
UNIT 21 CASTE - CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Structure

21.0 Objectives

21.1 Introduction

21.2 Caste and Continuity

21.2.1 Caste and Social Mobility

21.2.2 Caste and the Ritual Sphere

21.2.3 Caste and the Economic Sphere

21.2.4 Caste and Politics

21.3 Caste and Change

21.3.1 From a Closed System to an Open System

21.3.2 Caste in Modern Polity

21.3.3 Caste Associations

21.3.4 Can Castes Exist in the India of Tomorrow?

21.4 Let Us Sum Up

21.5 Key Words

21.6 Further Reading

21.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

21.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will be able to

- describe the social spheres in which caste continues to exist, such as, the ritual, economic and political sphere of life
- state the changes that have occurred in the functions of caste system
- explain the new functions of caste in the socio-political system
- describe the nature of caste associations.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

With the help of your study of earlier units in Blocks 1, 2, 3 and 4, and particularly unit 20 of this Block in ESO-12, you are in a position to define caste system, identify its structure and functions. You are familiar with the predominant features of caste system and its regional pattern. So far we have attempted to understand caste with reference to its nature and attributes and how it governs human behaviour in a multitude of situations. In this unit, we shall look into the dynamics of the caste system. We shall seek reasons as to how and why the system has continued to exist and what are the changes that have occurred and are occurring in the system.

In this unit, section 21.2 describes the continuity aspect of caste system in India and section 21.3 describes the aspect of change in caste system in India. Section 21.4 provides the summary of the unit.

21.2 CASTE AND CONTINUITY

Caste, as you already know, is by definition a closed social system whose membership is acquired by virtue of birth. Rules of endogamy and restrictions on social intercourse between castes help to maintain the insularity of such groups. From a purely *Brahmanic* or Sanskrit view, it appears as if this system is rigid and closed. However, when we examine historical data ranging back to the Vedic period we find that in reality there existed a lot of flexibility. Social mobility with the gain of economic and political power was always present. Historian, K.M. Pannikar (1955) believes that in Indian history, the Nandas were the last true Kshatriyas (around 5th Century B.C.), and since then all the so called Kshatriyas have come into being by usurpation of power by the lower castes who acquired the Kshatriya role and social position.

Caste system is, therefore, a dynamic reality with a great degree of flexibility in terms of internal structure and functions. To examine the continuity of caste system and its reasons, we need to keep in mind this high degree of flexibility of the system. Social mobility has been an important feature of caste system. We will proceed to understand the flexibility aspect in section 21.2.1. Then we will discuss caste and the ritual sphere in section 21.2.2; caste and economic sphere in section 21.2.3; and finally caste and politics in section 21.2.4.

21.2.1 Caste and Social Mobility

Before discussing the caste and social mobility, let us understand what is meant by social mobility. Social mobility refers to the process by which individuals or groups move from one social status to another in the social hierarchy. Social mobility can be either upward or downward. Upward social mobility is one where the individual or group moves from a lower status in the hierarchy to the upper. Downward mobility is when a person or group moves from a higher status to a lower one in the hierarchy (for more details see the unit 22 of this Block in ESO-12). Caste has been considered to be a closed system of stratification. However, in reality no system can be absolutely closed. In fact, social mobility has always been present within the caste system.

When we talk about caste and social mobility we are essentially dealing with the processes of social change in Indian society. Sociologists observe that in spite of the closed nature of caste system, there have been changes in caste hierarchy and its norms from time to time. For example, the culturally accepted practices during the Vedic period of Hinduism became a taboo in the periods that followed. Some of these practices were that Vedic Hinduism was magico-animistic, Vedic Brahmans drank soma (liquor), offered animal sacrifice and ate beef. These practices were prohibited later but they continued amongst the lower castes (Singh 1973: 6).

Caste mobility as a process of social and cultural change has been explained by Srinivas in his concept of Sanskritisation. The widespread social and cultural process called Sanskritisation is a process where a low Hindu caste changes

its customs, rites, rituals ideology and way of life in the direction of high and frequently twice-born castes. This has paved the way for mobility to occur within the caste system. With the advent of the British, the opening up of frontiers by means of roads, and railways and economic opportunities cutting across caste barriers increased the process of caste mobility.

