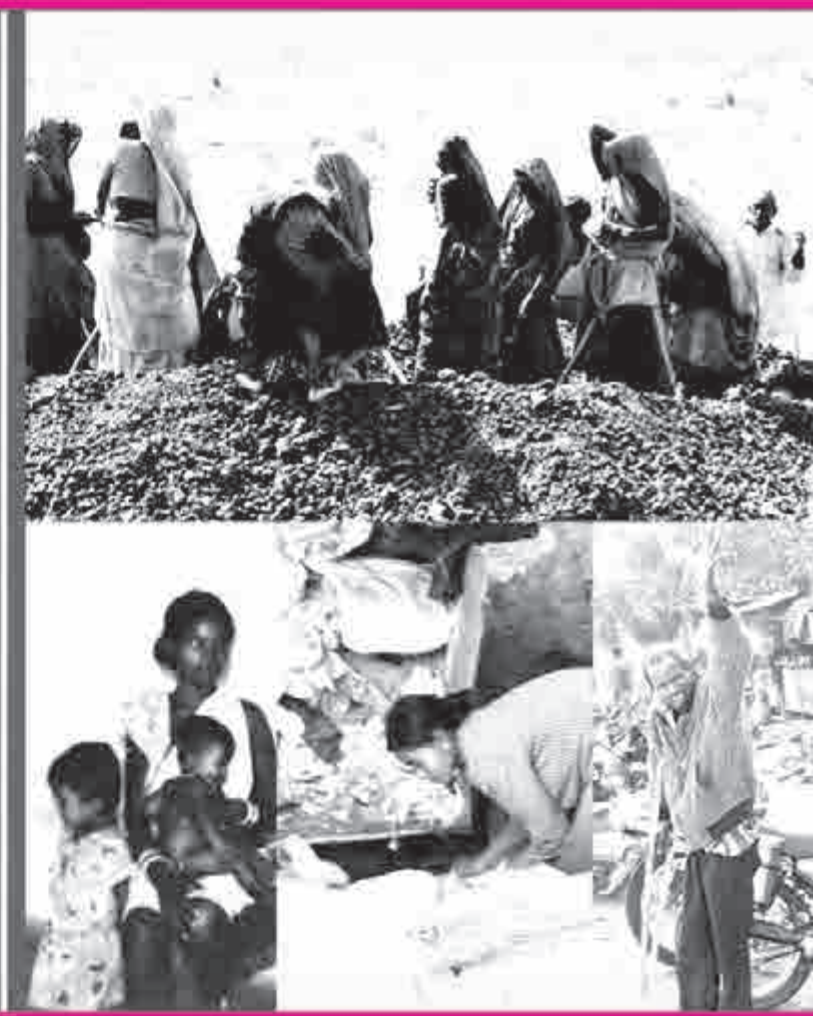
Chapter 5



Patterns of Social Inequality and Exclusion

2018-19

The family, caste, tribe and the market – these are the social institutions that have been considered in the last two chapters. In Chapters 3 and 4, these institutions were seen from the point of view of their role in forming communities and sustaining society. In this chapter we consider an equally important aspect of such institutions, namely their role in creating and sustaining patterns of inequality and exclusion.

For most of us who are born and live in India, social inequality and exclusion are facts of life. We see beggars in the streets and on railway platforms. We see young children labouring as domestic workers, construction helpers, cleaners and helpers in streetside restaurants (*dhabas*) and tea-shops. We are not surprised at the sight of small children, who work as domestic workers in middle class urban homes, carrying the school bags of older children to school. It does not immediately strike us as unjust that some children are denied schooling. Some of us read about caste discrimination against children in schools; some of us face it. Likewise, news reports about violence against women and prejudice against minority groups and the differently abled are part of our everyday lives.

This everydayness of social inequality and exclusion often make them appear inevitable, almost natural. If we do sometimes recognise that inequality and exclusion are not inevitable, we often think of them as being 'deserved' or 'justified' in some sense. Perhaps the poor and marginalised are where they are because they are lacking in ability, or haven't tried hard enough to improve their situation? We thus tend to blame them for their own plight – if only they worked harder or were more intelligent, they wouldn't be where they are.

A closer examination will show that few work harder than those who are located at the lower ranks of society. As a South American proverb says – "If hard labour were really such a good thing, the rich would keep it all for themselves!" All over the world, back-breaking work like stone breaking, digging, carrying heavy weights, pulling rickshaws or carts is invariably done by the poor. And yet they rarely improve their life chances. How often do we come across a poor construction worker who rises to become even a petty construction contractor? It is only in films that a street child may become an industrialist, but even in films it is often shown that such a dramatic rise requires illegal or unscrupulous methods.

Activity 5.1

Identify some of the richest and some of the poorest people in your neigbourhood, people that you or your family are acquainted with. (For instance a rickshawpuller or a porter or a domestic worker and a cinema hall owner or a construction contractor or hotel owner, or doctor… It could be something else in your context). Try to talk to one person from each group

to find out about their daily routines. For each person, organise the information in the form of an imaginary diary detailing the activities of the person from the time they get up to the time they go to sleep on a typical (or average) working day. Based on these diaries, try to answer the following questions and discuss them with your classmates.

- How many hours a day do each of these persons spend at work? What kind of work do they do – in what ways is their work tiring, stressful, pleasant or unpleasant? What kinds of relationship does it involve with other people – do they have to take orders, give orders, seek cooperation, enforce discipline....? Are they treated with respect by the people they have to deal with in their work, or do they themselves have to show respect for others?

It may be that the poorest, and in some cases even the richest, person you know actually has no real 'job' or is currently 'not working'. If this is so, do go ahead and find out about their daily routine anyway. But in addition, try to answer the following questions.

- Why is the person 'unemployed'? Has he/she been looking for work? How is he/she supporting herself/himself? In what ways are they affected by the fact of not having any work? Is their lifestyle any different from when they were working?

Activity 5.1 invites you to rethink the widely held commonsense view that hard work alone can improve an individual's life chances. It is true that hard work matters, and so does individual ability. If all other things were equal, then personal effort, talent and luck would surely account for all the differences between individuals. But, as is almost always the case, all other things are not equal. It is these non-individual or group differences that explain social inequality and exclusion.

5.1 What Is *Social* About Social Inequality and Exclusion?

The question being asked in this section has three broad answers which may be stated briefly as follows. First, social inequality and exclusion are social because they are not about individuals but about groups. Second, they are social in the sense that they are not economic, although there is usually a strong link between social and economic inequality. Third, they are systematic and structured – there is a definite pattern to social inqualities. These three broad senses of the 'social' will be explored briefly below.

Social Inequality

In every society, some people have a greater share of valued resources – money, property, education, health, and power – than others. These *social resources*

can be divided into three forms of capital – *economic capital* in the form of material assets and income; *cultural capital* such as educational qualifications and status; and *social capital* in the form of networks of contacts and social associations (Bourdieu 1986). Often, these three forms of capital overlap and one can be converted into the other. For example, a person from a well-off family (economic capital) can afford expensive higher education, and so can acquire cultural or educational capital. Someone with influential relatives and friends (social capital) may – through access to good advice, recommendations or information – manage to get a well-paid job.

Patterns of unequal access to social resources are commonly called *social inequality*. Some social inequality reflects innate differences between individuals for example, their varying abilities and efforts. Someone may be endowed with exceptional intelligence or talent, or may have worked very hard to achieve their wealth and status. However, by and large, social inequality is not the outcome of innate or 'natural' differences between people, but is produced by the society in which they live. Sociologists use the term *social stratification* to refer to a system by which categories of people in a society are ranked in a hierarchy. This hierarchy then shapes people's identity and experiences, their relations with others, as well as their access to resources and opportunities. Three key principles help explain social stratification:

1. *Social stratification is a characteristic of society, not simply a function of individual differences.* Social stratification is a society-wide system that unequally distributes social resources among categories of people. In the most technologically primitive societies – hunting and gathering societies, for instance – little was produced so only rudimentary social stratification could exist. In more technologically advanced societies where people produce a surplus over and above their basic needs, however, social resources are unequally distributed to various social categories regardless of people's innate individual abilities.

2. *Social stratification persists over generations.* It is closely linked to the family and to the inheritance of social resources from one generation to the next. A person's social position is *ascribed*. That is, children assume the social positions of their parents. Within the caste system, birth dictates occupational opportunities. A Dalit is likely to be confined to traditional occupations such as agricultural labour, scavenging, or leather work, with little chance of being able to get high-paying white-collar or professional work. The ascribed aspect of social inequality is reinforced by the practice of *endogamy*. That is, marriage is usually restricted to members of the same caste, ruling out the potential for blurring caste lines through inter-marriage.

3. *Social stratification is supported by patterns of belief, or ideology.* No system of social stratification is likely to persist over generations unless it is widely viewed as being either fair or inevitable. The caste system, for example, is

justified in terms of the opposition of purity and pollution, with the Brahmins designated as the most superior and Dalits as the most inferior by virtue of their birth and occupation. Not everyone, though, thinks of a system of inequality as legitimate. Typically, people with the greatest social privileges express the strongest support for systems of stratification such as caste and race. Those who have experienced the exploitation and humiliation of being at the bottom of the hierarchy are most likely to challenge it.

Often we discuss social exclusion and discrimination as though they pertain to differential economic resources alone. This however is only partially true. People often face discrimination and exclusion because of their gender, religion, ethnicity, language, caste and disability. Thus women from a privileged background may face sexual harassment in public places. A middle class professional from a minority religious or ethnic group may find it difficult to get accommodation in a middle class colony even in a metropolitan city. People often harbour prejudices about other social groups. Each of us grows up as a member of a community from which we acquire ideas not just about our 'community', our 'caste' or 'class' our 'gender' but also about others. Often these ideas reflect prejudices.

Prejudices refer to pre-conceived opinions or attitudes held by members of one group towards another. The word literally means 'pre-judgement', that is, an opinion formed in advance of any familiarity with the subject, before considering any available evidence. A prejudiced person's preconceived views are often based on hearsay rather than on direct evidence, and are resistant to change even in the face of new information. Prejudice may be either positive or negative. Although the word is generally used for negative pre-judgements, it can also apply to favourable pre-judgement. For example, a person may be prejudiced in favour of members of his/her own caste or group and – without any evidence – believe them to be superior to members of other castes or groups.

Prejudices are often grounded in **stereotypes**, fixed and inflexible characterisations of a group of people. Stereotypes are often applied to ethnic and racial groups and to women. In a country such as India, which was colonised for a long time, many of these stereotypes are partly colonial creations. Some communities were characterised as 'martial races', some others as effeminate or cowardly, yet others as untrustworthy. In both English and Indian fictional writings we often encounter an entire group of people classified as 'lazy' or 'cunning'. It may indeed be true that some individuals are sometimes lazy or cunning, brave or cowardly. But such a general statement is true of individuals in every group. Even for such individuals, it is not true all the time – the same individual may be both lazy and hardworking at different times. Stereotypes fix whole groups into single, homogenous categories; they refuse to recognise the variation across individuals and across contexts or across time. They treat an entire community as though it were a single person with a single all-encompassing trait or characteristic.

Activity 5.2

- Collect examples of prejudiced behaviour from films or novels.
- Discuss the examples you and your classmates have gathered. How are prejudices reflected in the manner a social group is depicted? How do we decide whether a certain kind of portrayal is prejudiced or not?
- Can you distinguish between instances of prejudice that were intentional – i.e., the film maker or writer *wanted* to show it as prejudiced – and unintentional or unconscious prejudice?

If prejudice describes attitudes and opinions, **discrimination** refers to actual behaviour towards another group or individual. Discrimination can be seen in practices that disqualify members of one group from opportunities open to others, as when a person is refused a job because of their gender or religion. Discrimination can be very hard to prove because it may not be open or explicitly stated. Discriminatory behaviour or practices may be presented as motivated by other, more justifiable, reasons rather than prejudice. For example, the person who is refused a job because of their caste may be told that they were less qualified than others, and that the selection was done purely on merit.

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion refers to ways in which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society. It focuses attention on a broad range of factors that prevent individuals or groups from having opportunities open to the majority of the population. In order to live a full and active life, individuals must not only be able to feed, clothe and house themselves, but should also have access to essential goods and services such as education, health, transportation, insurance, social security, banking and even access to the police or judiciary. Social exclusion is not accidental but systematic – it is the result of structural features of society.

It is important to note that social exclusion is involuntary – that is, exclusion is practiced regardless of the wishes of those who are excluded. For example, rich people are never found sleeping on the pavements or under bridges like thousands of homeless poor people in cities and towns. This does not mean that the rich are being 'excluded' from access to pavements and park benches, because they could certainly gain access if they wanted to, but they choose not to. Social exclusion is sometimes wrongly justified by the same logic – it is said that the excluded group itself does not wish to participate. The truth of such an argument is not obvious when exclusion is preventing access to something desirable (as different from something clearly undesirable, like sleeping on the pavement).

Prolonged experience of discriminatory or insulting behaviour often produces a reaction on the part of the excluded who then stop trying for inclusion. For example, 'upper' caste Hindu communities have often denied entry into temples for the 'lower' castes and specially the Dalits. After decades of such treatment, the Dalits may build their own temple, or convert to another religion like

Buddhism, Christianity or Islam. After they do this, they may no longer desire to be included in the Hindu temple or religious events. But this does not mean that social exclusion is not being practiced. The point is that the exclusion occurs regardless of the wishes of the excluded.

India like most societies has been marked by acute practices of social discrimination and exclusion. At different periods of history protest movements arose against caste, gender and religious discrimination. Yet prejudices remain and often, new ones emerge. Thus legislation alone is unable to transform society or produce lasting social change. A constant social campaign to change awareness and sensitivity is required to break them.

You have already read about the impact of colonialism on Indian society. What discrimination and exclusion mean was brought home to even the most privileged Indians at the hands of the British colonial state. Such experiences were, of course, common to the various socially discriminated groups such as women, *dalits* and other oppressed castes and tribes. Faced with the humiliation of colonial rule and simultaneously exposed to ideas of democracy and justice, many Indians initiated and participated in a large number of social reform movements.

In this chapter we focus on four such groups who have suffered from serious social inequality and exclusion, namely Dalits or the ex-untouchable castes; adivasis or communities refered to as 'tribal'; women, and the differently abled. We attempt to look at each of their stories of struggles and achievements in the following sections.

5.2 Caste and Tribe – Systems Justifying and Perpetuating Inequality

The Caste System as a Discriminatory System

The caste system is a distinct Indian social institution that legitimises and enforces practices of discrimination against people born into particular castes. These practices of discrimination are humiliating, exclusionary and exploitative.

Historically, the caste system classified people by their occupation and status. Every caste was associated with an occupation, which meant that persons born into a particular caste were also 'born into' the occupation associated with their caste – they had no choice. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, each caste also had a specific place in the hierarchy of social status, so that, roughly speaking, not only were occupational categories ranked by social status, but there could be a further ranking within each broad occupational category. In strict scriptural terms, social and economic status were supposed to be sharply separated. For example, the ritually highest caste – the Brahmins – were not supposed to amass wealth, and were subordinated to the secular power of kings and rulers belonging to the Kshatriya castes. On the other

hand, despite having the highest secular status and power, the king was subordinated to the Brahmin in the ritual-religious sphere. (Compare this to the *'apartheid'* system described in Box 5.1)

However, in actual historical practice economic and social status tended to coincide. There was thus a fairly close correlation between social (i.e. caste) status and economic status – the 'high' castes were almost invariably of high economic status, while the 'low' castes were almost always of low economic status. In modern times, and particularly since the nineteenth century, the link between caste and occupation has become much less rigid. Ritual-religious prohibitions on occupational change are not easily imposed today, and it is easier than before to change one's occupation. Moreover, compared to a hundred or fifty years ago, the correlation between caste and economic status is also weaker – rich and poor people are to be found in every caste. But – and this is the key point – the caste-class correlation is still remarkably stable at the macro level. As the system has become less rigid, the distinctions between castes of broadly similar social and economic status have weakened. Yet, between different socio-economic groupings, the distinctions continue to be maintained.

Although things have certainly changed, they have not changed much at the macro level – it is still true that the privileged (and high economic status) sections of society tend to be overwhelmingly 'upper' caste while the disadvantaged (and low economic status) sections are dominated by the so called 'lower' castes. Moreover, the proportion of population that lives in poverty or affluence differs greatly across caste groups. (See Tables 1 and 2) In short, even though there have been major changes brought about by social movements over more than a century, and despite changed modes of production as well as concerted attempts by the state to suppress its public role in independent India, caste continues to affect the life chances of Indians in the twenty-first century.

Box 5.1

Race and Caste – A Cross-Cultural Comparison

Just like caste in India, race in South Africa stratifies society into a hierarchy. About one South African in seven is of European ancestry, yet South Africa's White minority holds the dominant share of power and wealth. Dutch traders settled in South Africa in the mid-seventeenth century; early in the nineteenth century, their descendants were pushed inland by British colonisation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the British gained control of what became the Union and then the Republic of South Africa.

To ensure their political control, the White European minority developed the policy of **apartheid**, or separation of the races. An informal practice for many years, apartheid became law in 1948 and was used to deny the Black majority South African citizenship, ownership of land, and a formal voice in government. Every individual was classified by race and mixed marriages were prohibited. As a racial caste, Blacks held low-paying jobs; on average, they earned only one-fourth what whites did. In the latter half of the twentieth century, millions of Blacks were forcibly relocated to 'Bantustans' or 'homelands' – dirt-poor districts with no infrastructure or industry or jobs. All the

homelands together constituted only 14 per cent of South Africa's land, while Blacks made up close to 80 per cent of the country's population. The resulting starvation and suffering was intense and widespread. In short, in a land with extensive natural resources, including diamonds and precious minerals, the majority of people lived in abject poverty.

