
UNIT 22 THE SCHEDULED CASTES

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22.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to

- describe the status of the scheduled castes both at scriptural, legal and existential levels in a historical perspective
- discuss their traditional social, ritual disabilities and deprivations
- analyse the various aspects of their social mobility through various processes during ancient, medieval and modern period
- examine the present and developing situation in respect of the scheduled castes.

22.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous two units of this Block you learnt about caste and its regional patterns and its continuity and change in Indian society. In this unit you will learn about the scheduled castes, their social status and condition in Indian society in a historical perspective.

The scheduled castes constitute the most deprived and oppressed section of Indian society. The history of their suffering is very old. Under the traditional set-up, they were placed at the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy. But enactment of the Constitution in 1950 sought to place them at equal footing with other sections of the population. In reality, however, they continue to suffer from various social, economic, political and cultural deprivations.

For understanding the status of the scheduled castes, section 22.2 of this unit deals with the meaning, characteristics and various traditional disabilities and deprivations they have to suffer. But, Indian society has never been static. Individuals and groups belonging to the scheduled castes under certain conditions could achieve some measure of **social mobility** from the very beginning. This process is described in section 22.3, which discusses the concept of social mobility, and the process of social mobility among the scheduled castes during the ancient and medieval period.

During British rule, India experienced important changes in almost all spheres of life. The scheduled castes also were not left untouched. Colonial rule had differential impact on different sections of the scheduled castes which is discussed in section 22.4. Social mobility among them during this period, because of **Sanskritisation**, **Westernisation**, Conversion, and contributions of Ambedkar and Gandhi have been explained in this section. Section 22.5 discusses constitutional-legal provisions pertaining to the scheduled castes, government policy of '**protective discrimination**' in their favour, their mobility through the processes of Sanskritisation and urbanisation, and the phenomena of their vertical and horizontal mobilisation during the post-Independence period. Lastly, section 22.6 presents a summary of this unit.

22.2 THE SCHEDULED CASTES

The term 'scheduled caste' was coined by the Simon Commission (1927). The expressions, 'Depressed Classes', 'Exterior Castes' and 'Untouchables' were commonly used for the scheduled-castes during the colonial period. Gandhiji called them '*Harijans*' (the people of God). But since the passage of the Government of India Act of 1935, they have been generally referred to as 'Scheduled Castes'. The population of Scheduled Castes in different states of India during 1981 and 1991 is given in figure 22.1.

22.2.1 Castes Deemed as the Scheduled Castes

The Constitution of India (1950) made a provision that "the President may, with respect to any State or Union Territory, after consultation with the Governor, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of the Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory" (Article 34).

In pursuance of this provision, the President of India has passed orders from time to time specifying the names of scheduled castes in the country.