Besides Sanskritisation, another major agent of social change was Westernisation. Westernisation includes the influences, which swept over India during the British rule bringing in the ideologies of secularism, egalitarianism and democracy. The new opportunities in education, economy and polity were in theory caste free and open to all. No one could be denied access to them by reason of birth in a particular caste, sect or religion. However, no social change can bring about total change of a society. Therefore, we find that the traditional social organisation exemplified by the caste system has undergone several changes yet continues to exist in Indian society performing some old and some new functions. Now let us examine caste and the ritual sphere.

21.2.2 Caste and the Ritual Sphere

The notions of hierarchical gradation of caste groups drawing legitimacy from religion and the concept of purity and pollution have changed with the passing of time. The structural distance between various castes, as you are already aware of, has been defined in terms of purity and pollution. Corresponding to the caste hierarchy are hierarchies in food, traditional caste occupation, and styles of life. Endogamy and social restraints regarding commensality and free interaction between different castes in the local caste hierarchy were clearly defined and ritualised. As Mckim Marriot (1955) noted in his study of the Kishan Garhi village in U.P., the exchange of food and drink between different castes was patterned within the framework of the *jajmani* system. The pattern related to who will eat with whom, who will give *kaccha* food (i.e. food cooked in water) to whom, and who will receive it, who will give only *pacca* food to whom, and so on. Thus, interaction between castes was highly ritualised prior to the impact of Westernisation.

During the last few decades, as a result of the forces of modernisation, the ideology of caste has become less pervasive in an individual's day to day life. Caste rituals have become increasingly a personal affair, rather than public due to changed circumstances of living, forces of industrialisation, and urbanisation. Place of residence and food habits are influenced more by an individual's workplace and occupation than by his or her caste or religion. In a city a person generally does not ask the caste of a cook who serves in a restaurant. A person who might be a Brahman by caste may work in a shoe factory, and so on. Figure 21.1 shows how the people in a city may respond when they find an upper caste man doing a job which is traditionally considered as done by low caste people.

Harold Gould in his study of the *rickshawallahs* of Lucknow (1974) observed that the rickshawpullers whom he studied belonged to different castes. While working they interacted with each other without observing any caste restrictions. However, when these rickshawpullers went back to their homes in the evening they observed all the ritual practices of their caste. Their kins belonged to their own caste and they married within their own caste. This example illustrates the point that in workplace the caste norms are set aside but

in personal family life the caste norms exerts itself. In this sense, out of the two main features of caste system identified by Max Weber (1948), namely, commensality and **connubium**, the commensality aspect has disappeared but the connubium, i.e. caste and kinship and marriage link, yet survives in spite of all other changes (for a better understanding of the term connubium see section 21.5, Key Words). The ritual aspect of caste is confined to the personal sphere. Now, let us see the nature of caste in the economic sphere.