The prosperous White minority defended its privileges by viewing Blacks as social inferiors. However, they also relied on a powerful system of military repression to maintain their power. Black protestors were routinely jailed, tortured and killed. Despite this reign of terror, Blacks collectively struggled for decades under the leadership of the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela, and finally succeeded in coming to power and forming the government in 1994. Although the Constitution of post-apartheid South Africa has banned racial discrimination, economic capital still remains concentrated in White hands. Empowering the Black majority represents a continuing challenge for the new society.

"I have fought against White domination and I have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Nelson Mandela, 20 April 1964, Rivonia Trial.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE, 2011–12

CASTE AND COMMUNITY GROUPS	RURAL INDIA	URBAN INDIA
	Spending Rs.327 or less per person per month	Spending Rs.454 or less per person per month
Scheduled Tribes	45.3	24.1
Scheduled Castes	31.5	21.7
OBCs	22.7	15.4
UC-Muslim	26.9	22.1
UC-Hindu	25.6	12.1
UC-Christian	22.2	05.5
UC-Sikh	06.2	05.0
ALL GROUPS	25.4	13.7

Note: OBC = Other Backward Classes; UC = 'Upper Castes', i.e., not SC/ST/OBC

Source: Report of NITI Aayog, 2014

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT IS AFFLUENT, 1999-2000

CASTE AND COMMUNITY GROUPS	RURAL INDIA	URBAN INDIA
	Spending Rs.1000 or more per person per month	Spending Rs. 2000 or more per person per month
Scheduled Tribes	1.4	1.8
Scheduled Castes	1.7	0.8
OBCs	3.3	2.0
UC-Muslim	2.0	1.6
UC-Hindu	8.6	8.2
UC-Christian	18.9	17.0
UC-Sikh	31.7	15.1
UC-Others	17.9	14.4
ALL GROUPS	4.3	4.5

Note: OBC = Other Backward Classes; UC = 'Upper Castes', i.e., not SC/ST/OBC
Source: Computed from NSSO 55th Round (1999-2000) unit-level data on CD

EXERCISE FOR TABLES 1 AND 2

Table 1 shows the percentage of the population of each caste/community that lives below the official 'Poverty Line' for 1999-2000. There are separate columns for rural and urban India.

Table 2 is organised in exactly the same way except that it shows the percentage of population living in affluence rather than in poverty. 'Affluence' is here defined as a monthly per person expenditure of Rs.1000 for rural India and Rs.2000 for urban India. This is equivalent to a family of five spending Rs.5000 per month in rural India and Rs.10,000 per month in urban India. Please take some time to study the tables carefully before you answer the questions below.

1. What is the percentage of the Indian population that was living below the poverty line in (a) Rural India and (b) Urban India?
2. Which caste/community group has the highest proportion of its members living in extreme poverty in a) rural and b) urban India? Which caste/community has the lowest percentage of population living in poverty?

3. Approximately how many times higher than the national average is the poverty percentage for each of the lower castes (ST, SC, OBC)? Is there a significant rural-urban difference?
4. Which caste/community has the lowest percentage of population living in affluence in rural and urban India respectively? How does this compare with the national average?
5. The affluent population of 'Upper' caste Hindus is roughly how many times larger than the percentage for the 'lower' castes (ST, SC, OBC)?
6. What do these tables tell you about the relative position of the OBCs? Is there a significant rural-urban difference?

Untouchability

'Untouchability' is an extreme and particularly vicious aspect of the caste system that prescribes stringent social sanctions against members of castes located at the bottom of the purity-pollution scale. Strictly speaking, the 'untouchable' castes are outside the caste hierarchy – they are considered to be so 'impure' that their mere touch severely pollutes members of all other castes, bringing terrible punishment for the former and forcing the latter to perform elaborate purification rituals. In fact, notions of 'distance pollution' existed in many regions of India (particularly in the south) such that even the mere presence or the shadow of an 'untouchable' person is considered polluting. Despite the limited literal meaning of the word, the institution of 'untouchability' refers not just to the avoidance or prohibition of physical contact but to a much broader set of social sanctions.

It is important to emphasise that the three main dimensions of untouchability – namely, exclusion, humiliation-subordination and exploitation – are all equally important in defining the phenomenon. Although other (i.e., 'touchable') low castes are also subjected to subordination and exploitation to some degree, they do not suffer the extreme forms of exclusion reserved for 'untouchables.' Dalits experience forms of exclusion that are unique and not practised against other groups – for instance, being prohibited from sharing drinking water sources or participating in collective religious worship, social ceremonies and festivals. At the same time, untouchability may also involve forced *inclusion* in a subordinated role, such as being compelled to play the drums at a religious event. The performance of publicly visible acts of (self-)humiliation and subordination is an important part of the practice of untouchability. Common instances include the imposition of gestures of deference (such as taking off headgear, carrying footwear in the hand, standing with bowed head, not wearing clean or 'bright' clothes, and so on) as well as routinised abuse and humiliation. Moreover, untouchability is almost always associated with economic exploitation of various kinds, most commonly through the imposition of forced, unpaid (or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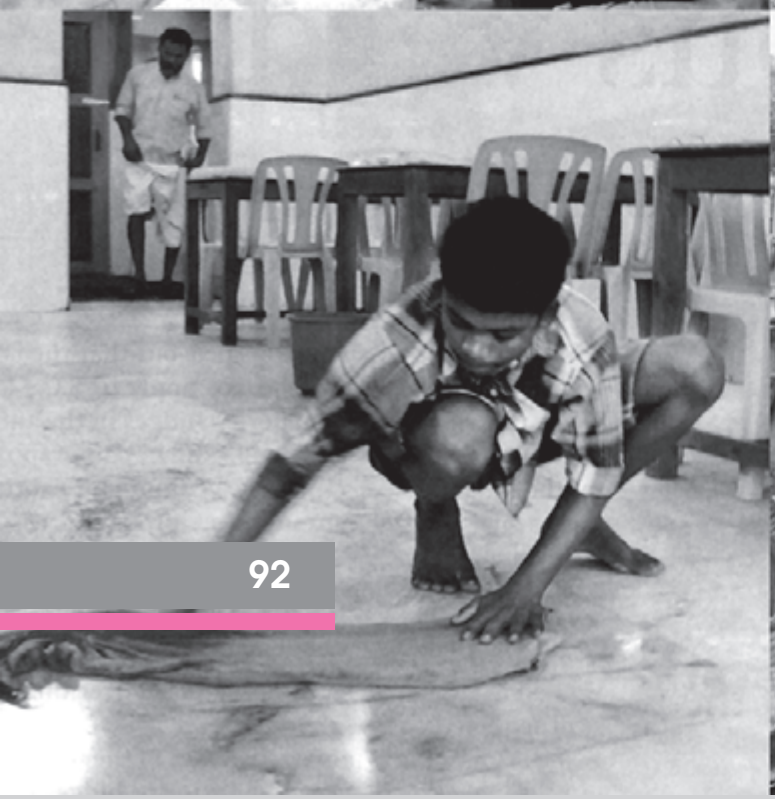


under-paid) labour, or the confiscation of property. Finally, untouchability is a pan-Indian phenomenon, although its specific forms and intensity vary considerably across regions and socio-historical contexts.

Box 5.2

The Everyday Ordeal of a Dalit Scavenger

Among the estimated 8 million manual scavengers in India is Narayanamma, who work in a 400 seat public latrine in Anantpur municipality in Andhra Pradesh. From time to time, after the women using the toilet file out, Narayanamma and her fellow workers are called inside. There is no flush. The excrement only piles up at each seat, or flows into open drains. It is Narayanamma's job to collect it with her broom onto a flat, tin plate, and pile it into her basket. When the basket is filled, she carries it on her head to a waiting tractor-trolley parked at a distance of half a kilometre. And then she is back, waiting for the next call from the toilet. This goes on until about ten in the morning, when at last Narayanamma washes up, and returns home.

"Ai, municipality come, clean this", is how most people call out to Narayanamma and her fellow workers when they walk down the road.

It is as though we do not have a name, she says. And often they cover their noses when we walk past, as though we smell. We have to wait until someone turns on a municipal tap, or works a hand-pump, when we fill water, so that these are not polluted by our touch. In the tea-stalls, we do not sit with others on the benches; we squat on the ground separately. Until recently, there were separate broken teacups for us, which we washed ourselves and these were kept apart only for our use. This continues to be the practice in villages even in the periphery of Anantpur, as in many parts of the state.

Source: Adapted from Mander 2001: 38-39.

The so-called 'untouchables' have been referred to collectively by many names over the centuries. Whatever the specific etymology of these names, they are all derogatory and carry a strongly pejorative charge. In fact, many of them continue to be used as forms of abuse even today, although their use is now a criminal offence. Mahatma Gandhi had popularised the term 'Harijan' (literally, children of God) in the 1930s to counter the pejorative charge carried by caste names.

However, the ex-untouchable communities and their leaders have coined another term, 'Dalit', which is now the generally accepted term for referring to these groups. In Indian languages, the term Dalit literally means 'downtrodden' and conveys the sense of an oppressed people. Though it was neither coined by Dr. Ambedkar nor frequently used by him, the term certainly resonates with his philosophy and the movement for empowerment that he led. It received wide currency during the caste riots in Mumbai in the early 1970s. The Dalit Panthers, a radical group that emerged in western India during that time, used the term to assert their identity as part of their struggle for rights and dignity.

State and Non-State Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination

The Indian state has had special programmes for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes since even before Independence. The 'Schedules' listing the castes and tribes recognised as deserving of special treatment because of the massive discrimination practiced against them were drawn up in 1935, by the British Indian government. After Independence, the same policies have been continued and many new ones added. Among the most significant additions is the extension of special programmes to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) since the early 1990s.

The most important state initiative attempting to compensate for past and present caste discrimination is the one popularly known as 'reservations'. This involves the setting aside of some places or 'seats' for members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in different spheres of public life. These include reservation of seats in the State and Central legislatures (i.e., state assemblies, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha); reservation of jobs in government service across all departments and public sector companies; and reservation of seats in educational institutions. The proportion of reserved seats is equal to the percentage share of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the total population. But for the OBCs this proportion is decided differently. The same principle is extended to other developmental programmes of the government, some of which are exclusively for the Scheduled Castes or Tribes, while others give them preference.

In addition to reservations, there have been a number of laws passed to end, prohibit and punish caste discrimination, specially untouchability. One of the earliest such laws was the Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, which disallowed the curtailment of rights of citizens due solely to change of religion or caste. The most recent such law was the Constitution Amendment (Ninety Third Amendment) Act of 2005, which became law on 23rd January 2006. Coincidentally, both the 1850 law and the 2006 amendment related to education. The 93rd Amendment is for introducing reservation for the Other Backward Classes in institutions of higher education, while the 1850 Act was used to allow entry of Dalits to government schools. In between, there have been numerous laws, of which the important ones are, of course, the Constitution of India itself, passed in 1950; and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989. The Constitution abolished untouchability (Article 17) and introduced the reservation provisions mentioned above. The 1989 Prevention of Atrocities Act revised and strenthened the legal provisions punishing acts of violence or humiliation against Dalits and adivasis. The fact that legislation was passed repeatedly on this subject is proof of the fact that the law alone cannot end a social practice. In fact, as you will have seen from newspapers and the media, cases of discrimination including atrocities against Dalits and adivasis, continue to take place all over India today. The particular case mentioned in Box 5.3 is only

one example; you can find numerous others in the newspapers and media.

State action alone cannot ensure social change. In any case, no social group howsoever weak or oppressed is only a victim. Human beings are always capable of organising and acting on their own – often against very heavy odds – to struggle for justice and dignity. Dalits too have been increasingly active on the political, agitational, and cultural fronts. From the pre-Independence struggles and movements launched by people like Jyotiba Phule, Iyotheedas, Periyar, Ambedkar and others (See Chapter 3) to contemporary political organisations like the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh or the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti of Karnataka, Dalit political assertion has come a long way. (For an example of a contemporary struggle, see Box 5.3) Dalits have also made significant contributions to literature in several Indian languages, specially Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. (See Box 5.4 which features a short poem by the well known Marathi Dalit poet, Daya Pawar.)

Activity 5.3

Obtain a copy of the Constitution of India. You can get it from your school library, from a bookshop, or from the Internet (web address: http://indiacode.nic.in/).

Find and list all the articles and sections (laws) that deal with the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, or with caste-related problems like Untouchability. You can make a chart of the most important laws and put them up in your class.

Box 5.3

D for Dalit, D for Defiance

Gohana is a small, dusty town on the Sonepat-Rohtak highway of Haryana with billboards promising progress… Past the town square, Gohana's largest dalit neighbourhood, Valmiki Colony, has risen from the ashes. On 31 August 2005, it was looted and burnt by a mob of Jats after a Jat youth was killed in a scuffle with some dalit youngsters. Dalits had fled their homes fearing attacks by Jats after the murder; the patrolling police had chosen not to stop the mobs from torching 54 dalit houses. "The arson was the Jats' way of teaching the dalits a lesson," said Vinod Kumar, whose house was burnt. "The police, administration and the government are dominated by Jats; they simply watched our houses burn."

Five months later, the burnt houses have been rebuilt, their facades painted in bright pink, red and green. Marble tiles with bright pictures of Valmiki adorn the facades of every house, asserting the dalit identity of the residents. "We had to return. It is our home," said Kumar, sitting on a newly acquired sofa in the drawing room of his house painted blue.

Kumar embodies the spirit of the dalits of Gohana. In his early 30s, he is not the scavenger the caste society ordered him to be, but a senior assistant in an insurance company. Most dalits have embraced education and stepped across the line of control of the caste system. "There are many of us who have a masters degree and work in private and government jobs. Most of our boys go to school and so do the girls," he said. (…)

The young men of the Valmiki Colony are not the stereotyped, submissive, suffering dalits that one would traditionally expect to encounter. Dressed in imitation Nike shoes and Wrangler jeans, their body language is defiant. However, the journey of upward social mobility remains tough for the vast majority of

landless dalits in Haryana. "Most boys drop out after high school because of acute poverty," said Sudesh Kataria, an assistant engineer working for a multinational. He has a diploma in electrical engineering from the Industrial Training Institute, Gurgaon. Kataria's best friend at ITI, a Jat, once invited him to a family wedding but insisted that he shouldn't reveal his identity. "At the wedding a guest asked me about my caste and I lied. Then he asked me about my village and I told him the truth. He knew my village was a dalit village." A fight broke out between the hosts and the guests — how can they let a dalit in? "They washed the chair I sat on and threw me out," Kataria recalls.

Kataria wants a new life for the dalits — he campaigns throughout the villages of Gurgaon with other educated dalits. "Our people will rise, stronger and powerful. We need to unite. And once we unite and fight back, there will be no Gohanas or Jhajjars. Not any more."

(Source: Adapted from an article by Basharat Peer, *in* Tehelka *February 18, 2006)*

The City
by Daya Pawar

Box 5.4

One day someone digs up a twentieth century city
and ends on this observation.
Here's an interesting inscription:
`This water tap is open to all castes and religions'.
What could it have meant:
That this society was divided?
That some were high while others were low?
Well, all right, then this city deserved burying—
Why did they call it the machine age?
Seems like the Stone Age in the twentieth century.

The Other Backward Classes

Untouchability was the most visible and comprehensive form of social discrimination. However, there were a large group of castes that were of low status and were also subjected to varying levels of discrimination short of untouchability. These were the service and artisanal castes who occupied the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy. The Constitution of India recognises the possibility that there may be groups other than the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes who suffer from social disadvantages. These groups – which need not be based on caste alone, but generally are identified by caste – were described as the 'socially and educationally backward classes'. This is the constitutional basis of the popular term 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs), which is in common use today.

Like the category of the 'tribe' (see Chapter 3), the OBCs are defined negatively, by what they are not. They are neither part of the 'forward' castes at the upper end of the status spectrum, nor of the Dalits at the lower end. But since caste has entered all the major Indian religions and is not confined to Hinduism alone, there are also members of other religions who belong to the backward castes and share the same traditional occupational identification and similar or worse socio-economic status.

For these reasons, the OBCs are a much more diverse group than the Dalits or adivasis. The first government of independent India under Jawaharlal Nehru appointed a commission to look into measures for the welfare of the OBCs. The First Backward Classes Commission headed by Kaka Kalelkar submitted its report in 1953. But the political climate at the time led to the report being sidelined. From the mid-fifties, the OBC issue became a regional affair pursued at the state rather than the central level.

The southern states had a long history of backward caste political agitation that had started in the early twentieth century. Because of these powerful social movements, policies to address the problems of the OBCs were in place long before they were discussed in most northern states. The OBC issue returned to the central level in the late 1970s after the Emergency when the Janata Party came to power. The Second Backward Classes Commission headed by B.P. Mandal was appointed at this time. However, it was only in 1990, when the central government decided to implement the ten-year old Mandal Commission report, that the OBC issue became a major one in national politics.

Since the 1990s we have seen the resurgence of lower caste movements in north India, among both the OBCs and Dalits. The politicisation of the OBCs allows them to convert their large numbers – recent surveys show that they are about 41% of the national population – into political influence. This was not possible at the national level before, as shown by the sidelining of the Kalelkar Commission report, and the neglect of the Mandal Commission report.

The large disparities between the upper OBCs (who are largely landed castes and enjoy dominance in rural society in many regions of India) and the lower OBCs (who are very poor and disadvantaged, and are often not very different from Dalits in socio-economic terms) make this a difficult political category to work with. However, the OBCs are severely under-represented in all spheres except landholding and political representation (they have a large number of MLAs and MPs). Although the upper OBCs are dominant in the rural sector, the situation of urban OBCs is much worse, being much closer to that of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes than to the upper castes.