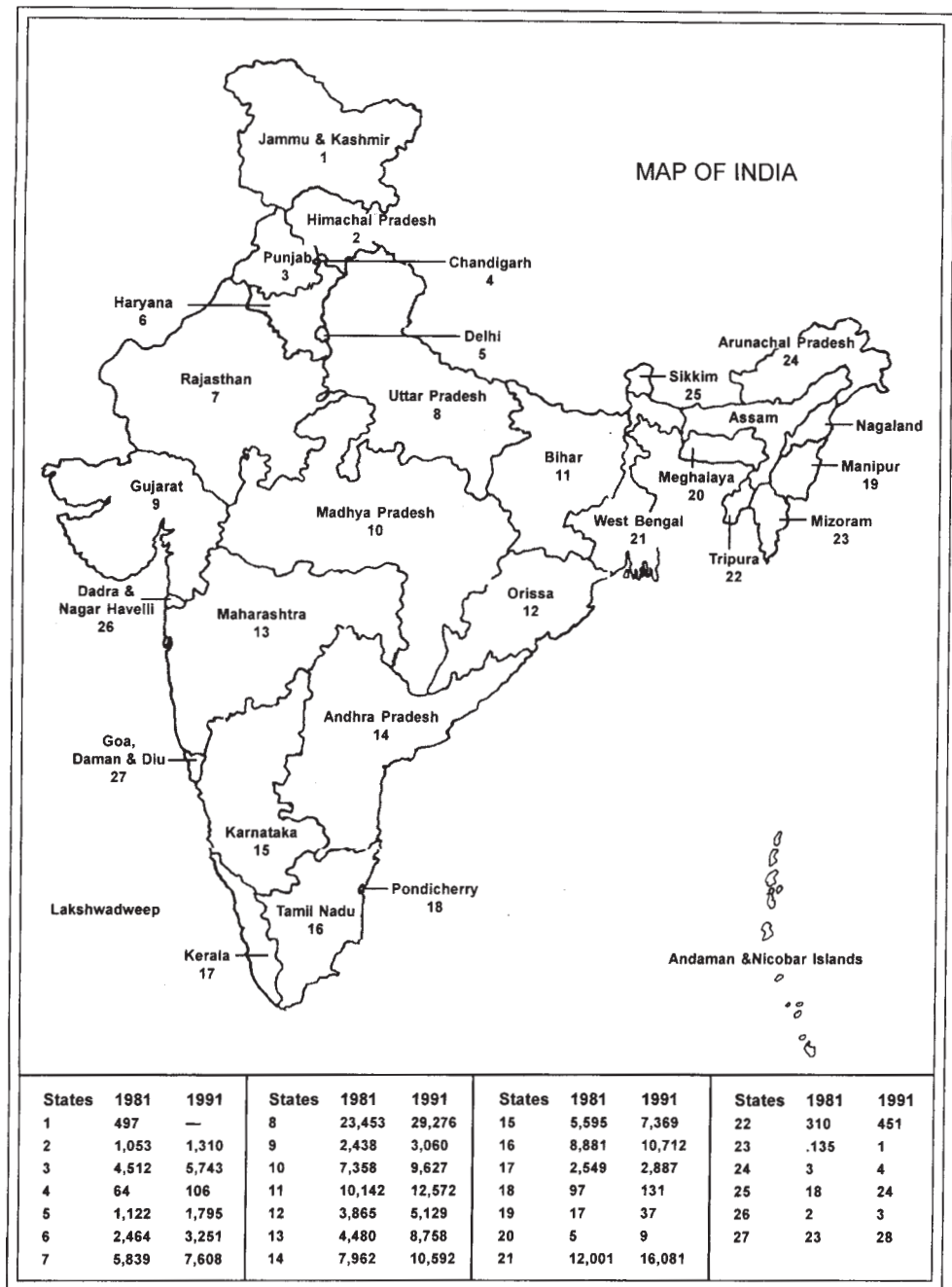


Fig. 22.1: Population of scheduled castes in 1981 and 1991

In the past these groups were classified on ritual criteria: contact with them caused varying degrees of pollution. The criteria adopted for inclusion in the scheduled caste’s list are social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of the stigma of untouchability. The better known Scheduled Castes include Chamar and Bhangi (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab), Bagdi and Rajbansi (West Bengal), Mahar (Maharashtra), Mala and Madiga (Andhra Pradesh), Cheruman and Pulayan (Kerala), Palla and Paraiya (Tamil Nadu). There are numerous other groups, large and small.

22.2.2 Characteristics, Disabilities and Deprivations

The scheduled castes account for about 15 per cent of the total population of the country (Government of India 1988: 15). In 1991 they accounted for about

16.48 percent of the total population. They are not concentrated in any particular geographical region. They are found in every state and their proportion varies from state to state (for details see figure 22.1).

The scheduled castes constituted the lowest strata of Indian society. They had been subjected to a variety of disabilities, deprivations and oppressions under the traditional system. They were placed outside and down below in social and ritual hierarchy under the '*varna*' model of society. They were engaged in manual tasks, which were considered impure and unclean. They were considered untouchables. Their touch required ritual purification for the upper caste people. They were denied entry into temples and to houses of the upper castes. They were prohibited from drawing water from '*savarna*' wells. Like the Shudras, they had no access to the study of religious texts. They were not permitted to wear clothes or jewellery customarily worn by the higher castes. They had to hold upper caste people in high esteem. Generally, they lived at the outskirts of the village in poor housing condition. In his study of Iravas of Kerala, Jeffrey (1976) observes,

They were forbidden the dignity of an umbrella or a shoulder cloth.... Their women were prohibited from covering their breasts and from wearing certain type of jewellery. They were said to pollute a Nambudiri from 36 paces and a Nayar from 120.