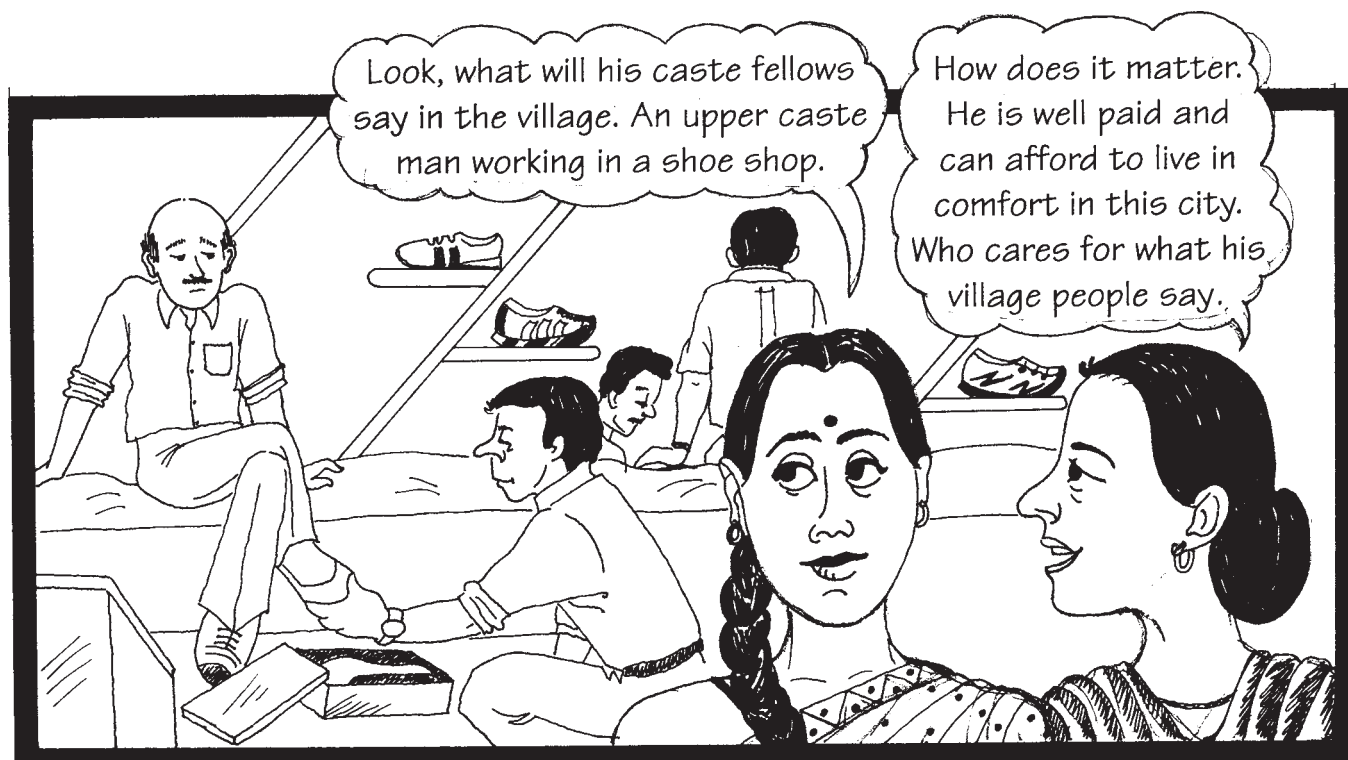


Fig. 21.1: Changes in the traditional caste occupation

Activity 1

Take the latest issue of the Sunday newspaper, which carries advertisements for brides or bridegrooms. Take the first 100 cases and categorise these into (i) those which ask for spouse of a specific caste, (ii) those which say "caste no bar"; and (iii) those which do not mention caste.

From the statistics i.e. the number of cases in each category you have got, state whether the significance of caste in marriage relations has remained important or declined. Compare your answer, if possible, with the answers of other students at your Study Centre.

21.2.3 Caste and the Economic Sphere

In this section we will discuss the continuity in the nature and function of caste in terms of its economic and occupational sphere of influence. The ideology of caste prescribed specific occupations for specific caste groups, which had a specific place in the social hierarchy. The vocations of the upper castes were considered to be the most prestigious while the occupations of the lower castes, especially the untouchables were considered to be polluting and defiling.

The advent of the British saw new economic opportunities flowing out, and reaching the masses. The opening up of plantations, development of towns and cities laid the basis for economic development, which intruded into the functioning of the caste system. The growth of money economy enabled economic relations to be governed by market conditions as opposed to inherited status. Certain caste groups flourishing in the wake of new business opportunities invested their profits in land. Because of land reforms like, Permanent Settlement, introduced during the British rule, land came into the market and thus ceased to be tied to caste.

The stability of caste monopolies over land, which was enforced by family inheritance, came under attack. Ownership of land provided principles governing wealth and a yardstick by which the local prestige system was measured. The low castes were thus able to surmount the obstacles posed by tradition and began to participate in the economic process.

The breakdown of the traditional economic system and the emergence of lower caste groups in economic rivalry rather than cooperation undermined the Brahman dominance found in Tanjore, Tamil Nadu. This has been attributed to the changing village structure from a closed stationary system to that of a relatively open system. The closed system was characteristic of **feudal economy** resulting in cooperation between ranked castes in ways ordained by religious ideas. An open system is one, which is governed by secular law under the influence of **market economy**.

The *Jajmani* system, which was a hereditary patron-client relationship, with the worker traditionally tied to his master, lost most of its insularity. Market economy, daily wages, and hired labour eroded steadily into the functioning of the traditional *jajmani* system.

Let us look at the changes that have occurred in the traditional, subsistence village economy which due to the impact of mercantilism becomes part of the larger national economy with an example from a village study conducted by F.G. Bailey (1955) of an Oriya village called Bisipara. The village Bisipara in Orissa witnessed changes due to the coming of land into the market as a result of certain economic forces set in motion by the British rule. The progressive extension of the economic frontier by which we mean the increasing contact of the villages with the cities due to the introduction of better means of transport and mass media, the impact of outside influences that have reached the villages as a result of market economy, brought migrant labour and factories to bear upon the village economy and sources of income were not confined to land and agriculture alone. A person participated as an individual in commercial economy. The village witnessed a breakdown of the traditional, economic organisation in which there was division of labour and division of wealth according to caste.

