalisation. There are many different ways and levels at which goods, services, cultural symbols, money, and so on, circulate — from the local market in a village or town right up to a global trading network such as the Nasdaq. In today's rapidly changing world, it is important to understand how markets are being constantly transformed, and the broader social and economic consequences of these changes.

Questions

1. What is meant by the phrase 'invisible hand'?
2. How does a sociological perspective on markets differ from an economic one?
3. In what ways is a market – such as a weekly village market – a social institution?
4. How do caste and kin networks contribute to the success of a business?
5. In what ways did the Indian economy change after the coming of colonialism?
6. Explain the meaning of 'commoditisation' with the help of examples.
7. What is a 'status symbol'?
8. What are some of the processes included under the label 'globalisation'?
9. What is meant by 'liberalisation'?
10. In your opinion, will the long term benefits of liberalisation exceed its costs? Give reasons for your answer.

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Notes