Besides this segregation, the scheduled castes formed an integral part of social life. At the village level, a large proportion of them worked as agricultural labourers for landowners or tenants belonging to high castes. Moreover, they provided a variety of specialised services. They worked as servants, scavengers, sweepers, drummers and so forth. They served all the caste Hindus but were not served by Brahman priest, barber, water carrier, washermen, and some others who served the caste Hindus.

In spite of their common deprivations and disabilities, the scheduled castes did not constitute a ritually homogeneous category nor do they do so now. The various castes belonging to this category form a ritual hierarchy somewhat similar to the *varna* model. They do not practice inter-marriage and sometimes do not interdine. According to Srinivas (1965), the leather-working Chamars in Uttar Pradesh consider themselves superior to the Bhangis, sweepers. The Kannada Holeya place themselves above the Madiga and do not accept even water or betel leaf from the latter.

Thus, we find that the scheduled castes formed a ritual hierarchy of their own. But they suffered from common deprivations and disabilities in social, economic and political domains in the larger society under the traditional system.

22.3 SOCIAL MOBILITY DURING PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

In spite of the rigid caste structure present in the pre-Independence period, the historical data show that social mobility was present in both ancient and medieval Indian society. But before learning about social mobility during these periods let us understand what the concept of social mobility means.

22.3.1 Social Mobility

Human societies are divided into various social strata. These strata are arranged hierarchically and are considered superior or inferior to one another according to the prevalent value system in society. But, any system of social stratification is not absolutely closed. Individuals or groups can move from one social status to another in the social hierarchy. This process of shifting of social status is called social mobility.

Sorokin has identified two types of social mobility on the basis of direction of mobility, i.e., vertical and horizontal. Vertical mobility refers to transition of an individual or group from one social stratum, to another, either upward or downward. A scheduled caste member getting a high post in an organisation, and a Brahman working as a landless agricultural labourer are examples, on an individual level, of upward and downward social mobility respectively.

By horizontal social mobility is meant shifting from one social group to another situated broadly on the same level. The shift from agricultural labour to factory labour is an example.

22.3.2 Social Mobility During the Ancient Period

Sacred texts portray the traditional Indian society as characterised by a closed and rigid system of social stratification based on '*varna*'. In reality, a degree of social mobility existed in society. The Rig-Vedic society (c 1500-1000 B.C.) as a whole was tribal, pastoral, semi-nomadic and egalitarian. Untouchability did not exist and hence nor did a class of untouchables. But gradually the Vedic society got transformed into an agricultural and *varna*-caste-class divided social order by the sixth century B.C. The scheduled castes were termed as '*antyaaja*' '*panchama*' and '*chandala*' in ancient literature.

But even then the system of social stratification was not entirely 'closed'. In their studies, Romila Thapar (1977) and K.M. Pannikar (1955) have shown that social mobility did exist in ancient India. Individual and group mobility vertical and horizontal did take place during that period. Pannikar has said that the Nandas were the last Kshatriya rulers in India, then people from the lower *varnas* took over. There is also a controversy regarding the Shudra origin of the Mauryas.

The important channels of social mobility during the ancient period were (a) Sanskritisation (b) conversion to Buddhism, Jainism and other heterodox sects, (c) migration and (d) renouncing the world and taking to the life of mendicant and preacher. Srinivas (1966) defines Sanskritisation as "the process by which a low Hindu-caste or tribe or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently twice-born caste". The scheduled castes, along with other lower castes and tribes took advantage of various available avenues of social mobility both on individual and group levels, on a limited scale during this period.