Bailey noted that the changed political atmosphere under the British disturbed the traditional caste hierarchy and the power structure of the village. He wrote, “the ultimate seat of political power moved outside the village. At the same time, redistribution of wealth upset the political structure inside the village. Division of wealth no longer followed the same lines as caste division” (Bailey 1955: 146). However, Bailey also maintains that although there was an internal reshuffle of positions, the caste system continued to order political relations

between the groups concerned and to reflect their economic status. Thus, in this sense, in spite of the tremendous changes that caste had undergone, it continued to exist.

Another important way in which we can see the continuity of caste is that when the new forces of socio-economic, political and educational changes came, it was the already powerful, wealthy upper castes, such as the Brahmans, Rajputs and the Vaishyas who benefited initially from these changes. The Brahman sections responded first to English education and therefore, benefited from political and administrative power (Kothari 1970: 9). The same pattern is visible in the commercial sector too. The great business houses like Birlas, Dalmias, etc., belonged to the traditional commercial castes. In banking the castes like the Chettiars of South established themselves in the modern systems of banking and commerce which was an extension of their traditional occupation.

21.2.4 Caste and Politics

A system of **social stratification** such as the caste rests upon the unequal distribution of power between status groups having definite positions in the prestige hierarchy. In any social strata the upper echelons face the problem of how to maintain their positions which they and their ancestors at one time achieved against the more socially disabled segments of the population. To maintain their position of superiority the higher strata must be able to control the mechanism of coercion. How was this possible?

The political system of the pre-British India was characterised by clear territorial changes marking off the territory of one chieftain or *Raja* from the territories of the other. These boundaries constituted effective barriers between people living under different chieftains. At the village level caste panchayats and caste councils functioned as the local governing bodies and provided a self-sufficient image to the Indian village. Such a political system imposed severe limits on extension of caste ties. Here the cultural and political boundaries overlapped with each other.

The British rule set the castes free from the territorial limitations inherent in the pre-British political system. It is widely held that civil and penal codes introduced by the British over the sub-continent of India in 1860 took away the power exercised by caste panchayats. The British had also introduced a new principle of justice wherein all men were equal before law and that the nature of wrong is not affected by the caste of the person who is committing it and by the caste of the person against whom it is committed.

Many sociologists undertook political analysis in terms of caste and traced the political development of caste through time, and the alliances of certain castes against certain others to gain political power. According to them, the advent of democracy and decentralised politics in the form of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system saw politics carried down to the grassroots level. Caste became a prominent variable in electoral politics. The demands of organised party system in politics have brought about a coalition of castes. Sub-castes and sub-divisions in sub-castes can find an active field of engagement in village politics. The introduction of democratic **decentralisation** and universal suffrage protected the interests of the backward classes (which include the scheduled castes,

scheduled tribes and other backward classes) in education, employment and political life, against the dominance of the traditionally powerful castes.

The dominant caste was a factor to reckon with in village India. Not all the dominant castes were ritually superior (for further details refer back to unit 20 of this Block of ESO-12). Dominance in a sense could be combined with land-ownership, political power, numerical strength, and so on. In some regions of Western and Northern India one encounters dominant peasant castes combining land-ownership and political power.

The coming of market economy, the decline of the traditional economic systems (a good example is that of the decline of Brahman hegemony in Tanjore), caste-free occupations and mobilisation of caste groups have all resulted in the decline of the traditional political role of castes. Yet, we find that caste retains its political significance. This is evident, for example, in the case of the **political mobilisation** of caste groups in Madhopur, U.P. In this village, the ranks of Noniyas, the salt-makers and Chamars, the leather-makers joined hands in opposing the locally dominant upper caste Thakurs. Thakurs were the Rajput landlords and the traditional dispensers of justice of erstwhile masters of the lower castes of this village. Thus, caste, which was a dividing factor, reshaped itself in the new circumstances to form a unifying factor. Not only for political gains but for material welfare and social status also, **caste alliances** came to be established.

It is very clear now that caste as a dynamic reality of Indian society has accompanied changes and in the process has continued to survive the onslaught of time. The characteristic of adaptability to forces of change has been a feature of the caste in the past and it continues to remain its main characteristic even today. This pattern of change therefore, constitutes an element of continuity of this system.