Adivasi Struggles

Like the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes are social groups recognised by the Indian Constitution as specially marked by poverty, powerlessness and social stigma. The *jana* or tribes were believed to be 'people of the forest' whose distinctive habitat in the hill and forest areas shaped their economic, social and political attributes. However, ecological isolation was nowhere absolute. Tribal groups have had long and close association with Hindu society and culture, making the boundaries between 'tribe' and 'caste' quite porous. (Recall the discussion of the concept of tribe in Chapter 3).

A Dalit village

In the case of adivasis, the movement of populations from one area to another further complicates the picture. Today, barring the North-Eastern states, there are no areas of the country that are inhabited exclusively by tribal people; there are only areas of tribal *concentration*. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, non-tribals have moved into the tribal districts of central India, while tribal people from the same districts have migrated to plantations, mines, factories and other places of employment.

In the areas where tribal populations are concentrated, their economic and social conditions are usually much worse than those of non-tribals. The impoverished and exploited circumstances under which adivasis live can be traced historically to the pattern of accelerated resource extraction started by the colonial British government and continued by the government of independent India. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the colonial government reserved most forest tracts for its own use, severing the rights that adivasis had long exercised to use the forest for gathering produce and for shifting cultivation. Forests were now to be protected for maximising timber production. With this policy, the mainstay of their livelihoods was taken away from adivasis, rendering their lives poorer and more insecure. Denied access to forests and land for cultivation, adivasis were forced to either use the forests illegally (and be harassed and prosecuted as 'encroachers' and thieves) or migrate in search of wage labour.

The Independence of India in 1947 should have made life easier for adivasis but this was not the case. Firstly, the government monopoly over forests continued. If anything, the exploitation of forests accelerated. Secondly, the policy of capital-intensive industrialisation adopted by the Indian government required mineral resources and power-generation capacities which were concentrated in Adivasi areas. Adivasi lands were rapidly acquired for new mining and dam projects. In the process, millions of adivasis were displaced without any appropriate compensation or rehabilitation. Justified in the name of 'national development' and 'economic growth', these policies were also a form of internal colonialism, subjugating adivasis and alienating the resources upon which they depended. Projects such as the Sardar Sarovar dam on the river Narmada in western India and the Polavaram dam on the river Godavari in Andhra Pradesh will displace hundreds of thousands of adivasis, driving them to greater destitution. These processes continue to prevail and have become even more powerful since the 1990s when economic liberalisation policies were officially adopted by the Indian government. It is now easier for corporate firms to acquire large areas of land by displacing adivasis.

Like the term Dalit, the term Adivasi connotes political awareness and the assertion of rights. Literally meaning 'original inhabitants', the term was coined in the 1930s as part of the struggle against the intrusion by the colonial government and outside settlers and moneylenders. Being Adivasi is about shared experiences of the loss of forests, the alienation of land, repeated displacements since Independence in the name of 'development projects' and much more.

In spite of the heavy odds against them and in the face of their marginalisation many tribal groups have been waging struggles against outsiders (called 'dikus') and the state. In post-Independence India, the most significant achievements of Adivasi movements include the attainment of statehood for Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, which were originally part of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh respectively. In this respect adivasis and their struggles are different from the Dalit struggle because, unlike Dalits, adivasis were concentrated in contiguous areas and could demand states of their own.

Box 5.5

In the Name of Development — Adivasis in the Line of Fire

The new year brought death to Orissa. On 2 January 2006, police opened fire on a group of adivasis, killing twelve and injuring many others. For the past 23 days, the Adivasis had blocked the state highway at Kalinganagar, peacefully protesting against the take-over of their farmlands by a steel company. Their refusal to surrender their land was a red rag to an administration under pressure to expedite industrial development in the state. The stakes were high — not only this piece of land but the entire policy of accelerated industrialisation would be jeopardised if the government were to entertain the adivasis' demands. The police were brought in to forcibly clear the highway. In the confrontation that followed, twelve adivasi men and women lost their lives. Many of them were shot in the back as they were trying to run away. When the dead adivasis' bodies were returned to their families, it was found that the police had cut off their hands, the men's genitals and the women's breasts. The corpses' mutilation was a warning — we mean business.

The Kalinganagar incident, like many horrors before it and after, briefly made the headlines and then disappeared from public view. The lives and deaths of poor adivasis slid back into obscurity. Yet their struggle still continues and by revisiting it, we not only remind ourselves of the need to address ongoing injustice, but also appreciate how this conflict encapsulates many of the key issues in the sphere of environment and development in India today. Like many adivasi-dominated parts of the country, Kalinganagar in Jajpur district of central Orissa is a paradox. Its wealth of natural resources contrasts sharply with the poverty of its inhabitants, mainly small farmers and labourers. The rich iron ore deposits in the area are state property and their 'development' means that Adivasi lands are compulsorily acquired by the state for a pittance. While a handful of local residents may get secure jobs on the lower rungs of the industrial sector, most are impoverished even further and survive on the edge of starvation as wage-labourers. It is estimated that 30 million people, more than the entire population of Canada, have been displaced by this land acquisition policy since India became independent in 1947 (Fernandes 1991). Of these, almost 75 per cent are, by the government's own admission, 'still awaiting rehabilitation'. This process of land acquisition is justified as being in the public interest since the state is committed to promoting economic growth by expanding industrial production and infrastructure. It is claimed that such growth is necessary for national development.

To these arguments has been added a new justification. Since 1990, the Indian government has adopted a policy of economic liberalisation — divesting the state of its welfare functions and dismantling the institutional apparatuses regulating private firms. Economic policy has been re-oriented to maximise foreign

exchange earnings, with concessions and subsidies given to Indian and foreign firms to encourage them to invest in production for export. Kalinganagar's iron ore attracted increased interest due to the booming international demand for steel and spurred a steel company, which had bought land from the Orissa state government, to start work on a new steel plant by building a wall enclosing the factory site. It was the construction of this wall that sparked off protests leading to the killing of adivasis. The state government had forcibly acquired this land from them years ago by paying them a few thousand rupees per acre. Since the meagre compensation did not enable adivasis to invest in an alternative livelihood, they had continued to live in the area and cultivate the land that legally no longer belonged to them (after acquiring the land, the administration had not put it to any use). The move in December 2005 to enclose this land directly deprived adivasis of their sole source of livelihood. Their desperation was fuelled by anger when they learnt that the state government had sold the aquired land to the steel firm at a price roughly ten times the compensation amount paid to the original owners. Adivasis took to the streets, refusing to give up the land that they survived on.

The struggle of adivasis in Orissa and its violent reprisal highlight how conflicts over land and related natural resources remain central to the challenge of India's development. Kalinganagar is now marked along with Narmada, Singrauli, Tehri, Hirakud, Koel Karo, Suvarnarekha, Nagarhole, Plachimada and many other sites, on the map of environmental conflicts in India. Like the others, its contours too reflect the deep social and political divides that characterise contemporary India.

To read more about the Kalinganagar issue see: Frontline, v. 23, n.1, Jan 14-27, 2006 or the People's Union for Civil Liberties report at http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Dalit-tribal/2006/kalinganagar.htm

5.3 Struggle for Women's Equality and Rights

Because of the obvious biological and physical differences between men and women, gender inequality is often treated as natural. However, despite appearances, scholars have shown that the inequalities between men and women are social rather than natural. For example, there are no biological reasons that can explain why so few women are found in positions of public power. Nor can nature explain why women generally receive a smaller or no share in family property in most societies. But the strongest argument comes from the societies that were different from the 'normal' or common pattern. If women were biologically unfit to be inheritors and heads of families, how did matrilineal societies (as the Nairs of Kerala used to be, and as the Khasis of Meghalaya still are) work for centuries? How have women managed to be successful farmers and traders in so many African societies? There is, in short, nothing biological about the inequalities that mark the relations between women and men. Gender is thus also a form of social inequality and exclusion like caste and class, but with its own specific features. In this section we will look at how gender inequality came to be recognised as inequality in the Indian context, and the kinds of responses that this recognition produced.

The women's question arose in modern India as part of the nineteenth century middle class social reform movements. The nature of these movements varied from region to region. They are often termed as middle class reform movements because many of these reformers were from the newly emerging western educated Indian middle class. They were often at once inspired by the democratic ideals of the modern west and by a deep pride in their own democratic traditions of the past. Many used both these resources to fight for women's rights. We can only give illustrative examples here. We draw from the anti-sati campaign led by Raja Rammohun Roy in Bengal, the widow remarriage movement in the Bombay Presidency where Ranade was one of the leading reformers, from Jyotiba Phule's simultaneous attack on caste and gender oppression, and from the social reform movement in Islam led by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.

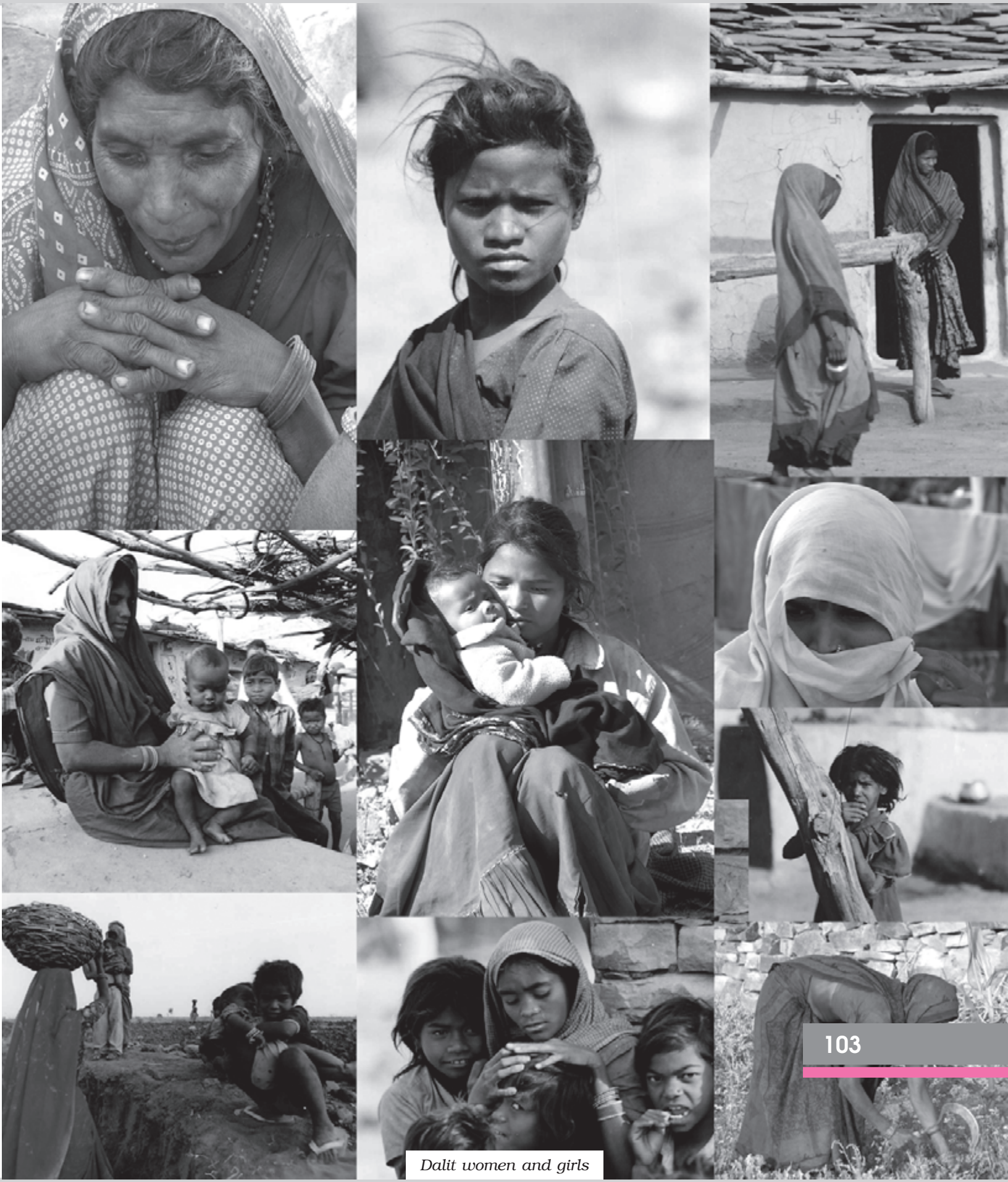
Raja Rammohun Roy's attempts to reform society, religion and the status of women can be taken as the starting point of nineteenth century social reform in Bengal. A decade before establishing the Brahmo Samaj in 1828, Roy undertook the campaign against "sati" which was the first women's issue to receive public attention. Rammohun Roy's ideas represented a curious mixture of Western rationality and an assertion of Indian traditionality. Both trends can be located in the over arching context of a response to colonialism. Rammohun thus attacked the practice of *sati* on the basis of both appeals to humanitarian and natural rights doctrines as well as Hindu *shastras*.

The deplorable and unjust treatment of the Hindu upper caste widows was a major issue taken up by the social reformers. Ranade used the writings of scholars such as Bishop Joseph Butler whose *Analogy of Religion* and *Three Sermons on Human Nature* dominated the moral philosophy syllabus of Bombay University in the 1860s. At the same time, M.G. Ranade's writings entitled the *The Texts of the Hindu Law* on the *Lawfulness of the Remarriage of Widows* and *Vedic Authorities for Widow Marriage* elaborated the *shastric* sanction for remarriage of widows.

While Ranade and Rammohun Roy belonged to one kind of nineteenth century upper caste and middle class social reformers, Jotiba Phule came from a socially excluded caste and his attack was directed against both caste and gender discrimination. He founded the Satyashodak Samaj with its primary emphasis on "truth seeking". Phule's first practical social reform efforts were to aid the two groups considered lowest in traditional Brahmin culture: women and untouchables. (See Chapter 3)

ACTIVITY 5.4

- Find out about a social reformer in your part of the country. Collect information about her/ him.
- Read an autobiography/ biography of any social reformer.
- Can you see any of the ideas they fought for existing today in our everyday lives or in our constitutional provisions.



Dalit women and girls

Activity 5.5

- Make a list of professions in which women are involved today.
- Can you think of any educational field where women are barred today? Perhaps the recent discussion on women in the Indian armed forces may throw some light on this.

As in the case of other reformers, a similar trend of drawing upon both modern western ideas as well as the sacred texts characterised Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's efforts to reform Muslim society. He wanted girls to be educated, but within the precincts of their homes. Like Dayanand Saraswati of the Arya Samaj, he stood for women's education but sought for a curriculum that included instruction in religious principles, training in the arts of housekeeping and handicrafts and rearing of children. This may appear very stereotypical today. One has to however realise that once rights such as education for women were accepted it started a process that finally made it impossible to confine women to only some kinds of education.

It is often assumed that social reform for women's rights was entirely fought for by male reformers and that ideas of women's equality are alien imports. To learn how wrong both these assumptions are, read the following extracts from two books written by women, *Stree Purush Tulana* written in 1882 and *Sultana's Dream* written in 1905.

Stree Purush Tulana (or Comparison of Men and Women) was written by a Maharashtrian housewife, Tarabai Shinde, as a protest against the double standards of a male dominated society. A young Brahmin widow had been sentenced to death by the courts for killing her newborn baby because it was illegitimate, but no effort had been made to identify or punish the man who had fathered the baby. *Stree Purush Tulana* created quite a stir when it was published. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born in a well-to-do Bengali Muslim family, and was lucky to have a husband who was very liberal in outlook and

Box 5.6

From *Stree Purush Tulana* 1882

…Who are these women you give such names to? Whose womb did you take your birth in? Who carried the killing burden of you for nine months? Who was the saint who made you the light in her eye, …How would you feel if someone said about your mother, "That old chap's mother, you know, she's a gateway to hell'. Or your sister, "That so-and so-s' sister, she's a real storehouse of deceit'. …Would you just sit and listen to their bad words?…

…Then you get blessed with a bit of education and promoted to some important new office- and you start feeling ashamed of your first wife. Money works its influence on you and you begin to say to yourself, what does a wife matter after all? Don't we just give them a few rupees a month and keep them at home like any other servant, to do the cooking and look after the house? You begin to think of her like some female slave you've paid for….If one of your horses died it wouldn't take long to replace it, and there's no great labour needed to get another wife either. ..The problem is Yama hasn't got time to carry off wives fast enough, or you'd probably get through several different ones in one day!

From *Sultana's Dream* (1905) **Box 5.7**

…"What is the matter, dear?" she said affectionately.
" I feel somewhat awkward," I said, in a rather apologising tone, "as being a purdahnishin woman I am not accustomed to walking about unveiled."
"You need not be afraid of coming across a man here. This is Ladyland, free from sin and harm…"
…I became very curious to know where the men were. I met more than a hundred women while walking there, but not a single man.
"Where are the men?" I asked her.
"In their proper places, where they ought to be."
"Pray let me know what you mean by 'their proper places."'
"Oh, I see my mistake, you cannot know our customs, as you were never here before. We shut our men indoors."
"Just as we are kept in the zenana?"
"Exactly so."
"How funny." I burst into a laugh. Sister Sara laughed too.

encouraged her education first in Urdu and later in Bengali and English. She was already a successful author in Urdu and Bengali when she wrote *Sultana's Dream* to test her abilities in English. This remarkable short story is probably the earliest example of science fiction writing in India, and among the first by a woman author anywhere in the world. In her dream, Sultana visits a magical country where the gender roles are reversed. Men are confined to the home and observe 'purdah' while women are busy scientists vying with each other at inventing devices that will control the clouds and regulate rain, and machines that fly or 'air-cars'.