22.3.3 Social Mobility During the Medieval Period

Burton Stein (1986) has shown that social mobility prevailed during the medieval period in India. In addition to the ancient channels of social mobility two fresh avenues opened up during this period, conversion to Islam and the Bhakti cult. Islamic emphasis on equality and brotherhood, a sense of affiliation

with the ruling class and material consideration motivated small sections of the Hindus to embrace Islam. They were from both the upper and lower caste Hindus. Some untouchables also got converted to Islam in the hope of raising their social status. But they did not benefit much. Imtiaz Ahmad (1978) observed that status inequalities continued to exist much as before. But it may have brought about a ‘psychological revaluation’ of themselves. In fact, as Ghaus Ansari (1960) opines, Muslim society in India itself got stratified. The converts from the untouchable castes were placed lowest in Muslim social hierarchy. However, it can be assumed that they suffered less segregation and restrictions in social interaction as Muslims than under the Hindu order.

The Bhakti movement provided another avenue of social mobility for the untouchable castes along with others. Kabir, a weaver, Ravidas, a cobbler and several others belonging to the lower castes became prominent Bhakti saints. The Bhakti saints preached that salvation was possible even for the untouchables, who were sincere devotees of God. Shanker Deva, the great Bhakti saint of Assam sang, “that Chandala at the tip of whose tongue is the message of Hari is to be placed in the highest estimation”.

Additionally, social mobility among the scheduled castes continued along the earlier paths, e.g., Sanskritisation and migration.

However, social mobility among the scheduled castes occurred on a limited scale. An overwhelming majority of them continued to suffer from traditional disabilities and deprivations during the medieval period.

Check Your Progress 1

i) When and by whom was the term ‘scheduled caste’ coined? Answer in two lines.

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ii) List at least two social disabilities or deprivations that the scheduled castes were subjected to in the pre-independence period? (Use about two lines).

.....

iii) Define social mobility in about three lines.

.....

iv) Tick the correct answer of the following question.

Who gave the concept of Sanskritisation?

- a) Triloki Nath Madan
- b) Shyama Charan Dube
- c) Mysore N. Srinivas
- d) Yogendra Singh

22.4 SOCIAL MOBILITY DURING THE BRITISH RULE

Social mobility found during the ancient and medieval period was relatively different from the kind found during the colonial rule in India. Now let us examine this social mobility.

22.4.1 Differential Impact of the British Rule

The establishment of British rule brought about deep and far reaching changes in the economic, political, educational and cultural spheres in India. It offered some new avenues of social mobility to the scheduled castes, e.g., new economic opportunities, education, westernisation, conversion to Christianity and politicisation. Moreover, the traditional process of mobility through Sanskritisation also gained more momentum during this period.

But all sections of the scheduled castes did not benefit under the colonial rule. The scheduled castes who were engaged in cottage industries or handicrafts, such as, weaving and tanning could not compete with cheap and better quality machine-made goods imported to India by the British. This led to their proletarianisation and pauperisation, forcing them to take to agricultural labour for survival. Some of the scheduled castes people migrated to urban areas and continued with their traditional occupation e.g., sweeping and scavenging. Hence, despite increased earning in urban areas, they experienced status immobility with regard to occupation.

Some of the scheduled castes benefited economically from the exigencies of the British rule and became upwardly mobile. The Nadars of Tamil Nadu were traditionally engaged in toddy tapping which was considered a polluting occupation. In his study, Hardgrave (1984) found that during the British rule, the Nadars turned to trade in toddy tapping and established themselves as middlemen and money-lenders. They earned wealth, purchased their own land and acquired education and thus raised their social status. Similarly, the Mahars of Maharashtra (studied by Patwardhan 1973) and the Jatav Chamars of Agra in Uttar Pradesh (studied by Lynch 1969) improved their social status by taking advantage of the new economic opportunities.