The changes introduced during the British period and post-independent India have witnessed the changing functions of caste and how it has continued to exist as a social institution unique to India. In this section we discussed how in spite of accommodating to social change through a long period of Indian history, especially during and after the British rule, caste has continued to exist.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.
 - a) Social mobility is the process by which individuals or groups move from one to another.
 - b) Mobility in the caste system resulted in the process called
 - c) According to Max Weber the two main features of caste system are commensality and
- ii) Write in about five lines on the opening of the economic frontier in Bisipara, Orissa.

.....

21.3 CASTE AND CHANGE

We have already discussed the continuity aspect of caste system in India. We discovered that in spite of the varied forces of change, caste has continued to adapt itself to the new circumstances and remain a significant part of Indian society. Here we are going to examine the changes that have come about in the caste system itself.

In the section on caste and rituals we have mentioned how some major aspects like the notions of purity and pollution, commensality, the *jajmani* system and rituals connected with it have declined. Untouchability has been legally abolished and declared a punishable crime under the Constitution of India. Thus, change has come about in caste system and its practices at the ideological level. But besides the ideological level, it is at the structural i.e. organisational level, as well as at the level of its functions, that major changes have come about. In the following sections we are going to examine some of these changes in caste system.

21.3.1 From a Closed System to an Open System

Indian society has undergone tremendous social change, as mentioned earlier, due to the impact of the British rule. Caste being part of the Indian society too has, therefore, experienced change. Society has moved from a relatively closed system to an open system. A closed system has been described as one in which elements like caste, class and power are combined together. In other words, this system is based on “cumulative inequalities” where higher caste implies higher class and consequently higher power.

An open system is one in which inequalities of caste, class and power are dispersed. In this case a person can be of lower caste but belong to upper class. This system has more avenues for social mobility open for the lower castes and classes in terms of employment, education, economic enterprise, politics, etc.

The caste system as a closed system of stratification in pre-British India does not mean that there was no social mobility possible at that time. We have already clarified that change was always an aspect of the continuity of this system. Another point is that no system can be either absolutely closed or absolutely open. So, in what way can we talk about change now? The change in the caste system today is due to the forces of modernisation set free by the British. Another force of change is our adoption of parliamentary democracy and giving ourselves a constitution which seeks to secure to all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity (Preamble of the Constitution of India). One of the major consequences of introducing parliamentary democracy was that every Indian adult above the age of 21 (and since the Elections in 1989 voting age has been reduced to 18 years) has the right to vote his or her leader

to power. Since, every individual vote counts it is imperative for a leader to get the allegiance of the people. In this sense numerical power and caste identity has become very important.

The modern political system, new market forces, development of science and technology has had several repercussions on the traditional caste structure. The association between elements of different kinds of land-ownership, political power and status based on caste is slowly giving way to status achieved through education, new occupations available due to the opening up of new economic opportunities, higher income, and so on. In his study of *Caste, Class and Power Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, Andre Beteille (1966) wrote that earlier (i.e. in pre-British period) education was a virtual monopoly of the Brahmans who dominated this area. But at the time of his study, the educational system had become far more open, both in principle and in practice. Many non-Brahman and even untouchable boys attended the schools at Sripuram (the village studied by Beteille) and the adjacent town of Thiruvaiyur. Because of this education the non-Brahmans and the Adi-Dravidas (the lowest castes) could compete on more equal terms with the Brahmans for white-collar jobs. It helped them to participate in the political affairs more equally with the Brahmans.

According to Beteille in the towns and cities white-collar jobs were relatively caste-free. Non-Brahmans from Sripuram could work as clerks or accountants in offices at Thiruvaiyur and Tanjore along with the Brahmans. Within the village land had come into the market since, due to several factors, some of the Brahmans had to sell their land. This enabled the, non-Brahmans and even a few Adi-Dravidas to buy it. Thus, as land came into the market, the productive organisation of the village tended to become free from the structure of caste (Beteille 1966: 3). Beteille had come to the conclusion that in a way changes in the distribution of power was the most radical change in the traditional social structure. He said that the traditional elites of Sripuram, comprising the Brahman landowners, had lost its grip over the village and the new leaders of the village depend for power on many factors in addition to caste. There had come into being new organisations and institutions, which provided new bases of power. These organisations and institutions were at least formally free of caste. All these changes in effect altered, if not weakened, the role of caste in the political arena (Beteille 1966: 16). Keeping in mind this perspective, let us now examine the relation or link between the institution of caste and modern politics in India at a wider level than the village.