Apart from the early feminist visions there were a large number of women's organisations that arose both at the all India and local levels in the early twentieth century. And then began the participation of women in the national movement itself. Not surprisingly women's rights were part and parcel of the nationalist vision.

In 1931, the Karachi Session of the Indian National Congress issued a declaration on the Fundamental Rights of Citizenship in India whereby it committed itself to women's equality. The declaration reads as follows:

1. All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex.
2. No disability attaches to any citizen, by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.

Activity 5.6

- Find out the names of a few women's organisations that emerged both at the national level and in your part of the country.
- Find out about any woman who was part of a tribal or peasant movement, a trade union or one of the many strands of the freedom movement.
- Identify a novel, a short story or play in your region which depicted the struggle of women against discrimination.

ACTIVITY 5.7

Divide your class into groups. Each group can chose a topic relating to women's rights on which they must collect information from newspapers, radio, television news or other source. Discuss your findings with your classmates.

Possible examples of topics could be :

- 33 per cent reservation for women in elected bodies
- Domestic violence
- Right to employment ... there are many other topics of interest, choose the ones which interest you.

3. The franchise shall be on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

4. Woman shall have the right to vote, to represent and the right to hold public offices. (Report of the Sub-Committee, 'Woman's Role in Planned Economy', 1947: 37-38).

Two decades after Independence, women's issues re-emerged in the 1970s. In the nineteenth century reform movements, the emphasis had been on the backward aspects of tradition like sati, child marriage, or the ill treatment of widows. In the 1970s, the emphasis was on 'modern' issues – the rape of women in police custody, dowry murders, the representation of women in popular media, and the gendered consequences of unequal development. The law was a major site for reform in the 1980s and after, specially when it was discovered that many laws of concern to women had not been changed since the 19th century. As we enter the twenty-first century, new sites of gender injustice are emerging. You will recall the discussion of the declining sex ratio in Chapter 2. The sharp fall in the child sex ratio and the implicit social bias against the girl child represents one of the new challenges of gender inequality.

Social change whether on women's rights or any other issue is never a battle won once and for all. As with other social issues the struggle is long, and the women's movement in India will have to fight to defend hard won rights as well as take up new issues as they emerge.

5.4 THE STRUGGLES OF THE DISABLED

The differently abled are not 'disabled' only because they are physically or mentally 'impaired' but also because society is built in a manner that does not cater to their needs. In contrast to the struggles over Dalit, adivasi or women's rights, the rights of the disabled have been recognised only very recently. Yet in all historical periods, in all societies there have been people who are disabled. One of the leading activists and scholars of disability in the Indian context, Anita Ghai, argues that this invisibility of the disabled can be compared to the *Invisible Man* of Ralph Ellison. Ellison's novel of that name is a famous indictment of racism against African Americans in the USA.

> *I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in the circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of*

hard distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, figments of their imagination. Indeed everything and anything except me (Ellison, 1952:3).

The very term 'disabled' is significant because it draws attention to the fact that public perception of the 'disabled' needs to be questioned.

Here are some common features central to the public perception of 'diability' all over the world —

- Disability is understood as a biological given.
- Whenever a disabled person is confronted with problems, it is taken for granted that the problems originate from her/his impairment.
- The disabled person is seen as a victim.
- Disability is supposed to be linked with the disabled individual's self perception.
- The very idea of disability suggests that they are in need of help.

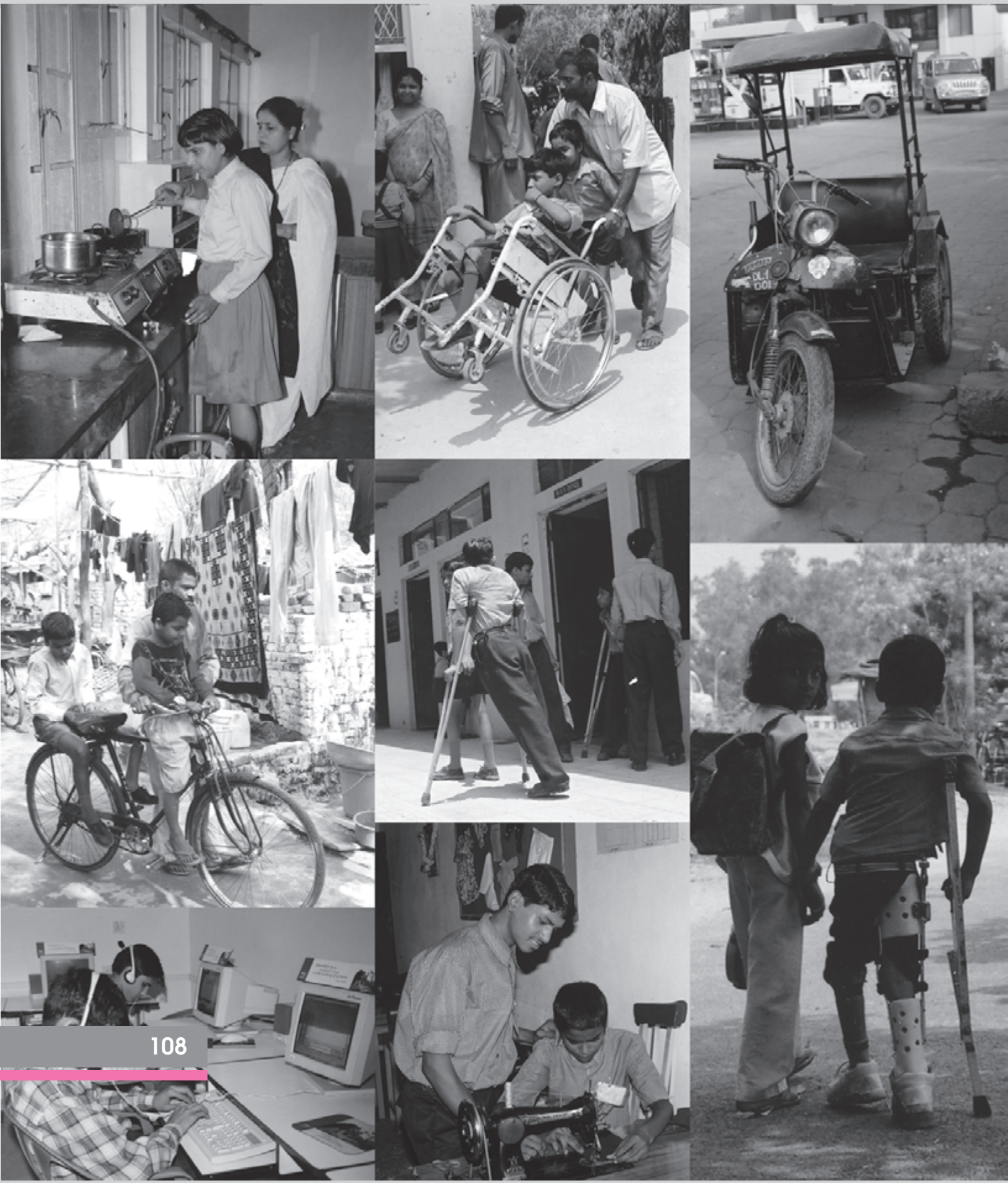
In India labels such as 'disability', 'handicap', 'crippled', 'blind' and 'deaf' are used synonymously. Often these terms are hurled at people as insults. In a culture that looks up to bodily 'perfection', all deviations from the 'perfect body' signify abnormality, defect and distortion. Labels such as *bechara* (poor thing) accentuate the victim status for the disabled person. The roots of such attitudes lie in the cultural conception that views an impaired body as a result of fate. Destiny is seen as the culprit, and disabled people are the victims. The common perception views disability as retribution for past *karma* (actions) from which there can be no reprieve. The dominant cultural construction in India therefore looks at disability as essentially a characteristic of the individual. The popular images in mythology portray the disabled in an extremely negative fashion.

The very term 'disabled' challenges each of these assumptions. Terms such as 'mentally challenged', 'visually impaired' and 'physically impaired' came to replace the more trite negative terms such as 'retarded', 'crippled' or 'lame'. The disabled are rendered disabled not because they are biologically disabled but because society renders them so.

We are disabled by buildings that are not designed to admit us, and this in turn leads to a range of further disablements regarding our education, our chances of gaining employment, our social lives and so on. The disablement lies in the construction of society, not in the physical condition of the individual (Brisenden 1986 :176).

ACTIVITY 5.8

- Find out how different traditional or mythical stories depict the disabled. You can draw from any of the innumerable regional sources of folklore, mythology, and traditional storytelling in India, or from any other part of the world.
- Make a list of popular sayings or proverbs that show negative attitudes towards the disabled.



The social construction of disability has yet another dimension. There is a close relationship between disability and poverty. Malnutrition, mothers weakened by frequent childbirth, inadequate immunisation programmes, accidents in overcrowded homes, all contribute to an incidence of disability among poor people that is higher than among people living in easier circumstances. Furthermore, disability creates and exacerbates poverty by increasing isolation and economic strain, not just for the individual but for the family; there is little doubt that disabled people are among the poorest in poor countries.

ACTIVITY 5.9

Have you seen the film, *Iqbal*? If you have not do try and see it. It is an exemplary story of the grit and determination of a young boy who cannot hear and speak but has a passion for cricket, and finally, excels as a bowler. The film brings alive not just Iqbal's struggles but also the many possible concrete meanings of the phrase 'differently abled'.

BOX 5.8

Approach adopted for the disabled in Census 2011

- Information on disability was collected during the Population Enumeration phase of Census 2011 through 'Household Schedule'.
- Questions on disability were asked about all persons in the household.
- Enumerators were instructed to contact the disabled person in the households, besides the respondent, to collect information.
- All types of household, i.e., 'National', 'Institutional'and 'Household', were covered.
- Questions and instructions on disability were finalised after field trial of selected questions, including disability in selected area, extensive deliberation with civil society organisations and nodal ministry, pre-test of all census questions covering rural/urban sample in all States.
- Aspects considered in finalising questions were simple nomenclature of the types/ categories of disability for easy comprehension by both enumerator and respondent, relevance of data for the planners and policy-makers, feasibility of canvassing the question to cover all types of disabilities as listed in the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, and the National Trust Act, 1999.
- A filter question to ascertain disability status was included.
- Attempt was made to collect information on eight types of disabilities as against five in Census 2001.
- The placement of the question on disability in the census Schedule was changed and the question was brought forward.
- Special efforts were made to improve the coverage, which included extensive training to the enumerators and publicity measures.

Significantly, efforts to redress the situation have come from the disabled themselves. The government has had to respond as the notification in Box 5.8 shows.

It is only recently with the efforts of the disabled themselves that some awareness is building in the society on the need to rethink 'disability'. This is illustrated by the newspaper report on the next page.

Recognition of disability is absent from the wider educational discourse. This is evident from the historical practices within the educational system that continue to marginalise the issue of disability by maintaining two separate streams – one for disabled students and one for everyone else.

Box 5.9

'Disabled-unfriendly' Courts

Describing the non-consideration of handicapped persons for Judge posts as an "exclusive" policy of the higher judiciary, a senior jurist says by continuing to ignore the handicapped, the judiciary is violating a statutory mandate. "The High Court building itself is far from disabled-friendly." All entrances to the actual court complex are preceded by staircases and none of them has a ramp. Even to access the limited elevator facility, one has to climb several steps.

The condition of the City Civil Court, where many handicapped or injured persons come to depose before courts hearing accident claims cases, is worse. One can see disabled, injured or old people being carried up the stairs by their companions, says an advocate.

The Hindu Wednesday 2 August 2006.

In this chapter we have looked at caste, tribe, gender and disability as institutions that generate and perpetuate inequalities and exclusion. However, they also provoke struggles against these inequalities. Historically, the understanding of inequality in the social sciences has been dominated by notions of class, race and more recently, gender. It is only later that the complexities of other categories like caste and tribe have received attention. In the Indian context, caste, tribe and gender are now getting the attention they deserve. But there remain categories that are still in need of attention, such as those who are marginalised by religion or by a combination of categories. More complex formations like groups defined by religion and caste, gender and religion, or caste and region are likely to claim our attention in the near future, as shown, for example, by the Sachar Committee Report on the Muslim community.

Box 5.10

In a country where half the children in the age group of 5-14 are out of school how can there be space for children with disabilities, especially if a segregated schooling is being advocated for them? Even if the legislation optimistically tries to make education available to every disabled child, parents in a village do not see this as instrumental in achieving any autonomy for their disabled child. What they would prefer is perhaps a better way of fetching water from the well and improved agricultural facilities. Similarly, parents in an urban slum expect education to be related to a world of work that would enhance their child's basic quality of life.

Source: Anita Ghai 'Disability in the Indian Context', 2002:93

Activity 5.10

Read the quote above and discuss the different ways in which the problems of the disabled are socially constituted.

Questions

1. How is social inequality different from the inequality of individuals?
2. What are some of the features of social stratification?
3. How would you distinguish prejudice from other kinds of opinion or belief?
4. What is social exclusion?
5. What is the relationship between caste and economic inequality today?
6. What is untouchability?
7. Describe some of the policies designed to address caste inequality.
8. How are the Other Backward Castes different from the Dalits (or Scheduled Castes)?
9. What are the major issues of concern to adivasis today?
10. What are the major issues taken up by the women's movement over its history?
11. In what sense can one say that 'disability' is as much a social as a physical thing?

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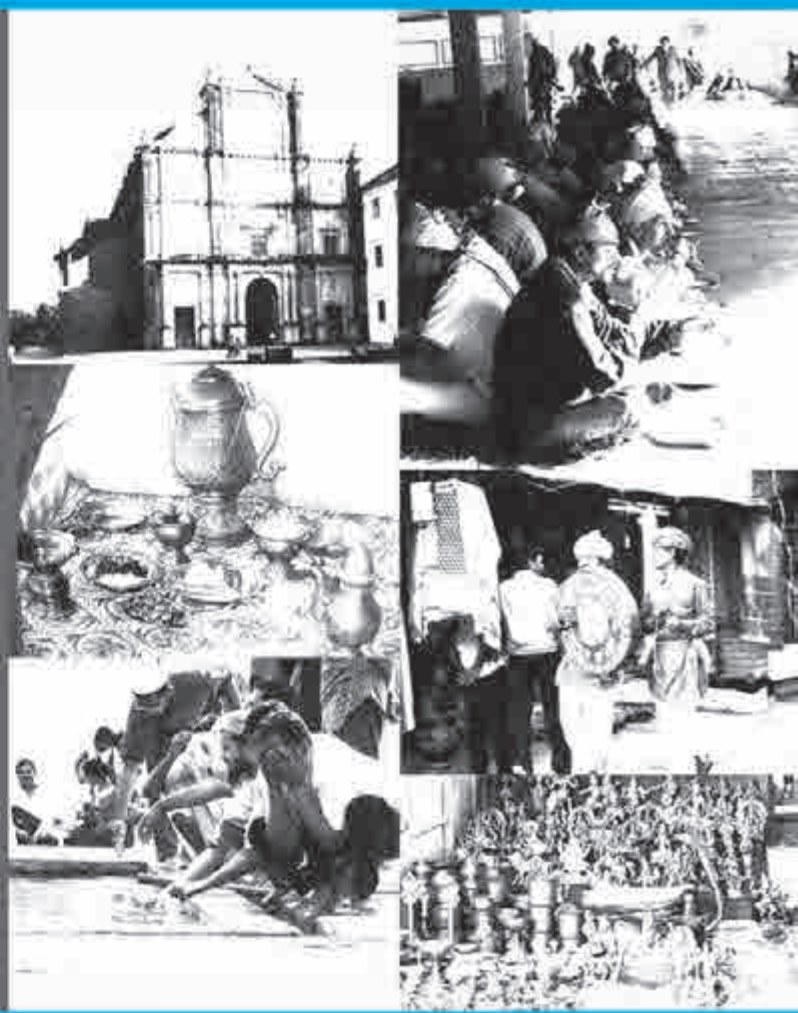
Notes

Chapter 6



The Challenges of Cultural Diversity

2018-19

Different kinds of social institutions, ranging from the family to the market, can bring people together, create strong collective identities and strengthen social cohesion, as you learnt in Chapters 3 and 4. But, on the other hand, as Chapters 4 and 5 showed, the very same institutions can also be sources of inequality and exclusion. In this chapter, you will learn about some of the tensions and difficulties associated with cultural diversity. What precisely does 'cultural diversity' mean, and why is it seen as a challenge?

The term 'diversity' emphasises *differences* rather than inequalities. When we say that India is a nation of great cultural diversity, we mean that there are many different types of social groups and communities living here. These are communities defined by cultural markers such as language, religion, sect, race or caste. When these diverse communities are also part of a larger entity like a nation, then difficulties may be created by competition or conflict between them.

This is why cultural diversity can present tough challenges. The difficulties arise from the fact that cultural identities are very powerful – they can arouse intense passions and are often able to moblise large numbers of people. Sometimes cultural differences are accompanied by economic and social inequalities, and this further complicates things. Measures to address the inequalities or injustices suffered by one community can provoke opposition from other communities. The situation is made worse when scarce resources – like river waters, jobs or government funds – have to be shared.

If you read the newspapers regularly, or watch the news on television, you may often have had the depressing feeling that India has no future. There seem to be so many divisive forces hard at work tearing apart the unity and integrity of our country – communal riots, demands for regional autonomy, caste wars… You might have even felt upset that large sections of our population are not being patriotic and don't seem to feel as intensely for India as you and your classmates do. But if you look at any book dealing with the history of modern India, or books dealing specifically with issues like communalism or regionalism (for example, Brass 1974), you will realise that these problems are not new ones. Almost all the major 'divisive' problems of today have been there ever since Independence, or even earlier. But in spite of them India has not only survived as a nation, but is a stronger nation-state today.