22.4.2 Social Mobility through Sanskritisation

The traditional avenue of social mobility of the scheduled castes through Sanskritisation gained added momentum during the British period. The economically and educationally mobile scheduled castes were no longer willing to accept their inferior social position. The policy of recording castes in the census gave a fillip to the process of Sanskritisation. Many Scheduled Castes claimed higher status in the caste hierarchy. The Jatavas and the Nadars started claims to Kshatriya status by Sanskritising their way of life. The Jatavas traced their origin to the *gotra* of Siva and stopped eating beef and buffalo. Similarly, the Nadars began to tie the *dhoti* in the fashion of the Brahmins, to crop their hair in the fashion of the Brahmin tuft, and to abandon the heavy jewellery and ear-pieces which had been common among them. But the scheduled castes had to face the wrath of the upper castes who beat them and even stripped their women to the waist for following the style of upper caste living.

Moreover, Sanskritic beliefs and values were mediated to the scheduled castes through a number of movements of different religious sects, e.g., the Satnami Sect, Gorakh Panth, Ramanand Panth and Kabir Panth. Sri Narayana Guru of Kerala started organising his sect around Izhava priests and *sanyasis* for socio-religious reform.

Activity 1

Select at least five people who belong to the scheduled caste category in your area and ask them the following questions.

- 1) Occupation of all the members of their family
- 2) Educational qualifications of their parents, brothers and sisters
- 3) Their personal ambitions regarding what they want to become in future

Write a report of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with those of the other students in your Study Centre.

22.4.3 Social Mobility through Westernisation

Westernisation, as defined by Srinivas (1980), “characterises the changes brought about in society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, and the term subsumes changes occurring at various levels—technology, institutions, ideology, values”. The upwardly mobile untouchable castes adopted the life-style implied in Westernisation. This was facilitated by the prevalence of various non-Sanskritic traditions among them—such as, eating meat and drinking alcohol. Sunanda Patwardhan (1973) observes: “The Mahar were the first people to serve the British officers and their wives as butlers, butchers and ayah. Being beef-eating themselves, the Mahar did not mind working for the foreign, beef-eating master”.

22.4.4 Social Mobility through Conversion

Conversion to Christianity provided an additional avenue of social mobility to the scheduled castes. This was prompted by the hope of improvement in social status through education, health facilities, job opportunities and financial support provided by the Christian missionaries. Large-scale conversion took place during the latter half of the nineteenth century from among the Chamar, the Churra, the Lal Begi and other scheduled castes. Further, it has been observed that though the scheduled castes who became highly educated, got white-collar jobs and earned wealth were integrated into the Christian fold, the backward ones could not remove their stigma of untouchability even after conversion.

22.4.5 Ambedkar and Gandhi

Another important effort to raise the status of the scheduled castes was made by the great leader, B.R. Ambedkar who belonged to the untouchable Mahar caste of Maharashtra. He laid emphasis on horizontal mobilisation of the scheduled castes and made them a political force to reckon with. He emphasised secular avenues of politics, education and administration for social mobility of the scheduled castes. He held that political power was the key to all progress and that the scheduled castes could achieve political salvation if they captured power by organising themselves into a separate party.

Ambedkar emphasised the Depressed Classes Mission Society to articulate the demands of the scheduled castes. Recourse was taken to non-violent direct action for removal of the social and civil disabilities of the scheduled castes. Ambedkar led ‘*satyagraha*’ in 1927 to gain *Harijan* entry in the temple at Poona (now Pune). He also burnt the Manusmriti to express his anger.

In 1928, Ambedkar demanded of the Simon Commission adult franchise, separate electorate and full representation for the scheduled castes. His insistence on separate electorate resulted in big increase in the number of reserved seats for the scheduled castes in legislature under the Poona Pact (1932) with Gandhiji. Further, he set up the Scheduled Caste Federation in 1942 for securing political rights and representation for the Scheduled Castes through acquisition of power. But he failed at the elections in 1946. Later, fed up with political manoeuvring, he embraced Buddhism with a large number of scheduled castes after Independence.