21.3.2 Caste in Modern Polity

Unlike the European experience, political democracy in India did not emerge as a natural development of ideas, values and technologies. In fact, the notion of political democracy was adopted by the national leaders to serve the people of India in the best way possible. Thus, the values and attitudes, which went with this form of polity, had to be inculcated in its people. We see that the new political order is universal in constitution and in principle rejects the demands of caste. However, in practice it has accommodated a variety of interests, in addition to those of caste. Caste has, in fact, come to terms with the democratic political process.

Political conflicts can almost be seen as conflicts between caste groups or caste alliances. The beginning of political consciousness on caste lines is evident

in references made to caste *sabhas* or caste associations. We will discuss this aspect later. The reason for this development can be seen in the fact that politics being a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for realisation of certain goals. This is possible through identifying and manipulating the existing, as well as emerging alliances.

Politics has drawn caste into its web for organising support and in articulating the needs of the masses. The organisation of support is done through the same organisation in which the masses are found, namely the caste groups. In making politics their sphere of activity, caste and kin groups attest their identity to strive for positions of power.

Different parties and movements mobilise different social status groups as resources for their political objectives. Thus, even today we often hear of candidates being selected for political parties on the basis of caste.

The caste provided for organised party politics a ready made system of segments, which could be used to marshall support. Liberal education, government patronage, and an expanding franchise have been major factors that have penetrated the caste system. Discontent and exploitation prevailing within the caste groups provided a basis for organising caste factions and alliances. Thus modern politics found an on going vertical network of caste and made the structure of caste a political vehicle.

According to Rudolph and Rudolph (1967: 11), caste has in its transformed state, helped the Indian masses (of which nearly 70 percent live in the villages) make a success of representative democracy. It has fostered the growth of equality by making Indians less separate and more alike. Indians are becoming less separate in the sense that due to the electoral system numerical strength i.e., the number of votes, as mentioned earlier, makes a lot of difference in power. Thus, it is in the interest of large majority of castes to come together to achieve their political goals. In this process, caste associations and caste federations are formed.

Formation of caste federations refers to a grouping together of members of distinct endogamous groups into a single organisation for common objectives. One of the most active caste federation is the Kshatriya *Sabha* of Gujarat. It dates from 1946 and includes several *jati*-clusters of the region, notably the Rajputs, Bariyas and Bhils. It was not only a caste community but was also a political community. The *Sabha* had made use of new avenues of politics and promoted Rajput leaders. The federation welcomed all *jatis* who followed the Rajput model in their life style. Even the poor landless and Muslim Rajputs (Rajputs who converted to Islam) were taken into their fold.

The founder of the *sabha* believed that Kshatriyas were a 'class' and not just a caste. To prove this point many of the rich, aristocratic Rajputs would even go to the extent of having a common meal with the Bariyas and Bhils. With numerical strength they gained political importance and influence (Kothari 1970: 30-70).

The relationship that caste bears to politics can be best understood in terms of three types of political mobilisation discussed by Rudolph and Rudolph (1967) which exemplify different phases of political development in India. These three types of political mobilisation are i) vertical, ii) horizontal and iii) differential.

- i) **Vertical mobilisation:** This is a process in which political support is acquired by the traditional notables, such as the erstwhile *Rajas*, feudatory landlords, locally dominant caste elites and so on. This is possible in a society organised and integrated along caste lines having mutual dependence and where legitimacy of traditional authority still survives. Due to their traditional authority the notables are able to get the support of their dependents, socially inferior groups in the traditional manner where the local *Raja* or landlord used to protect and promote the interests of his '*praja*' i.e., the subjects and in return gained their loyalty and deference. Rudolph and Rudolph (1967: 24) maintain that vertical mobilisation remains a viable strategy for dominant classes and castes until dependents, tenants, and clients become politicised enough to be mobilised by ideological appeals to class or community interests and sentiments.
- ii) **Horizontal mobilisation:** This is a process in which popular political support is marshalled by class or community leaders and their specialised organisations. As the term horizontal indicates, the solidarity among classes and caste groups such as provided by the caste federations introduces a new pattern of cleavage by challenging the vertical solidarities and structures of traditional societies.

The major difference between this form of mobilisation and vertical mobilisation is that here the agent of mobilisation is the political party rather than the local notable. Here political parties appeal to voters directly as individuals or indirectly through the organised groups to which they belong. Direct appeals to individual voters may emphasise ideology or issues, on the one hand, or community identification through caste, on the other. This mobilisation is possible only as long as internal differentiation has not developed and caste communities are by and large homogeneous, cohesive and their interests are still diffuse and varied.