As you prepare to read on, remember that this chapter deals with difficult issues for which there are no easy answers. But some answers are better than others, and it is our duty as citizens to try our utmost to produce the best answers that are possible within the limitations of our historical and social context. Remember also that, given the immense challenges presented by a vast and extremely diverse collection of peoples and cultures, India has on the whole done fairly well compared to most other nations. On the other hand, we also have some significant shortcomings. There is a lot of room for improvement and much work needs to be done in order to face the challenges of the future …

6.1 Cultural Communities and the Nation-state

Before discussing the major challenges that diversity poses in India – issues such as regionalism, communalism and casteism – we need to understand the relationship between nation-states and cultural communities. Why is it so important for people to belong to communities based on cultural identities like a caste, ethnic group, region, or religion? Why is so much passion aroused when there is a perceived threat, insult, or injustice to one's community? Why do these passions pose problems for the nation-state?

The Importance of Community Identity

Every human being needs a sense of stable identity to operate in this world. Questions like — Who am I? How am I different from others? How do others understand and comprehend me? What goals and aspirations should I have? – constantly crop up in our life right from childhood. We are able to answer many of these questions because of the way in which we are socialised, or taught how to live in society by our immediate families and our community in various senses. (Recall the discussion of socialisation in your Class XI textbooks.) The socialisation process involves a continuous dialogue, negotiation and even struggle against significant others (those directly involved in our lives) like our parents, family, kin group and our community. Our community provides us the language (our mother tongue) and the cultural values through which we comprehend the world. It also anchors our self-identity.

Community identity is based on birth and 'belonging' rather than on some form of acquired qualifications or 'accomplishment'. It is what we 'are' rather than what we have 'become'. We don't have to do anything to be born into a community – in fact, no one has any choice about which family or community or country they are born into. These kinds of identities are called 'ascriptive' – that is, they are determined by the accidents of birth and do not involve any choice on the part of the individuals concerned. It is an odd fact of social life that people feel a deep sense of security and satisfaction in belonging to communities in which their membership is entirely accidental. We often identify so strongly with communities we have done nothing to 'deserve' – passed no exam, demonstrated no skill or competence… This is very unlike belonging to, say, a profession or team. Doctors or architects have to pass exams and demonstrate their competence. Even in sports, a certain level of skill and performance are a necessary pre-condition for membership in a team. But our membership in our families or religious or regional communities is without preconditions, and yet it is total. In fact, most ascriptive identities are very hard to shake off; even if we choose to disown them, others may continue to identify us by those very markers of belonging.

Perhaps it is because of this accidental, unconditional and yet almost inescapable belonging that we can often be so emotionally attached to our

community identity. Expanding and overlapping circles of community ties (family, kinship, caste, ethnicity, language, region or religion) give meaning to our world and give us a sense of identity, of who we are. That is why people often react emotionally or even violently whenever there is a perceived threat to their community identity.

Activity 6.1

To get a clearer understanding of the expanding circles of community ties which shape our sense of identity, you can do a small survey designed as a game. Interview your school mates or other friends: each interviewee gets four chances to answer each of two questions: 'Who am I?' and 'Who do others think I am?'. But the answers must be in a single word or short phrase; they cannot include any names (your own or your parents'/guardians' names; cannot include your class/school, etc.). Interviews must be done singly and in private, i.e., other potential interviewees should not be able to hear what is said. Each person should only be interviewed once (i.e., different interviewers cannot interview the same person). You can record the answers and analyse them later. Which types of identities predominated? What was the most common first choice? Which was often the last choice? Were there any patterns to the answers? Did the answers for 'who am I' differ greatly, somewhat, or not at all from answers to 'who do others think I am'?

A second feature of ascriptive identities and community feeling is that they are universal. Everyone has a motherland, a mother tongue, a family, a faith… This may not necessarily be strictly true of every individual, but it is true in a general sense. And we are all equally committed and loyal to our respective identities. Once again it is possible to come across people who may not be particularly committed to one or the other aspect of their identity. But the possibility of this commitment is potentially available to most people. Because of this, conflicts that involve our communities (whether of nation, language, religion, caste or region) are very hard to deal with. Each side in the conflict thinks of the other side as a hated enemy, and there is a tendency to exaggerate the virtues of one's own side as well as the vices of the other side. Thus, when two nations are at war, patriots in each nation see the other as the enemy aggressor; each side believes that God and truth are on their side. In the heat of the moment, it is very hard for people on either side to see that they are constructing matching but reversed mirror images of each other.

It is a social fact that no country or group ever mobilises its members to struggle for untruth, injustice or inequality – everyone is always fighting for truth, justice, equality… This does not mean that both sides are right in every conflict, or that there is no right and wrong, no truth. Sometimes both sides are indeed equally wrong or right; at other times history may judge one side to be the aggressor and the other to be the victim. But this can only happen long after the heat of the conflict has cooled down. Some notion of mutually agreed upon truth is very hard to establish in situations of identity conflict; it usually takes decades, sometimes centuries for one side to accept that it was wrong (See Box 6.1).

Box 6.1

When 'Victors' Apologise

It is not uncommon for the losing side in a war to be forced to apologise for the bad things that it did. It is only rarely that the winners accept that they were guilty of wrong doing. However, in recent times there have been many such examples from around the world. Nations or communities that were on the 'winning' side, or that are still in a dominant position, are beginning to accept that they have been responsible for grave injustices in the past and are seeking to apologise to the affected communities.

In Australia, there has been a long debate on an official apology from the Australian nation (where the majority of the population today is of white-European origin) to the descendants of the native peoples who were the original inhabitants of the forcibly colonised land. Most state governments in Australia have passed some variant of the following apology resolution:

> *We, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation. We value the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of lands and waters.*
>
> *We recognise this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent. (…) Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves. As we walk the journey of healing, one part of the nation apologises and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apologies and forgives. (…) And so, we pledge ourselves to stop injustice, overcome disadvantage, and respect that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to self-determination within the life of the nation.*

In the United States of America there has been a longstanding debate about apologies to the Native American community (the original inhabitants of the land driven out by war) and to the Black community (brought as slaves from Africa). No consensus has been reached yet.

In Japan, official policy has long recognised the need to apologise for the atrocities of war and colonisation during the periods when Japan occupied parts of East Asia including Korea and parts of China. The most recent apology is from a 15th August 2005 speech by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi:

> *In the past, Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. Sincerely facing these facts of history, I once again express my feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology, and also express the feelings of mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, in the war. I am determined not to allow the lessons of that horrible war to erode, and to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world without ever again waging a war.*

Similar debates have gone on in South Africa, where a white minority was in power and brutally oppressed the black majority consisting of the native population. In Britain as well, there has been public discussion on whether the nation should apologise for its role in colonialism, or in promoting slavery. Interestingly, the latter issue has also been taken up by cities – for example, the port city of Bristol debated whether the city council should pass a resolution apologising for the role that Bristol played in the slave trade.

Sources:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bringing_Them_Home#Apologies
http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/koizumispeech/2005/08/15danwa_e.html

Activity 6.2

Read Box 6.1 carefully. What purpose do you think such apologies serve? After all, the actual victims and the actual exploiters or oppressors may be long dead – they cannot be compensated or punished. Then for whom and for what reason are such apologies offered or debated?

Can you think of other examples where anonymous ordinary people (i.e., people who are not famous or powerful) who are no longer living are remembered, celebrated or honoured in a public way? What purpose is served by memorials and monuments like, for example, the India Gate monument in Delhi? (To whom is this monument dedicated? If you don't know, try to find out.)

Think about the kind of apology mentioned in Box 6.1 in the Indian context. If you were asked to propose such a thing, which groups or communities do you think we as a nation should 'apologise' to? Discuss this in class and try to reach a consensus. What are the arguments and counter-arguments given for various candidate groups?

Did your opinion on such 'apologies' change after the class discussion?

Communities, Nations and Nation-States

At the simplest level, a nation is a sort of large-scale community – it is a community of communities. Members of a nation share the desire to be part of the same political collectivity. This desire for political unity usually expresses itself as the aspiration to form a *state*. In its most general sense, the term state refers to an abstract entity consisting of a set of political-legal institutions claiming control over a particular geographical territory and the people living in it. In Max Weber's well-known definition, a state is a "body that successfully claims a monopoly of legitimate force in a particular territory" (Weber 1970:78).

A nation is a peculiar sort of community that is easy to describe but hard to define. We know and can describe many specific nations founded on the basis of common cultural, historical and political institutions like a shared religion, language, ethnicity, history or regional culture. But it is hard to come up with any defining features, any characteristics that a nation must possess. For every possible criterion there are exceptions and counter-examples. For example, there are many nations that do not share a single common language, religion, ethnicity and so on. On the other hand, there are many languages, religions or ethnicities that are shared across nations. But this does not lead to the formation of a single unified nation of, say, all English speakers or of all Buddhists.

How, then, can we distinguish a nation from other kinds of communities, such as an ethnic group (based on common descent in addition to other commonalities of language or culture), a religious community, or a regionally-defined community? Conceptually, there seems to be no hard distinction – any of the other types of community can one day form a nation. Conversely, no particular kind of community can be guaranteed to form a nation.

Activity 6.3

Is it really true that there is no characteristic that is common to each and every nation? Discuss this in class. Try to make a list of possible criteria or characteristics that could define a nation. For each such criterion, make a list of examples of nations that meet the criterion, and also a list of nations that violate it.

In case you came up with the criterion that every nation must possess a territory in the form of a continuous geographical area, consider the cases mentioned below. (Locate each country or region on a world map; you will also need to do a little bit of prior research on each case…)

- Alaska and the United States of America
- Pakistan before 1971 (West Pakistan + East Pakistan)
- Malvinas/Falkland Islands and the United Kingdom
- Austria and Germany
- Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela
- Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates

(Hint: The first three cases are examples of geographically distant territories belonging to the same nation; the last three cases are examples of countries with contiguous territory, shared language and culture but separate nation-states.)

Can you add to this list of examples?

The criterion that comes closest to distinguishing a nation is the state. Unlike the other kinds of communities mentioned before, nations are communities that have a state of their own. That is why the two are joined with a hyphen to form the term *nation-state*. Generally speaking, in recent times there has been a one-to-one bond between nation and state (one nation, one state; one state, one nation). But this is a new development. It was not true in the past that a single state could represent only one nation, or that every nation must have its own state. For example, when it was in existence, the Soviet Union explicitly recognised that the peoples it governed were of different 'nations' and more than one hundred such internal nationalities were recognised. Similarly, people constituting a nation may actually be citizens or residents of different states. For example, there are more Jamaicans living outside Jamaica than in Jamaica – that is, the population of 'non-resident' Jamaicans exceeds that of 'resident' Jamaicans. A different example is provided by 'dual citizenship' laws. These laws allow citizens of a particular state to also – simultaneously – be citizens of another state. Thus, to cite one instance, Jewish Americans may be citizens of Israel as well as the USA; they can even serve in the armed forces of one country without losing their citizenship in the other country.

In short, today it is hard to define a nation in any way other than to say that it is a community that has succeeded in acquiring a state of its own. Interestingly, the opposite has also become increasingly true. Just as would-be or aspiring

nationalities are now more and more likely to work towards forming a state, existing states are also finding it more and more necessary to claim that they represent a nation. One of the characteristic features of the modern era (recall the discussion of modernity from Chapter 4 of your Class XI textbook, *Understanding Society)* is the establishment of democracy and nationalism as dominant sources of political legitimacy. This means that, today, 'the nation' is the most accepted or proper justification for a state, while 'the people' are the ultimate source of legitimacy of the nation. In other words, states 'need' the nation as much or even more than nations need states.

But as we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, there is no historically fixed or logically necessary relationship between a nation-state and the varied forms of community that it could be based on. This means that there is no pre-determined answer to the question: How should the 'state' part of the nation-state treat the different kinds of community that make up the 'nation' part? As is shown in Box 6.2 (which is based on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report of 2004 on Culture and Democracy), most states have generally been suspicious of cultural diversity and have tried to reduce or eliminate it. However, there are many successful examples – including India – which show that it is perfectly possible to have a strong nation-state without having to 'homogenise' different types of community identities into one standard type.

Box 6.2

Threatened by community identities, states try to eliminate cultural diversity

Historically, states have tried to establish and enhance their political legitimacy through nation-building strategies. They sought to secure … the loyalty and obedience of their citizens through policies of assimilation or integration. Attaining these objectives was not easy, especially in a context of cultural diversity where citizens, in addition to their identifications with their country, might also feel a strong sense of identity with their community – ethnic, religious, linguistic and so on.

Most states feared that the recognition of such difference would lead to social fragmentation and prevent the creation of a harmonious society. In short, such identity politics was considered a threat to state unity. In addition, accommodating these differences is politically challenging, so many states have resorted to either suppressing these diverse identities or ignoring them on the political domain.

Policies of assimilation – often involving outright suppression of the identities of ethnic, religious or linguistic groups – try to erode the cultural differences between groups. Policies of integration seek to assert a single national identity by attempting to eliminate ethno-national and cultural differences from the public and political arena, while allowing them in the private domain. Both sets of policies assume a singular national identity.

Assimilationist and integrationist strategies try to establish singular national identities through various interventions like:

- Centralising all power to forums where the dominant group constitutes a majority, and eliminating the autonomy of local or minority groups;
- Imposing a unified legal and judicial system based on the dominant group's traditions and abolishing alternative systems used by other groups;
- Adopting the dominant group's language as the only official 'national' language and making its use mandatory in all public institutions;
- Promotion of the dominant group's language and culture through national institutions including state-controlled media and educational institutions;
- Adoption of state symbols celebrating the dominant group's history, heroes and culture, reflected in such things as choice of national holidays or naming of streets etc.;
- Seizure of lands, forests and fisheries from minority groups and indigenous people and declaring them 'national resources'…

Source: Adapted from UNDP Human Development Report 2004, Ch.3, Feature 3.1

Box 6.2 speaks of 'assimilationist' and 'integrationist' policies. Policies that promote assimilation are aimed at persuading, encouraging or forcing all citizens to adopt a uniform set of cultural values and norms. These values and norms are usually entirely or largely those of the dominant social group. Other, non-dominant or subordinated groups in society are expected or required to give up their own cultural values and adopt the prescribed ones. Policies promoting integration are different in style but not in overall objective: they insist that the public culture be restricted to a common national pattern, while all 'non-national' cultures are to be relegated to the private sphere. In this case too, there is the danger of the dominant group's culture being treated as 'national' culture.

You can probably see what the problem is by now. There is no necessary relationship between any specific form of community and the modern form of the state. Any of the many bases of community identity (like language, religion, ethnicity and so on) may or may not lead to nation formation – there are no guarantees. But because community identities can act as the basis for nation-formation, already existing states see all forms of community identity as dangerous rivals. That is why states generally tend to favour a single, homogenous national identity, in the hope of being able to control and manage it. However, suppressing cultural diversity can be very costly in terms of the

alienation of the minority or subordinated communities whose culture is treated as 'non-national'. Moreover, the very act of suppression can provoke the opposite effect of intensifying community identity. So encouraging, or at least allowing, cultural diversity is good policy from both the practical and the principled point of view.

Cultural Diversity and the India1n Nation-state – An overview

The Indian nation-state is socially and culturally one of the most diverse countries of the world. It has a population of about 1.21 billion people, according to Census of India 2011 (Provisional), currently the second largest – and soon to become the largest – national population in the world. These billion-plus people speak about 1,632 different languages and dialects. As many as eighteeen of these languages have been officially recognised and placed under the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, thus guaranteeing their legal status. In terms of religion, about 80.5% of the population are Hindus, who in turn are regionally specific, plural in beliefs and practices, and divided by castes and languages. About 13.4% of the population are Muslims, which makes India the world's third largest Muslim country after Indonesia and Pakistan. The other major religious communities are Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.9%), Buddhists (0.8%) and Jains (0.4%). Because of India's huge population, these small percentages can also add up to large absolute numbers.

In terms of the nation-state's relationship with community identities, the Indian case fits neither the assimilationist nor the integrationist model described in Box 6.2. From its very beginning the independent Indian state has ruled out an assimilationist model. However, the demand for such a model has been expressed by some sections of the dominant Hindu community. Although 'national integration' is a constant theme in state policy, India has not been 'integrationist' in the way that Box 6.2 describes. The Constitution declares the state to be a secular state, but religion, language and other such factors are not banished from the public sphere. In fact these communities have been explicitly recognised by the state. By international standards, very strong constitutional protection is offered to minority religions. In general, India's problems have been more in the sphere of implementation and practice rather than laws or principles. But on the whole, India can be considered a good example of a 'state-nation' though it is not entirely free from the problems common to nation-states.

National unity with cultural diversity – Building a democratic "state-nation" Box 6.3

An alternative to the nation-state, then, is the "state nation", where various "nations"— be they ethnic, religious, linguistic or indigenous identities— can co-exist peacefully and cooperatively in a single state polity.

Case studies and analyses demonstrate that enduring democracies can be established in polities that are multicultural. Explicit efforts are required to end the

cultural exclusion of diverse groups … and to build multiple and complementary identities. Such responsive policies provide incentives to build a feeling of unity in diversity — a "we" feeling. Citizens can find the institutional and political space to identify with both their country and their other cultural identities, to build their trust in common institutions and to participate in and support democratic politics. All of these are key factors in consolidating and deepening democracies and building enduring "state-nations".