In contrast with Ambedkar, Gandhi wanted the *Harijans* to be integrated into the Hindu society. For this, he tried to raise the consciousness of the upper castes through a countrywide campaign against untouchability and other constructive work. He did not believe in the *Dharma Shastra*, which taught untouchability. He started publishing a newspaper named *Harijan*. His well-known fast in 1932 drew the attention of the people to the problem of the scheduled castes. On his insistence, the British government agreed to increase the representation of the scheduled castes in the legislature under the Poona Pact (1932). Thus, Ambedkar’s demand for separate electorate was abandoned and the scheduled castes remained in the Hindu fold. Gandhiji pleaded for compassion and equity to the scheduled castes.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Read each of the following statements and about each statement write Yes, if you agree and No, if you do not agree.
 - a) There was no scope of social mobility for the scheduled castes during ancient and medieval period in India.
 - b) Bhakti Movement during the medieval period provided opportunities to the scheduled castes for social mobility.
 - c) B.R. Ambedkar gave emphasis on horizontal mobilisation of the scheduled castes for raising their status.
 - d) M.K. Gandhi supported the proposal for separate representation in legislature for the scheduled castes.
 - e) State policy of protective discrimination aims at promoting the interests of the scheduled castes.
- ii) In what way did the Nadars of Tamil Nadu benefit socially and economically during the colonial period? Describe in about six lines.

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iii) Discuss the differences between B.R. Ambedkar and M.K. Gandhi with regard to their approach to raise the status of the scheduled castes. Use about seven lines.

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22.5 SCHEDULED CASTES IN POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA

India gained Independence in 1947. The Constitution of India was enacted in 1950. It aimed at constituting India into a sovereign, democratic republic and securing to all its citizens: justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Later on the words socialist and secular were also added in the Preamble of our Constitution.

22.5.1 Policy of Protective Discrimination

It was realised that the scheduled castes constituted some of the most backward sections of the population. Hence, to protect them from the difficulties of open competition and safeguard their interests, the policy of ‘protective discrimination’ was adopted. The term protective discrimination implies that the Government under the Constitution of India considers them, i.e., the scheduled castes a separate category which has to be helped through welfare measures, reservation of seats in educational institutions, jobs, etc. so that this backward section of Indian population can catch up with the other sections. The Constitution made provision for special safeguards and protection for the scheduled castes with the object of removing their social disabilities and promoting their educational, economic and political interests (Articles 15,16,17, 23, 25,46, 330, 332, 335, 338). Practice of untouchability was abolished. The scheduled castes were granted access to shops, hotels, and the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort. Forced labour was prohibited. Moreover, the State was given the responsibility to promote the educational and economic interests of the scheduled castes and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46). State was also permitted to make reservation for them in public services (Article 16, 335) and in representation in the Lok Sabha and the state Vidhan Sabhas (Article 330, 332), and also appoint a special officer at the Centre to oversee the implementation of the various provisions (Article 338).

In pursuance of the above Constitutional provisions, about 14 per cent of the total seats in the Lok Sabha and State Vidban Sabbas have been reserved for the scheduled castes. The proportion of reservation in services is 15 per cent of the vacancies. The position of Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been created at the Centre. Five-Year Plans now have a special component earmarked for the welfare and the development of the scheduled castes.

22.5.2 Vertical Mobilisation

Here, vertical mobilisation refers to the process of political mobilisation of the scheduled castes across caste line by the upper caste people. Government's policy of reservation and special welfare schemes for the scheduled castes have facilitated this process in the post-Independence period. Some individuals and families belonging to the scheduled castes have reached the top of the legislative and administrative bodies. They work as catalysts for vertical mobilisation.

The scheduled caste politicians have been largely co-opted into the major political party, which uses them for creating vote banks. The Scheduled Caste leaders may also be co-opted into upper caste factions in local and regional politics. Dushkin (1972) observes, "Under this arrangement locally powerful upper-caste notables mobilise the vote to fill the reserved seats with their own scheduled caste men, whom they manipulate and control. These men are bound to them by traditional ties as well as political debts, and the kind of leadership expected by them is good fellowship".

22.5.3 Horizontal Mobilisation

Here, the term refers to the political process in which emphasis is on increasing the solidarity among the scheduled castes and organising them into a political force so that their interest is safeguarded and promoted. Before independence Ambedkar made ceaseless efforts in this direction. This process continued after Independence. This is reflected in the formation of political parties and pressure groups by the scheduled castes.