- iii) **Differential mobilisation:** This process takes place when the changes that caste has and is undergoing carries it beyond the traditional ascriptive definition. These changes include internal differentiation or fission, and integration of several caste groups in caste federations and associations i.e. fusion which express the shared interests, symbols and norms of these castes.

It also brings out the caste from its village home that it does not remain rooted to the village social structure alone.

We can explain the differential mobilisation through the example of the Rajputs of Rajasthan. The Rajputs were the rulers, feudal lords, court retainers of princely states before Independence. At that time they formed an association called the Kshatriya *Mahasabha* which initially represented all ranks within the community.

In 1954 a new caste association was formed called the *Bhooswami Sangh*. This new association brought into open the conflict between the "small" Rajputs whose modest landholdings had to be supplemented by income from service under the princes and *jagirdars*. These princes and *jagirdars*, however, had in most cases dismissed them from service with the advent of the land reforms after Independence. Thus, when the rich and powerful Rajputs refused to protect the interests of the "small" Rajputs, they formed

the *Bhooswami Sangh*. This *sangh* took up the task of protecting the interests of the “small” Rajputs. Political parties, at this time, were quick to capitalise on these class and ideological differences within the Rajput community. This example illustrates the process of differentiation that occurs within the caste community and is used by the political parties.

We have so far understood the role played by caste in modern polity. In this discussion we have also discussed the significance of caste associations and caste federations in the context of politics. Let now us understand the nature of caste associations.

21.3.3 Caste Associations

Caste associations are defined as “paracomunities which enable members of castes to pursue social mobility, political power, and economic advantage” (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 29). Caste associations resemble in many ways the voluntary associations or interest groups found in industrially advanced societies. However, caste associations or paracomunities are distinct in many respects from voluntary associations; as well as from natural associations like caste out of which they have developed.

The caste associations are more like the voluntary associations at the organisational level than the traditional caste structures. It has offices, membership, incipient bureaucratisation and legislative process that can be seen through conferences, delegates, and resolutions. But, unlike the voluntary associations, caste associations are characterised by a shared sense of culture, character and status, which gives it solidarity not found in voluntary associations.

The functions of caste associations are diverse. It serves the Indian society by both levelling the sacred and hierarchical caste order and also replacing it. It initiates and manages the efforts of the lower castes to become twice-born, to don the sacred thread which symbolises higher ritual rank and culture. This is clear from the case of the Nadars of Tamil Nadu, a low caste of toddy tappers, who through the efforts of their association, the Nadar *Mahajana Sangam* formed in 1910, acquired not only higher status but a modern organisation to serve their needs.

According to Kothari (1970: 115), some of the objectives of this association are

- i) To promote the social, material and general welfare of the Nadars
- ii) To take practical measures for the social, moral, and intellectual advancement of the Nadars
- iii) To start schools and colleges for imparting western education to Nadar children and to help poor but deserving pupils belonging to the community with scholarships, books, fees, etc.
- iv) To encourage and promote commercial and industrial enterprise among the members of the community

These and several other objectives of this caste association and caste associations in general, reveal the significant contribution that these organisations provided to their communities.

We see that the paracomunities or caste associations contribute to fundamental structural and cultural change in Indian society by providing an adaptive institution in which both the traditional as well as modern features of society can meet and fuse.

In the final analysis we see that caste is losing the functions, norms, and structures it once had and acquiring new ones to suit the new demands and condition of the people. It is today serving the ritual and occupational goals of traditional society more as well as it is helping Indian society to transform itself from an ascriptive, hierarchical and closed system to one which is achievement oriented, relatively egalitarian and open (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 103). In the next section therefore, we will answer the crucial question - can caste exist in the India of tomorrow?

Activity 2

Find out about one of the major caste associations found in your area. If possible, go and meet one of their office bearers. If not meet one of the members of this caste association or write to the caste association. Ask them to give you their written constitution and some information regarding the foundation of this association. From the written constitution, write down a short note of about two pages on the establishment, aims and objectives of this caste association. Compare, if possible, your note with those written by other students at your Study Centre.

21.3.4 Can Caste Exist in the India of Tomorrow?

A small section of Indian population, comprising the educated elites, probably powerful but numerically insignificant, desires that caste system ought to go. For a vast majority of the Indian population, especially the Hindus envisaging a social system without caste is impossible. Caste is part of their social identity and existence.