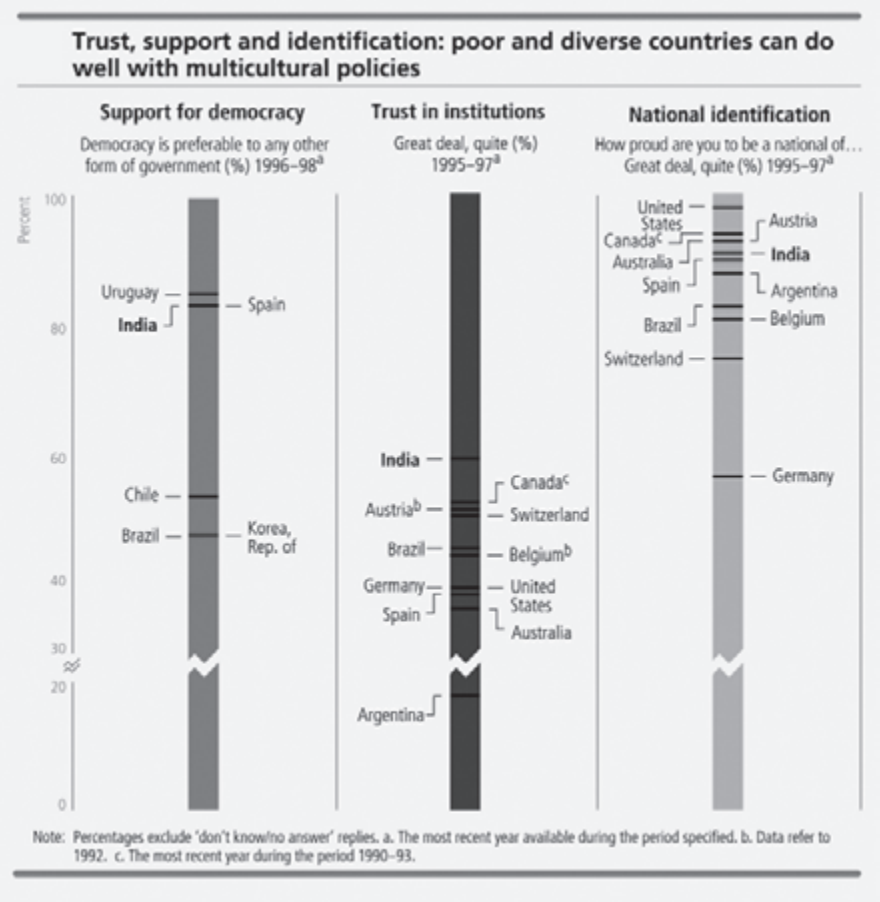
India's constitution incorporates this notion. Although India is culturally diverse, comparative surveys of long-standing democracies including India show that it has been very cohesive, despite its diversity. But modern India is facing a grave challenge to its constitutional commitment to multiple and complementary identities with the rise of groups that seek to impose a singular Hindu identity on the country. These threats undermine the sense of inclusion and violate the rights of minorities in India today. Recent communal violence raises serious concerns for the prospects for social harmony and threatens to undermine the country's earlier achievements.

And these achievements have been considerable. Historically, India's constitutional design recognised and responded to distinct group claims and enabled the polity to hold together despite enormous regional, linguistic and cultural diversity. As evident from India's performance on indicators of identification, trust and support (Chart 1), its citizens are deeply committed to the country and to democracy, despite the country's diverse and highly stratified society. This performance is particularly impressive when compared with that of other long-standing—and wealthier—democracies.

The challenge is in reinvigorating India's commitment to practices of pluralism, institutional accommodation and conflict resolution through democratic means. Critical for building a multicultural democracy is a recognition of the shortcomings of historical nation-building exercises and of the benefits of multiple and complementary identities. Also important are efforts to build the loyalties of all groups in society through identification, trust and support. National cohesion does not require the imposition of a single identity and the denunciation of diversity. Successful strategies to build "state-nations" can and do accommodate diversity constructively by crafting responsive policies of cultural recognition. They are effective solutions for ensuring the longer terms objectives of political stability and social harmony.

Source: Adapted from UNDP Human Development Report 2004, Ch.3, Feature 3.1

Chart 1: Fostering Cultural Diversity Strengthens Faith in the Indian State

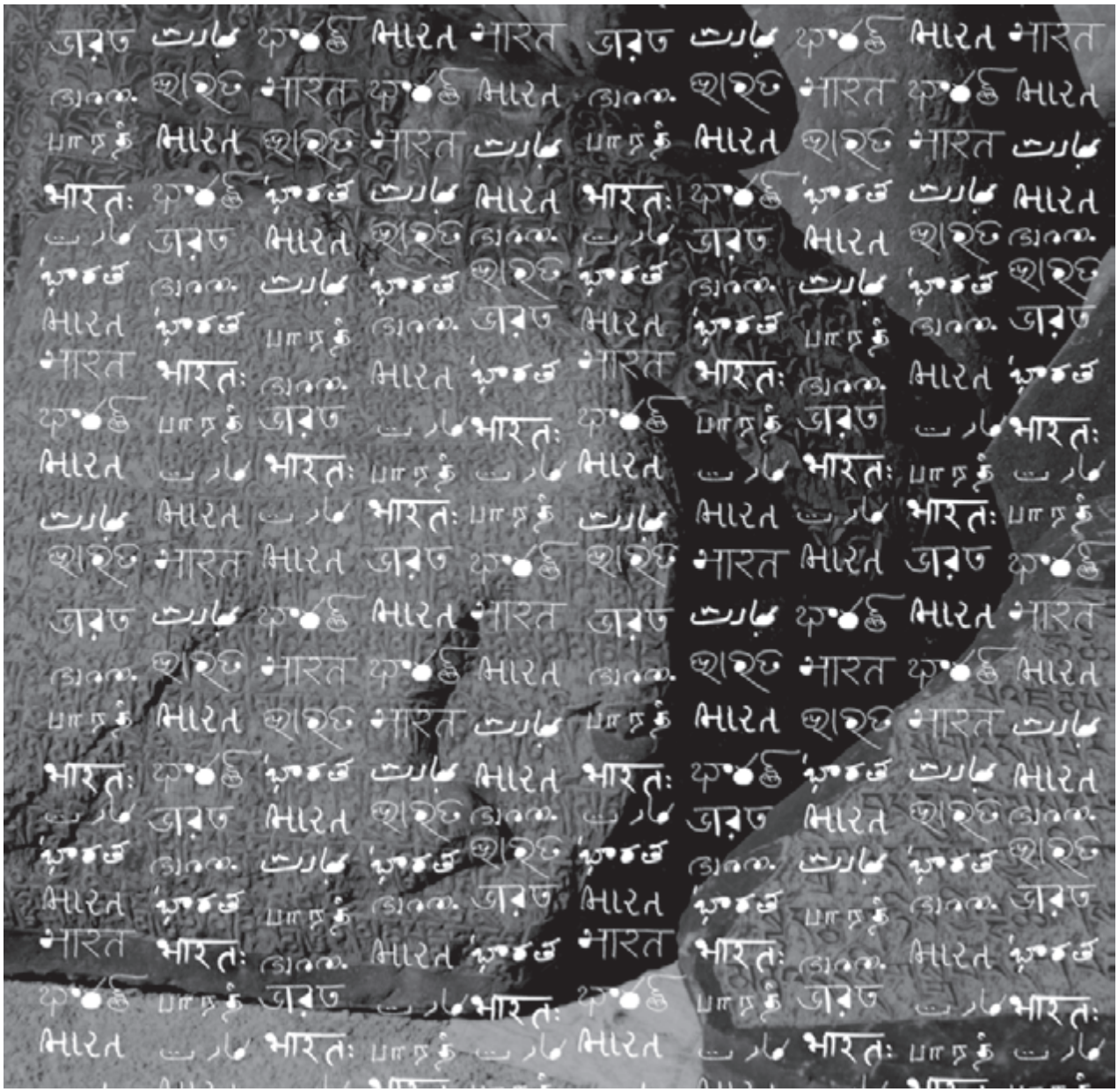


Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2004, Ch.3, Feature 3.1, Figure 2.

6.2 Regionalism in the Indian Context

Regionalism in India is rooted in India's diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, and religions. It is also encouraged by the geographical concentration of these identity markers in particular regions, and fuelled by a sense of regional deprivation. Indian federalism has been a means of accommodating these regional sentiments. (Bhattacharyya 2005).

After Independence, initially the Indian state continued with the British-Indian arrangement dividing India into large provinces, also called 'presidencies'. (Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta were the three major presidencies; incidentally, all three cities after which the presidencies were named have changed their names recently). These were large multi-ethnic and multilingual provincial states constituting the major political-administrative units of a semi-federal state



called the Union of India. For example, the old Bombay State (continuation of the Bombay Presidency) was a multilingual state of Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada and Konkani speaking people. Similarly, the Madras State was constituted by Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam speaking people. In addition to the presidencies and provinces directly administered by the British Indian government, there were also a large number of princely states and principalities all over India. The larger princely states included Mysore, Kashmir, and Baroda. But soon after the adoption of the Constitution, all these units of the colonial era had to be reorganised into ethno-linguistic States within the Indian union in response to strong popular agitations. (See Box 6.4 on the next page).

Box 6.4

Linguistic States Helped Strengthen Indian Unity

The Report of the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) which was implemented on November 1, 1956, has helped transform the political and institutional life of the nation.

The background to the SRC is as follows. In the 1920s, the Indian National Congress was reconstituted on lingusitic lines. Its provincial units now followed the logic of language – one for Marathi speakers, another for Oriya speakers, etc. At the same time, Gandhi and other leaders promised their followers that when freedom came, the new nation would be based on a new set of provinces based on the principle of language.

However, when India was finally freed in 1947, it was also divided. Now, when the proponents of linguistic states asked for this promise to be redeemed, the Congress hesitated. Partition was the consequence of intense attachment to one's faith; how many more partitions would that other intense loyalty, language, lead to? So ran the thinking of the top Congress bosses including Nehru, Patel and Rajaji.

On the other side, the rank and file Congressmen were all for the redrawing of the map of India on the lines of language. Vigorous movements arose among Marathi and Kannada speakers, who were then spread across several different political regimes – the erstwhile Bombay and Madras presidencies, and former princely states such as Mysore and Hyderabad. However, the most militant protests ensued from the very large community of Telugu speakers. In October 1953, Potti Sriramulu, a former Gandhian, died seven weeks after beginning a fast unto death. Potti Sriramulu's martyrdom provoked violent protests and led to the creation of the state of Andhra Pradesh. It also led to the formation of the SRC, which in 1956 put the formal, final seal of approval on the principle of linguistic states.

In the early 1950s, many including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru feared that states based on language might hasten a further subdivision of India. In fact, something like the reverse has happened. Far from undermining Indian unity, linguistic states have helped strengthen it. It has proved to be perfectly consistent to be Kannadiga and Indian, Bengali and Indian, Tamil and Indian, Gujarati and Indian…

To be sure, these states based on language sometimes quarrel with each other. While these disputes are not pretty, they could in fact have been far worse. In the same year, 1956, that the SRC mandated the redrawing of the map of India on linguistic lines, the Parliament of Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known) proclaimed Sinhala the country's sole official language despite protests from the Tamils of the north. One left-wing Sinhala MP issued a prophetic warning to the chauvinists. "One language, two nations", he said, adding: "Two languages, one nation".

The civil war that has raged in Sri Lanka since 1983 is partly based on the denial by the majority linguistic group of the rights of the minority. Another of India's neighbours, Pakistan, was divided in 1971 because the Punjabi and Urdu speakers of its western wing would not respect the sentiments of the Bengalis in the east.

It is the formation of linguistic states that has allowed India to escape an even worse fate. If the aspirations of the Indian language communities had been ignored, what we might have had here was – "One language, fourteen or fifteen nations."

Adapted from an article by Ramachandra Guha *in the Times of India, 1 November 2006.*

Language coupled with regional and tribal identity – and not religion – has therefore provided the most powerful instrument for the formation of ethno-national identity in India. However, this does not mean that all linguistic communities have got statehood. For instance, in the creation of three new states in 2000, namely Chhatisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand, language did not play a prominent role. Rather, a combination of ethnicity based on tribal identity, language, regional deprivation and ecology provided the basis for intense regionalism resulting in statehood. Currently there are 28 States (federal units) and 7 Union territories (centrally administered) within the Indian nation-state.

Note: In this chapter, the word "State" has a capital S when it is used to denote the federal units within the Indian nation-state; the lower case 'state' is used for the broader conceptual category described above.

Couples from different regions 1880s to 1930s: Clockwise from top left corner: Gujarat; Tripura; Bombay; Aligarh; Hyderabad; Goa; Calcutta. From Malavika Karlekar, Visualising Indian Women 1875-1947, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Activity 6.4

Find out about the origins of your own State. When was it formed? What were the main criteria used to define it? – Was it language, ethnic/tribal identity, regional deprivation, ecological difference or other criterion? How does this compare with other States within the Indian nation-state?

Try to classify all the States of India in terms of the criteria for their formation.

Are you aware of any current social movements that are demanding the creation of a State? Try to find out the criteria being used by these movements. (Hint: Check the Telengana and Vidarbha movements, and others in your region…)

Respecting regional sentiments is not just a matter of creating States: this has to be backed up with an institutional structure that ensures their viability as relatively autonomous units within a larger federal structure. In India this is done by Constitutional provisions defining the powers of the States and the Centre. There are lists of 'subjects' or areas of governance which are the exclusive responsibility of either State or Centre, along with a 'Concurrent List' of areas where both are allowed to operate. The State legislatures determine the composition of the upper house of Parliament, the Rajya Sabha. In addition there are periodic committees and commissions that decide on Centre-State relations. An example is the Finance Commission which is set up every ten years to decide on sharing of tax revenues between Centre and States. Each Five Year Plan also involves detailed State Plans prepared by the State Planning Commissions of each state.

On the whole the federal system has worked fairly well, though there remain many contentious issues. Since the era of liberalisation (i.e., since the 1990s) there is concern among policy makers, politicians and scholars about increasing inter-regional economic and infrastructural inequalities. As private investment (both foreign and Indian) is given a greater role in economic development, considerations of regional equity get diluted. This happens because private investors generally want to invest in already developed States where the infrastructure and other facilities are better. Unlike private industry, the government can give some consideration to regional equity (and other social goals) rather than just seek to maximise profits. So left to itself, the market economy tends to increase the gap between developed and backward regions. Fresh public initiatives will be needed to reverse current trends.

6.3 The Nation-State and Religion-Related Issues and Identities

Perhaps the most contentious of all aspects of cultural diversity are issues relating to religious communities and religion-based identities. These issues may be broadly divided into two related groups – the secularism–communalism set and the minority–majority set. Questions of secularism and communalism are about the state's relationship to religion and to political groupings that invoke religion as their primary identity. Questions about minorities and majorities involve decisions on how the state is to treat different religious, ethnic

or other communities that are *unequal* in terms of numbers and/or power (including social, economic and political power).

Minority Rights and Nation Building

In Indian nationalism, the dominant trend was marked by an inclusive and democratic vision. Inclusive because it recognised diversity and plurality. Democratic because it sought to do away with discrimination and exclusion and bring forth a just and equitable society. The term 'people' has not been seen in exclusive terms, as referring to any specific group defined by religion, ethnicity, race or caste. Ideas of humanism influenced Indian nationalists and the ugly aspects of exclusive nationalism were extensively commented upon by leading figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

Box 6.5

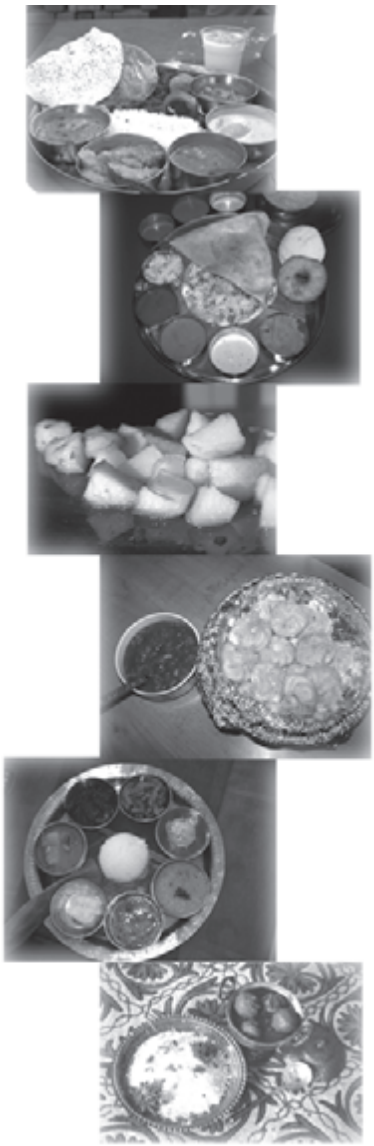
Rabindranath Tagore on the evils of exclusive nationalism

…where the spirit of the Western nationalism prevails, the whole people is being taught from boyhood to foster hatreds and ambitions by all kinds of means -- by the manufacture of half-truths and untruths in history, by persistent misrepresentation of other races and the culture of unfavourable sentiments towards them…Never think for a moment that the hurt you inflict upon other races will not infect you, or that the enemities you sow around your homes will be a wall of protection to you for all time to come? To imbue the minds of a whole people with an abnormal vanity of its own superiority, to teach it to take pride in its moral callousness and ill-begotten wealth, to perpetuate humiliation of defeated nations by exhibiting trophies won from war, and using these schools in order to breed in children's minds contempt for others, is imitating the West where she has a festering sore…

Source: On Nationalism by Rabindranath Tagore. First published in 1917, Reprint Edition of Macmillan, Madras 1930.