The 'Republican Party of India' was formed by the scheduled castes in 1957. The party stood for an alliance of the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and other backward classes. It aimed at fighting for equality of opportunity and for special preference to the 'have-nots'. Its noble ideals included removal of exploitation of man by man and class by class. But the party had limited effectiveness. It formally split in 1970 due to internal differences. Its members were by and large co-opted into the Congress and worked as a pressure group in the party.

A group of young and militant scheduled caste radicals disillusioned with the leadership of the Republican Party formed a new party called the 'Dalit Panthers'. They have a broad orientation and seek to include all depressed people, such as, landless labourers, poor peasants, and factory workers belonging even to non-scheduled caste category in their movement. They aim at revolution. They proclaim: "We want to rule the whole country. Our target is not individuals but a whole system rotten to the core". Their main thrust lies in the sphere of creating a revolutionary consciousness through literature. They have a limited following.

In early 1980s, 'Bahujan Samaj Party' (BSP), under the leadership of Kanshi Ram, championed the cause of the scheduled castes through the strategy of horizontal mobilisation. During its brief career till the year 2003 it has shown itself to be capable of uniting the SCs with OBCs with a view to gain electoral success. Working on the calculation that the SCs, STs, OBCs and minorities constitute about 85 percent of the population BSP has managed to make major inroads to electoral politics (Suresh 1996). In the thirteenth Lok Sabha they have 14 MPs and 5 of their MPs represented the party in Rajya Sabha in 2003. They came to power thrice in the State of Uttar Pradesh, once in the year 1995 and second and third time in 1997 and 2002 respectively.

Further, the power bloc of the scheduled castes in the legislatures at the national and state levels also works on the principle of horizontal mobilisation. Such power blocs aim at securing benefits for the scheduled caste depending on the prevailing political situation. One such effective power bloc existed in the Lok Sabha under the leadership of Jagjivan Ram.

It is observed that vertical mobilisation of the scheduled castes in politics made them an ally in the continuation of an unjust and inequalitarian social order. Their horizontal mobilisation through the Republican Party of India, the Dalit Panthers have had only a limited effect. Bahujan Samaj Party managed to achieve political mileage to a great extent in this regard. Although the BSP is recognised by the Election Commission as a national party and it fields candidates across India, as an official national party must, it effectively functions on a regional basis limited to certain states of north India.

But it is rightly observed by Andre Beteille (1969) that "Since Independence... the emphasis seems to be shifting from Sanskritisation to competition for positions of office and power".

Activity 2

Meet one of the leaders of your area who belongs to the scheduled caste category. Talk to him/her about

- 1) What measures he has taken to improve the socio-economic status of scheduled caste people of his/her area.
- 2) What he/she thinks about the reservation issue.

Write a note of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with those of the other students of your Study Centre.

22.5.4 Sanskritisation

The process of social mobility among the scheduled castes through Sanskritisation has continued during post-Independence period. They have adopted upper caste names, discovered myths regarding their glorious origin, adopted Sanskritic deities, customs and changed their occupations. In Kerala, the scheduled castes have adopted upper caste names, e.g., Uma, Ramani, Sankaran, Pushkaran and so on. The Barwis of West Bengal anoint turmeric on the day of the marriage. The Tiya of West Bengal call themselves Rajbanshi (or royal descent) or Suryabanshi (descendant from the Sun God). Moreover, Mahar of Maharashtra, Pasi of Uttar Pradesh, Baira and Balai of Rajasthan

have given up their traditional polluting occupation and taken up clean occupations in agriculture, industry and services.

22.5.5 Urbanisation

Increased pace of urbanisation and urbanward migration from the rural areas in the post-Independence period has opened up a secular avenue of social mobility. But in case of the scheduled castes urbanward migration per se does not result in upward social mobility. In urban areas, they are generally employed in low status and low income occupations e.g. scavenging, boot polishing, construction work and unskilled factory work. Therefore, in spite of some increased earning they experience status immobility. Srinivas (1980) observed

Rural barbers when they migrate to towns, work in hair cutting saloons, washermen start laundries, smith work in furniture shops, oilmen sell oil, if not press oil, Malis work as gardeners, Chamars work in shoe-shops and Brahmins are cooks, teachers and lawyers.