The joint family and caste system provide the individual in our society some of the benefits, which a welfare state provides in the industrially advanced countries. Caste stands for a certain amount of cultural homogeneity. However, it has its evil and exploitative side which has not been perceived by the majority of the people, especially the upper castes.

It is essential to remember that nothing effective can be achieved unless and until the people themselves are made to realise the unjust nature of caste system. The principle of caste is so firmly entrenched in our political and social life that everyone including the political leader appears to have accepted tacitly these very principles.

The coming of modern means of communication has increased the 'horizontal stretch of caste'. Far-flung caste groups are able to interact and communicate with each other and find commonalties and shared interests to form clusters and this has resulted in the increase of caste solidarity within a region. One effect of universal adult franchise is the strengthening of caste consciousness. Political parties are at pains to select candidates who have a social base, usually drawn from the locally dominant caste groups.

It is obvious that the eradication of caste is a distant reality, despite the indications to the contrary.

As long as caste performs the functions of a welfare state in India and provides for the common bonds of kinship ties, political groups and alliances, it can be assured of a continued existence in modern India.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.
 - a) In a closed system different components of caste, class and power are together.
 - b) Caste has become the most important variable in the process.
 - c) In horizontal mobilisation the agent of mobilisation is the rather than the local notable found in the case of vertical mobilisation.
- ii) Define caste association and mention at least two functions of caste associations using about seven lines.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

21.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have described the social spheres in which caste system continues to exist. We described that social mobility has always been part of caste system. The flexibility and accommodative nature of caste is one of the essential aspects, which has lead to its continuity. We have discussed how the divisive role of caste has declined in the society. Concept of purity and pollution, the *Jajmani* system, and the commensality aspect of caste have declined. However, caste as an endogamous social group and its link with the kinship system still persists.

We explained in this unit how in spite of this continuity of caste system the structure and role of caste have changed. We have discussed the role of caste in modern politics and also the phases of development in political mobilisation of caste groups from vertical, horizontal to differential mobilisations. We have defined caste associations and explained in what ways these are similar or different from both voluntary associations of industrially advanced societies and the traditional caste structure. Finally, we have explained how and under what conditions caste can continue to exist in future India.

21.5 KEYWORDS

Caste Alliance	People belonging to different groups of castes or sub-castes coming together to achieve certain goals. For example, a caste alliance can decide to support a particular leader in elections.
Connubium	It refers to the right and obligation of members of a category of men to choose their wives from a prescribed category of women. The two groups are said to have or maintain connubium.
Decentralisation	Distribution of power to the grassroots level of the village.
Feudal Economy	Traditional ties of landowner, intermediaries and agricultural labourers. This economy is characterised by ties of patron client relationships, bonded labour and payment of wages in kind rather than cash.
Market Economy	This economy is characterised by forces of supply and demand. Wage labour and money are the principal means of exchange.
Political Mobilisation of Castes	Caste groups are manipulated to meet certain political goals.
Social Stratification	It is the process of differential ranking where a society is divided in segments and these segments are hierarchically ranked.

21.6 FURTHER READING

- Bailey, F.G. 1957. *Caste and the Economic Frontier*. The University Press: Manchester.
- Beteille, A. 1966. *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*. Oxford University Press: Bombay
- Beteille, A. 2000. *The Chronicles of Our Time*. Penguin Books: New Delhi
- Kothari, R. 1970. *Caste in Indian Politics*. Orient Longman: New Delhi
- Rudolph (L.I.) and (S.H.) Rudolph, 1967. *The Modernity of Tradition Political Development in India*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago
- Srinivas. M.N. 1962. *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*. Asia Publishing House: Bombay
- Srinivas. M.N., (ed.), 1996. *Caste its Twentieth Century Avatar*. Penguin Book: New Delhi

21.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i)
 - a) Social status
 - b) Sanskritisation
 - c) Connubium
- ii) Certain administrative changes introduced by the British saw the low castes of Bisipara, a village in Orissa, making use of the new business opportunities. They broke free from the caste-bound traditions and economic organisations. With money they bought land which came into the market. This disturbed the traditional equation of higher caste, higher land-ownership and higher power.

Check Your Progress 2

- i)
 - a) Combined
 - b) Political
 - c) Political party
- ii) Caste associations have been defined as paracomunities that help their members to pursue social mobility. It attempts to improve the social, material and political condition of its members. It provides a modern rational organisation to carry out its objectives. Amongst its functions one very important function is that it provides schools and college facilities for the education of the children of its members. It provides a unified strength to fight for political goals.