To be effective, the ideas of inclusive nationalism had to be built into the Constitution. For, as already discussed (in section 6.1), there is a very strong tendency for the dominant group to assume that their culture or language or religion is synonymous with the nation state. However, for a strong and democratic nation, special constitutional provisions are required to ensure the rights of all groups and those of minority groups in particular. A brief discussion on the definition of minorities will enable us to appreciate the importance of safeguarding minority rights for a strong, united and democratic nation.

The notion of minority groups is widely used in sociology and is more than a merely numerical distinction – it usually involves some sense of relative disadvantage. Thus, privileged minorities such as extremely wealthy people are not usually referred to as minorities; if they are, the term is qualified in some way, as in the phrase 'privileged minority'. When minority is used without qualification, it generally implies a relatively small but also disadvantaged group.



A Kashmiri girl

The sociological sense of minority also implies that the members of the minority form a collectivity – that is, they have a strong sense of group solidarity, a feeling of togetherness and belonging. This is linked to disadvantage because the experience of being subjected to prejudice and discrimination usually heightens feelings of intra-group loyalty and interests (Giddens 2001:248). Thus, groups that may be minorities in a statistical sense, such as people who are left-handed or people born on 29th February, are not minorities in the sociological sense because they do not form a collectivity.

However, it is possible to have anomalous instances where a minority group is disadvantaged in one sense but not in another. Thus, for example, religious minorities like the Parsis or Sikhs may be relatively well-off economically. But they may still be disadvantaged in a cultural sense because of their small numbers relative to the overwhelming majority of Hindus. Religious or cultural minorities need special protection because of the demographic dominance of the majority. In democratic politics, it is always possible to convert a numerical majority into political power through elections. This means that religious or cultural minorities – regardless of their economic or social position – are politically vulnerable. They must face the risk that the majority community will capture political power and use the state machinery to suppress their religious or cultural institutions, ultimately forcing them to abandon their distinctive identity.

Left Margin: Food from different parts of India; Right top: Child dressed in Kashmiri Clothes; Bottom: Dolls dressed in costumes of different Indian States.

Box 6.6

Relative size and distribution of religious minorities

As is well known, Hindus constitute an overwhelming majority in India: they number about 828 millions and account for 80.5% of the total population according to the 2001 Census. The Hindu population is *four times larger* than the combined population of all other minority religions, and about *six times larger* than the largest minority group, the Muslims.

However, this can also be misleading because Hindus are not a homogenous group and are divided by caste – as indeed are all the other major religions, albeit to different extents. The Muslims are by far the largest religious minority in India – they numbered 138 millions and were 13.4% of the population in 2001. They are scattered all over the country, constitute a majority in Jammu and Kashmir and have sizeable pockets in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan.

Christians constitute around 2.3% of the population (24 million) and are scattered all over, with sizeable pockets in the north eastern and southern states. The three Christian-majority states are all in the North East – Nagaland (90%), Mizoram (87%) and Meghalaya (70%). Sizeable proportions of Christians are also found in Goa (27%) and Kerala (19%).

The Sikhs constitute 1.9% of the population (19 million) and although they are found scattered across the country, they are concentrated in Punjab where they are in a majority (60%).

There are also several other small religious groups – Buddhists (8 million, 0.8%), Jains (4 million, 0.4%), and 'Other Religions and Persuasions' (under 7 million, 0.7%). The highest proportion of Buddhists is found in Sikkim (28%) and Arunachal Pradesh (13%), while among the larger states Maharashtra has the highest share of Buddhists at 6%. The highest concentrations of Jains are found in Maharashtra (1.3%), Rajasthan (1.2%) and Gujarat (1%).

In the long years of struggle against British colonialism, Indian nationalists understood the imperative need to recognise and respect India's diversity. Indeed 'unity in diversity' became a short hand to capture the plural and diverse nature of Indian society. Discussions on minority and cultural rights mark many of the deliberations of the Indian National Congress and find final expression in the Indian Constitution (Zaidi 1984).

Box 6.7

Dr. Ambedkar on protection of minorities

To diehards who have developed a kind of fanaticism against minority protection I would like to say two things. One is that *minorities are an explosive force which, if it erupts, can blow up the whole fabric of the state.* The history of Europe bears ample and appalling testimony to this fact. The other is that the minorities in India have agreed to place their existence in the hands of the majority. In the history of negotiations for preventing the partition of Ireland, Redmond said to Carson "Ask for any safeguard you like for the Protestant minority but let us have a United Ireland." Carson's reply was "Damn your safeguards, we don't want to be ruled by you." No minority in India has taken this stand.

[John Redmond, Catholic majority leader; Sir Edward Carson, Protestant minority leader]

(Source: Constituent Assembly Debates 1950: 310-311, cited in Narang 2002:63)

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956)

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar Buddhist revivalist, jurist, scholar and political leader, is the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Born in a poor untouchable community, he spent his life fighting against untouchability and the caste system.

Parliament building

The makers of the Indian Constitution were aware that a strong and united nation could be built only when all sections of people had the freedom to practice their religion, and to develop their culture and language. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution, made this point clear in the Constituent Assembly, as shown in Box 6.7.

In the last three decades we have witnessed how non-recognition of the rights of different groups of people in a country can have grave implications for national unity. One of key issues that led to the formation of Bangladesh was the unwillingness of the Pakistani state to recognise the cultural and linguistic rights of the people of Bangladesh.

Box 6.8

The Indian Constitution on minorities and cultural diversity

Article 29:

(1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.

(2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or received out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

Article 30:

(1) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

(2) The State shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language.

One of the many contentious issues that formed the backdrop of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was the imposition of Sinhalese as a national language. Likewise any forcible imposition of a language or religion on any group of people in India weakens national unity which is based upon a recognition of differences. Indian nationalism recognises this, and the Indian Constitution affirms this (Box 6.8).

Finally, it is useful to note that minorities exist everywhere, not just in India. In most nation-states, there tend to be a dominant social group whether cultural, ethnic, racial or religious. Nowhere in the world is there a nation-state consisting exclusively of a single homogenous cultural group. Even where this was almost true (as in countries like Iceland, Sweden or South Korea), modern capitalism, colonialism and large scale migration have brought in a plurality of groups. Even the smallest state will have minorities, whether in religious, ethnic, linguistic or racial terms.

Activity 6.5

There are many instances of a 'majority' in one context being converted into a 'minority' in another context (or the other way around). Find out about concrete examples of this, and discuss the implications.
Remember that the sociological concept of a minority involves not just relative numbers but also relative power.
(Suggestions: Whites in South Africa before and after the end of apartheid; Hindus in Kashmir; Muslims in Gujarat; Upper castes among Hindus; Tribals in North Eastern states;)

Communalism, Secularism and the Nation-State

Communalism

In everyday language, the word '**communalism**' refers to aggressive chauvinism based on religious identity. Chauvinism itself is an attitude that sees one's own group as the only legitimate or worthy group, with other groups being seen – by definition – as inferior, illegitimate and opposed. Thus, to simplify further, communalism is an aggressive political ideology linked to religion. This is a peculiarly Indian, or perhaps South Asian, meaning that is different from the sense of the ordinary English word. In the English language, "communal" means something related to a community or collectivity as different from an individual. The English meaning is neutral, whereas the South Asian meaning is strongly charged. The charge may be seen as positive – if one is sympathetic to communalism – or negative, if one is opposed to it.

Different religious worship places

Communal riots

It is important to emphasise that communalism is about politics, not about religion. Although communalists are intensely involved with religion, there is in fact no necessary relationship between personal faith and communalism. A communalist may or may not be a devout person, and devout believers may or may not be communalists. However, all communalists do believe in a *political identity* based on religion. The key factor is the attitude towards those who believe in other kinds of identities, including other religion-based identities. Communalists cultivate an aggressive political identity, and are prepared to condemn or attack everyone who does not share their identity.

One of the characteristic features of communalism is its claim that religious identity overrides everything else. Whether one is poor or rich, whatever one's occupation, caste or political beliefs, it is religion alone that counts. All Hindus are the same as are all Muslims, Sikhs and so on. This has the effect of constructing large and diverse groups as singular and homogenous. It is noteworthy that this is done for one's own group as well as for others. This would obviously rule out the possibility that Hindus, Muslims and Christians who belong to Kerala, for example, may have as much or more in common with each other than with their co-religionists from Kashmir, Gujarat or Nagaland. It also denies the possibility that, for instance, landless agricultural labourers (or industrialists) may have a lot in common even if they belong to different religions and regions.

Communalism is an especially important issue in India because it has been a recurrent source of tension and violence. During communal riots, people become faceless members of their respective communities. They are willing to kill, rape, and loot members of other communities in order to redeem their pride, to protect their home turf. A commonly cited justification is to avenge the deaths or dishonour suffered by their co-religionists elsewhere or even in the distant past. No region has been wholly exempt from communal violence of one kind or another. Every religious community has faced this violence in greater or lesser degree, although the proportionate impact is far more traumatic for minority communities. To the extent that governments can be held responsible for communal riots, no government or ruling party can claim to be blameless in this regard. In fact, the two most traumatic contemporary instances of communal violence occurred under each of the major political parties. The anti-Sikh riots of Delhi in 1984 took place under a Congress regime. The unprecedented scale and spread of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 took place under a BJP government.

India has had a history of communal riots from pre-Independence times, often as a result of the divide-and-rule policy adopted by the colonial rulers. But colonialism did not invent inter-community conflicts – there is also a long history of pre-colonial conflicts – and it certainly cannot be blamed for post-Independence riots and killings. Indeed, if we wish to look for instances of

Box 6.9

Kabir Das – A Lasting Symbol of Syncretic Traditions

The poems of Kabir, synthesising Hindu and Muslim devotion are cherished symbols of pluralism:

Moko Kahan Dhundhe re Bande	Where do you search for me?
Mein To Tere Paas Mein	I am with you
Na Teerath Mein, Na Moorat Mein	Not in pilgrimage, nor in icons
Na Ekant Niwas Mein	Neither in solitude
Na Mandir Mein, Na Masjid Mein	Not in temples, nor in mosques
Na Kabe Kailas Mein	Neither in *Kaaba* nor in *Kailash*
Mein To Tere Paas Mein Bande	I am with you o man
Mein To Tere Paas Mein…	I am with you …

religious, cultural, regional or ethnic conflict they can be found in almost every phase of our history. But we should not forget that we also have a long tradition of religious pluralism, ranging from peaceful co-existence to actual inter-mixing or syncretism. This syncretic heritage is clearly evident in the devotional songs and poetry of the Bhakti and Sufi movements (Box 6.9). In short, history provides us with both good and bad examples; what we wish to learn from it is up to us.

Activity 6.6

Talk to your parents and the elders in your family and collect from them poems, songs, short stories which highlight issues such as religious pluralism, syncretism or communal harmony. When you have collected all this material and presented them in class, you may be pleasantly surprised to learn how broad based our traditions of religious pluralism are, and how widely they are shared across different linguistic groups, regions and religions.

Secularism

As we have seen above, the meanings of the terms communal and communalism are more or less clear, despite the bitter controversies between supporters and opponents. By contrast, the terms 'secular' and 'secularism' are very hard to define clearly, although they are also equally controversial. In fact, **secularism** is among the most complex terms in social and political theory. In the western context the main sense of these terms has to do with the separation of church and state. The separation of religious and political authority marked a major turning point in the social history of the west. This separation was related to the process of "secularisation", or the progressive retreat of religion from public life, as it was converted from a mandatory obligation to a voluntary personal practice. Secularisation in turn was related to the arrival of modernity and the rise of science and rationality as alternatives to religious ways of understanding the world.

The Indian meanings of secular and secularism include the western sense but also involve others. The most common use of secular in everyday language is as the opposite of communal. So, a secular person or state is one that does not favour any particular religion over others. Secularism in this sense is the opposite of religious chauvinism and it need not necessarily imply hostility to religion as such. In terms of the state-religion relationship, this sense of

secularism implies equal respect for all religions, rather than separation or distancing. For example, the secular Indian state declares public holidays to mark the festivals of all religions.

One kind of difficulty is created by the tension between the western sense of the state maintaining a distance from all religions and the Indian sense of the state giving equal respect to all religions. Supporters of each sense are upset by whatever the state does to uphold the other sense. Should a secular state provide subsidies for the Haj pilgrimage, or manage the Tirupati-Tirumala temple complex, or support pilgrimages to Himalayan holy places? Should all religious holidays be abolished, leaving only Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi Jayanti and Ambedkar Jayanti for example? Should a secular state ban cow slaughter because cows are holy for a particular religion? If it does so, should it also ban pig slaughter because another religion prohibits the eating of pork? If Sikh soldiers in the army are allowed to have long hair and wear turbans, should Hindu soldiers also be allowed to shave their heads or Muslim soldiers allowed to have long beards? Questions of this sort lead to passionate disagreements that are hard to settle.

Another set of complications is created by the tension between the Indian state's simultaneous commitment to secularism as well as the protection of minorities. The protection of minorities requires that they be given special consideration in a context where the normal working of the political system places them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the majority community. But providing such protection immediately invites the accusation of favouritism or 'appeasement' of minorities. Opponents argue that secularism of this sort is only an excuse to favour the minorities in return for their votes or other kinds of support. Supporters argue that without such special protection, secularism can turn into an excuse for imposing the majority community's values and norms on the minorities.

These kinds of controversies become harder to solve when political parties and social movements develop a vested interest in keeping them alive. In recent times, communalists of all religions have contributed to the deadlock. The resurgence and newly acquired political power of the Hindu communalists has added a further dimension of complexity. Clearly a lot needs to be done to improve our understanding of secularism as a principle and our practice of it as a policy. But despite everything, it is still true that India's Constitution and legal structure has proved to be reasonably effective in handling the problems created by various kinds of communalism.

The first generation of leaders of independent India (who happened to be overwhelmingly Hindu and upper caste) chose to have a liberal, secular state governed by a democratic constitution. Accordingly, the 'state' was conceived in culturally neutral terms, and the 'nation' was also conceived as an inclusive territorial-political community of all citizens. Nation building was viewed mainly as a state-driven process of economic development and social transformation.

The expectation was that the universalisation of citizenship rights and the induction of cultural pluralities into the democratic process of open and competitive politics would evolve new, civic equations among ethnic communities, and between them and the state (Sheth:1999). These expectations may not have materialised in the manner expected. But ever since Independence, the people of India, through their direct political participation and election verdicts have repeatedly asserted their support for a secular Constitution and state. Their voices should count.

6.4 State and Civil Society

You may have noticed that much of this chapter has been concerned with the state. The **state** is indeed a very crucial institution when it comes to the management of cultural diversity in a nation. Although it claims to represent the nation, the state can also become somewhat independent of the nation and its people. To the extent that the state structure – the legislature, bureaucracy, judiciary, armed forces, police and other arms of the state – becomes insulated from the people, it also has the potential of turning authoritarian. An authoritarian state is the opposite of a democratic state. It is a state in which the people have no voice and those in power are not accountable to anyone. Authoritarian states often limit or abolish civil liberties like freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of political activity, right to protection from wrongful use of authority, right to the due processes of the law, and so on. Apart from **authoritarianism**, there is also the possibility that state institutions become unable or unwilling to respond to the needs of the people because of corruption, inefficiency, or lack of resources. In short, there are many reasons why a state may not be all that it should be. Non-state actors and institutions become important in this context, for they can keep a watch on the state, protest against its injustices or supplement its efforts.

Civil society is the name given to the broad arena which lies beyond the private domain of the family, but outside the domain of both state and market. Civil society is the non-state and non-market part of the public domain in which individuals get together voluntarily to create institutions and organisations. It is the sphere of active citizenship: here, individuals take up social issues, try to influence the state or make demands on it, pursue their collective interests or seek support for a variety of causes. It consists of voluntary associations, organisations or institutions formed by groups of citizens. It includes political parties, media institutions, trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious organisations, and other kinds of collective entities. The main criteria for inclusion in civil society are that the organisation should not be state-controlled, and it should not be a purely commercial profit-making entity. Thus, Doordarshan is not part of civil society though private television channels are; a car manufacturing company is not part of civil society but the trade unions to which its workers belong are. Of course these criteria allow for a lot of grey areas. For

example, a newspaper may be run like a purely commercial enterprise, or an NGO may be supported by government funds.

The Indian people had a brief experience of authoritarian rule during the 'Emergency' enforced between June 1975 and January 1977. Parliament was suspended and new laws were made directly by the government. Civil liberties were revoked and a large number of politically active people were arrested and jailed without trial. Censorship was imposed on the media and government officials could be dismissed without normal procedures. The government coerced lower level officials to implement its programmes and produce instant results. The most notorious was the forced sterilisation campaign in which large numbers died due to surgical complications. When elections were held unexpectedly in early 1977, the people voted overwhelmingly against the ruling Congress Party.

The Emergency shocked people into active participation and helped energise the many civil society initiatives that emerged in the 1970s. This period saw the resurgence of a wide variety of social movements including the women's, environmental, human rights and dalit movements. Today the activities of civil society organisations have an even wider range, including advocacy and lobbying activity with national and international agencies as well as active participation

Box 6.10

Forcing the State to Respond to the People: The Right to Information Act

The Right to Information Act 2005 (Act No. 22/ 2005) is a law enacted by the Parliament of India giving Indians (except those in the State of Jammu and Kashmir who have their own special law) access to Government records. Under the terms of the Act, any person may request information from a "public authority" (a body of Government or instrumentality of State) which is expected to reply expeditiously or within thirty days. The Act also requires every public authority to computerise their records for wide dissemination and to proactively publish certain categories of information so that the citizens need minimum recourse to request for information formally.

This law was passed by Parliament on 15 June 2005 and came into force on 13 October 2005. Information disclosure in India was hitherto restricted by the Official Secrets Act 1923 and various other special laws, which the new RTI Act now overrides.

The Act specifies that citizens have a right to:

- request any information (as defined)
- take copies of documents
- inspect documents, works and records
- take certified samples of materials of work.
- obtain information in form of printouts, diskettes, floppies, tapes, video cassettes or in any other electronic mode or through printouts.

in various movements. The issues taken up are diverse, ranging from tribal struggles for land rights, devolution in urban governance, campaigns against rape and violence against women, rehabilitation of those displaced by dams and other developmental projects, fishermen's struggles against mechanised fishing, rehabilitation of hawkers and pavement dwellers, campaigns against slum demolitions and for housing rights, primary education reform, distribution of land to dalits, and so on. Civil liberties organisations have been particularly important in keeping a watch on the state and forcing it to obey the law. The media, too, has taken an increasingly active role, specially its emergent visual and electronic segments.

Among the most significant recent initiatives is the campaign for the Right to Information. Beginning with an agitation in rural Rajasthan for the release of information on government funds spent on village development, this effort grew into a nation-wide campaign. Despite the resistance of the bureaucracy, the government was forced to respond to the campaign and pass a new law formally acknowledging the citizens' right to information (Box 6.10). Examples of this sort illustrate the crucial importance of civil society in ensuring that the state is accountable to the nation and its people.

Activity 6.9

Find out about the civil society organisations or NGOs that are active in your neighbourhood. What sorts of issues do they take up? What sort of people work in them? How and to what extent are these organisations different from

a) government organisations;

b) commercial organisations?

Questions

1. What is meant by cultural diversity? Why is India considered to be a very diverse country?
2. What is community identity and how is it formed?
3. Why is it difficult to define the nation? How are nation and state related in modern society?
4. Why are states often suspicious of cultural diversity?
5. What is regionalism? What factors is it usually based on?
6. In your opinion, has the linguistic reorganisation of states helped or harmed India?
7. What is a 'minority'? Why do minorities need protection from the state?
8. What is communalism?
9. What are the different senses in which 'secularism' has been understood in India?
10. What is the relevance of civil society organisations today?

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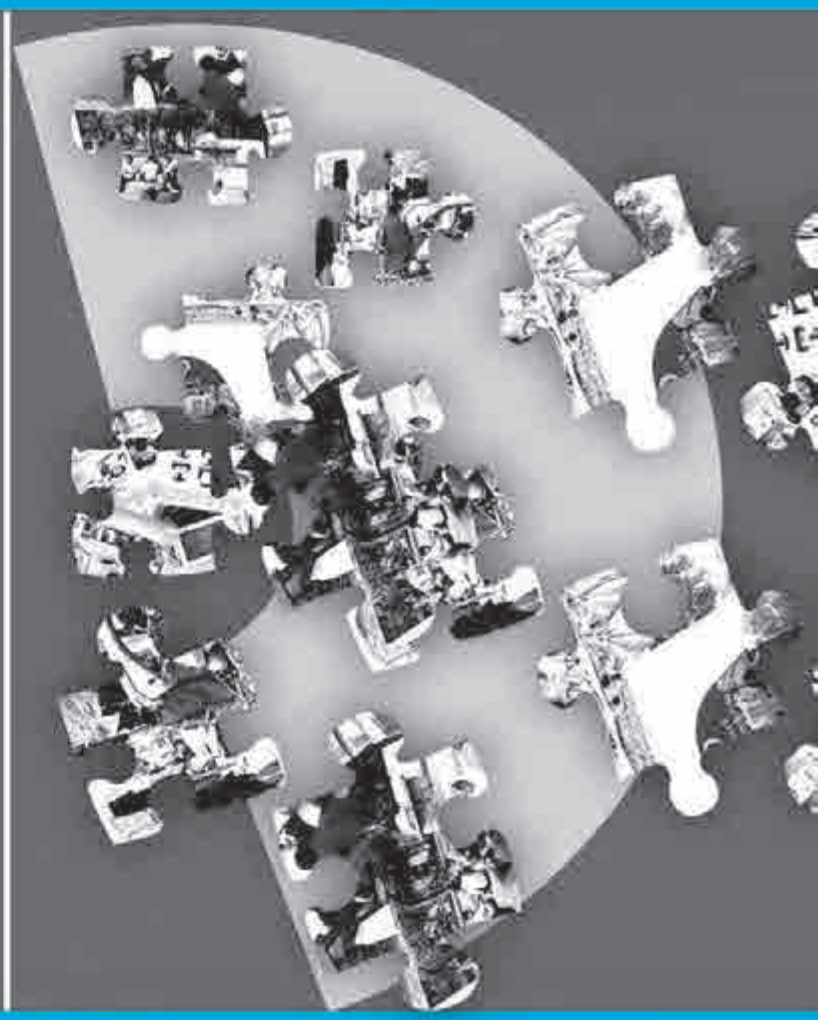
Notes

Chapter 7



Suggestions for Project Work

2018-19

This chapter suggests some small practical research projects that you can try out. There is a big difference between reading about research and actually doing it. Practical experience of trying to answer a question and collecting evidence systematically is a very valuable experience. This experience will hopefully introduce you to the excitement and also some of the difficulties of sociological research. Before you read this chapter, please refer once again to Chapter 5 ("Doing Sociology: Research Methods") in the Class XI textbook, *Introducing Sociology*.

The projects suggested here have tried to anticipate the potential problems of organising this kind of activity for large number of students in different kinds of schools located in different kinds of contexts. These are intended just to give you a feel for research. A "real" research project would obviously be more elaborate and involve much more time and effort than is possible in your setting. These are meant as suggestions; feel free to think up ideas of your own in consultation with your teachers.

Every research question needs an appropriate or suitable research method. A given question may be answered with more than one method, but a given research method is not necessarily appropriate for all questions. In other words, for most research questions one has a choice of possible methods but this choice is usually limited. One of the first tasks of the researcher – after carefully specifying the research question – is to select a suitable method. This selection must be done not only according to technical criteria (i.e., the degree of compatibility between question and method), but also practical considerations. These latter might include the amount of time available to do the research; the resources available in terms of both people and materials; the circumstances or situations in which it has to be done, and so on.

For example, let us suppose you are interested in comparing co-educational schools with 'boys only' or 'girls only' schools. This, of course, is a broad topic. You must first formulate a specific question that you want to answer. Examples could be: Do students in co-educational schools do better in studies than students in boys/girls only schools? Are boys only schools always better than co-educational schools in sports? Are children in single sex schools happier than children in co-educational schools, or some other such question. Having decided on a specific question, the next step is to choose the appropriate method.

For the last question, 'Are school children in single sex schools happier?', for example, you could choose to interview students of different kinds of schools. In the interview you could ask them directly how they felt about their school. You could then analyse the answers you collect to see if there is any difference between those who attend different kinds of schools. As an alternative, you could try to use a different method – say that of direct observation – to answer the research question. This means that you would have to spend time in co-educational and boys/girls schools, observing how students behave. You would have to decide on some criteria by which you could say if students are

more or less happy with their school. So, after observing different kinds of schools for sufficient time, you could hope to answer your question. A third method you could use is the survey method. This would involve preparing a questionnaire designed to get information on how students felt about their schools. You would then distribute the questionnaire to an equal number of students in each kind of school. You would then collect the filled-in questionnaires and analyse the results.

Here are some examples of some practical difficulties that you might face when doing research of this kind. Suppose you decide to do a survey. You must first make enough copies of the questionnaire. This involves time, effort and money. Next, you may need permission from teachers to distribute the questionnaire to students in their classrooms. You may not get permission the first time, or you may be asked to come back later..... After you have distributed the questionnaire you may find that many people have not bothered to return it to you or have not answered all questions, or other such problems. You then have to decide how to deal with this – go back to your respondents and ask them to complete the questionnaires; or ignore the incomplete questionnaires and consider only the complete ones; consider only the completed answers, and so on. You must be prepared to deal with such problems during research work.

7.1 Variety of Methods

You may remember the discussion of research methods in Chapter 5 of the Class XI textbook, *Introducing Sociology*. This may be a good time to revisit this chapter and refresh your memory.

Survey Method

A survey usually involves asking a relatively large number of people (such as 30, 100, 2000, and so on; what is considered 'large' depends on the context and the kind of topic) the same fixed set of questions. The questions may be asked by an investigator in person where they are read out to the respondent, and his/her answers are noted down by the investigator. Or the questionnaire may be handed over to the respondents who then fill it up themselves and give it back. The main advantage of the survey is that it can cover a lot of people, so that the results are truly representative of the relevant group or population. The disadvantage is that the questions to be asked are already fixed. No on-the-spot adjustments are possible. So, if a question is misunderstood by the respondents, then wrong or misleading results can be produced. If a respondent says something interesting then this cannot be followed up with further questions on the subject because you have to stick to the questionnaire format. Moreover, questionnaires are like a snapshot taken at one particular moment. The situation may change later or may have been different before, but the survey wouldn't capture this.

Interviews

An interview is different from a survey in that it is always conducted in person and usually involves much fewer persons (as few as 5, 20, or 40, usually not much more than that). Interviews may be *structured*, that is, follow a pre-determined pattern of questions or *unstructured*, where only a set of topics is pre-decided, and the actual questions emerge as part of a conversation. Interviews may be more or less *intensive*, in the sense that one may interview a person for a long time (2-3 hours) or in repeated visits to get a really detailed version of their story.

Interviews have the advantage of being flexible in that promising topics may be pursued in greater detail, questions may be refined or modified along the way, and clarifications may be sought. The disadvantage of the interview method is that it cannot cover a large number of people and is limited to presenting the views of a select group of individuals.

Observation

Observation is a method where the researcher must systematically watch and record what is happening in whatever context or situation that has been chosen for the research. This sounds simple but may not always be easy to do in practice. Careful attention has to be paid to what is happening without pre-judging what is relevant to the study and what is not. Sometimes, what is *not* happening is as important or interesting as what does actually happen. For example, if your research question is about how different classes of people use specific open spaces, then it is significant that a given class or group of people (say poor people, or middle class people for example) never enter the space, or are never seen in it.

Combinations of More Than One Method

You can also try to combine methods to approach the same research question from different angles. In fact, this is often highly recommended. For example, if you are researching the changing place of mass media sources like newspapers and television in social life, you could combine a survey with archival methods. The survey will tell you about what is happening today, while the archival methods might tell you about what magazines, newspapers or television programmes were like in the past.

7.2 Possible Themes and Subjects for Small Research Projects

Here are some suggestions about possible research topics; you can always choose other topics in consultation with your teachers. Remember that these

are only topics – you need to select specific *questions* based on these topics. Remember also that most methods can be used with most of these topics, but that the specific question chosen must be suitable for the method chosen. You can also use combinations of methods. The topics are in no particular order. Topics that are not obviously or directly derived from your textbooks have been emphasised because it will be easier for you and your teachers to think of your own project related to the texts.

1. Public Transport

What part does it play in people's lives? Who needs it? Why do they need it? To what degree are different types of people dependent on public transport? What sorts of problems and issues are associated with public transport? How have forms of public transport been changing over time? Does differential access to public transport cause social problems? Are there groups who do not need public transport? What is their attitude towards it? You could also take up the case of a particular form of transport – say the tonga, or the rickshaw, or the train – and write about its history in relation to your town or city. What are the changes this mode of transport has gone through? Who have been its main rivals? Is the competition with rivals being lost or won? For what reasons? What is the likely future of this mode of transport? Will anyone miss it?

If you live in Delhi, try to find out more about the Delhi Metro. Could you write a science-fiction like account of what the Metro would be like fifty years from now, in, say 2050 or 2060? (Remember, it is not easy to write good science fiction! You must give reasons for the things you imagine; these future things must be related in some coherent fashion to things/relations/situations that exist in the present. So you would have to imagine how public transport will evolve given present conditions, and what the role of the Metro would be in future compared to what it is now.)

2. Role of Communication Media in Social Life

Communication media could include the mass media, like newspapers, television, films, internet and so on – i.e., media which convey information and are seen/accessed by large numbers of people. It could also include the media that people use for communicating with each other, such as the telephone, letters, mobile phones, email and internet. In these areas, you could try to investigate, for example, the changing place of mass media in social life and the shifts within major formats like print, radio, television, and so on. At a different level, you could try to ask a different sort of question about the likes and dislikes of particular groups (classes, age groups, genders) regarding films, books etc. How do people perceive the new communication media (like mobile phones, or internet) and their impact? What can we learn through observation and inquiry about their place in people's lives? Observation allows you to capture the divergence (if any) between stated views and actual behaviour. (How many hours do people really watch television, as different from how many hours they feel they watch, or feel is appropriate to watch etc..) What are some of the consequences of shift in format? (For example, has TV really reduced the importance of radio and newspapers, or does each format still have its own special niche?) What are the reasons why people prefer one or the other format?

Alternatively, you could think of doing any number of projects based on a content analysis of the media (newspapers, magazines, television etc.) and how they have treated particular themes or subjects, such as, for example, schools and school education, the environment, caste, religious conflicts, sports events, local versus national or regional news, etc.

3. Household Appliances and Domestic Work

This refers to all the devices used to do work in the household, such as gas, kerosene or other type of stoves; mixies, grinders and food processors of various kinds; the electric or other kind of iron for ironing clothes; washing machines; ovens; toaster; pressure cooker, and so on. How has work within the household changed over time? Has the coming of these devices changed the nature of work and specially the intra-household division of labour? Who are the people who use these devices? Are they mostly men or women, young or old, paid or unpaid workers? How do the users feel about them? Have they really made work easier? Have there been any changes in the age-related jobs done within the household? (i.e., do younger/older people do different kinds of jobs now as compared to earlier?)

Alternatively, you could simply concentrate on how the domestic tasks are distributed within the household – who does what, and whether there have been changes lately.

4. The Use of Public Space

This research topic is about the different uses to which public space (such as an open field, the roadside or footpath, empty plots in housing colonies, space outside public offices, and the like) is put. For example, some spaces support a lot of small scale commercial activity like roadside vendors, small temporary shops and parking lots etc. Other spaces seem empty but get used in different ways – to hold marriage or religious functions, for public meetings, as a dumping ground for various kinds of things... Many spaces are occupied by poor homeless people and become in effect their homes. Try to think of research questions in this general area: What do people from different classes (e.g., the poor, middle classes, affluent people etc.) feel about the use of public space? What kind of a resource do they represent for these groups? How has the use of a particular open space in your neighbourhood been changing over time? Has it generated any conflicts or frictions? What are the reasons for this conflict?

5. Changing Aspirations of Different Age Groups

Did you always have the same ambitions throughout your life? Most people change their goals, specially at young ages. This research topic tries to discover what these changes are and whether there are any patterns to the changes across different groups. You could try choosing research groups such as different age groups (eg., classes 5, 8 and 11) in different kinds of schools; different genders; different parental backgrounds etc. and see if any patterns emerge. You could also include adults in your research design and see what they remember about these sorts of changes, and whether there is any pattern to changes after school as compared to changes within the school-going age.

6. The 'Biography' of a Commodity

Think of a particular consumption item in your own home, such as a television set, a motor cycle, a carpet or a piece of furniture. Try to imagine what the life-history of that commodity would be. Write about it as though you were that commodity and were writing an 'auto-biography'. What are the circuits of exchange through which it has moved to get to where it is now? Can you trace the social relations through which the item was produced, traded, and purchased? What is its symbolic significance, for its owners – i.e. for you, your family, for the community?

If it could think and talk, what would your television set (or sofa set, or motorcyle...) have to say about the people it meets or sees (like your family or other families or households that you can imagine)?

RESEARCH TOPIC / AREA	TYPE OF RESEARCH METHOD / TECHNIQUE	
	OBSERVATION	SURVEY
Modes of Public Transport; Local Railway or Bus Station	Modes of behaviour, expected etiquette, space sharing	Opinions on changes over time; experiences, difficulties etc.
Domestic Appliances (Use of cooking fuel/ mode; fan, cooler, ac; iron; fridge; mixie…)	Patterns of use; domestic division of labour; gender aspects	Attitudes/memories relating to different type of appliances
Use of Public Spaces (roadside, empty land, etc)	Observe how comparable open spaces are used in different localities	Opinions of a cross-section of people on different uses of specific public spaces
. Changing Aspirations of School Children at different ages (e.g. Classes 5, 8, 11)	Not suitable	Boys and Girls Adults of different generations (from memory)
Place of the means of communication in social life (from mobile phones to satellite TV)	Watch how people use mobile phones in public – what place do these devices have in their lives?	How much TV do different kind of people watch, and what are their preferred programmes?

TYPE OF RESEARCH METHOD / TECHNIQUE		
ARCHIVAL	**INTERVIEWS**	**COMMENTS / SUGGESTIONS**
Newspaper and other sources for history of change	Views of regular vs. occasional users; men vs. women etc.	Suitable only for biggish cities?
Advertisement patterns for different kinds of appliances	How do different type of people respond to specific appliances?	Boys to be encouraged to do this; should not become a 'girl's topic'
What were the different uses to which a particular space was put over the years?	Do people of different social classes, groups have different views on use of space?	Best to take familiar, specific places that people know about and relate to
Depends on availability of material from the past (such as school essays on this subject)	Talk to one group about their own evolution; or talk to different age groups	Interviewees should not be from own school
Analysis of . media coverage and content on any current issue of interest	What do people feel about the decline of letter writing after the coming of phones?	Try not to pre-judge the the issue (e.g. it is so sad that letter writing has declined) – ask, don't tell.

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