22.5.6 Present Situation

Some individuals, families and groups from amongst the scheduled castes have achieved social mobility. But the over-whelming majority of the scheduled castes still constitutes the most backward section of society. They suffer from traditional disabilities and deprivations, more in rural than in urban areas. In his study of Gujarat villages, I.P. Desai (1976) found that the practice of untouchability, restriction on entry into temples and upper caste houses, and separate source of water supply prevailed in 47,90 and 64 per cent respectively of the total number of 69 villages.

Occupational mobility of the scheduled castes has been very limited. They are under-represented in Class I and II services but over-represented in Class III and IV services. In politics, they are treated as a 'vote bank'. Educationally, they are still backward. The literacy rate is 21 per cent. Economically, they constitute the bulk of the people living below the poverty line.

Oppression and atrocities against the scheduled castes continue to exist even at the beginning of twenty-first century. On the contrary, we witness sharpening of conflicts between the scheduled castes and dominant section of the population. This is reflected in the emergence of anti-reservation riots in urban areas and increasing atrocities on the scheduled castes in rural areas.

The provisions of reservation for the scheduled castes have given rise to a feeling of resentment among the non-scheduled caste section of the population. Competition over scarce jobs and limited seats in professional colleges has generated tensions and conflicts. Anti-reservation movements have been witnessed in some parts of the country, e.g., Maharashtra and Gujarat. These movements have been directed against the upwardly mobile scheduled castes. In 1981, anti-scheduled caste riots occurred in many urban centres in Gujarat over the issue of reservation of seats in the post-graduate medical courses. The targets of attacks were mainly the upwardly mobile scheduled castes, such as, the Vankar who are generally employed in blue or white-collar jobs. Attacks were not directed at the lowly Bhangi who are generally engaged in the menial jobs as scavengers and where literacy rate is quite low.

Further, we need to understand that the scheduled castes form a part of the large section of backward population of our country, which includes the scheduled tribes and the other backward classes (OBCs). Generally speaking, the whole of the backward classes is backward in social, economic, political and educational domains. Their backwardness is reflected in their under-representation in central government services in which their overall proportion is about thirty per cent though they constitute about seventy-five per cent of the total population. Their representation in Class I services is much smaller (Report of the Backward Classes Commission 1980, First Part, p. 42).

Moreover, we observe that the policy of reservation has led to the growth of a small group of elites from amongst the backward classes. They are well educated, economically prosperous and politically vocal. The benefits of reservation are mainly cornered by them. Regarding the scheduled caste elites, Sachchidananda (1977) states that since they are educated and therefore, comparatively more enlightened than the rest of the community, they are better able to foresee social change. This perception helps them to take advantage of the various concessions and welfare measures adopted by the government for them. The scheduled caste elites, both in the towns and the villages show little concern for their lowly brethren. Instead, they are largely concerned with their own self-interests and those of their family and kin.

Thus, we find that the “trickle down approach” of the planners and “social mobility approach” in academics for raising the status of the scheduled castes have been a failure. An alternative could be a united struggle of all the oppressed sections of the population for transforming the society and building a united struggle of all the oppressed sections of the population for transforming the society and building a secular socialist and democratic India as envisaged in the Constitution.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Tick the correct answer to the following question.

What is the percentage of the scheduled castes in the total population of India, according to the 1991 Census?

- a) 20.49 percent
- b) 10.12 percent
- c) 23.56 percent
- d) 16.48 percent

ii) In what way has the urbanward migration not helped the scheduled castes? Use about five lines.

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22.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have learnt that the term scheduled caste has been defined mainly on ritual basis of untouchability. The criteria of social, economic and educational backwardness have been taken into account for including various castes in the list of the scheduled castes. We have noted that this list is issued by the President of India.

We learnt that the term “scheduled caste” was coined by the Simon Commission in 1927. The concept of social mobility has been defined and its horizontal and vertical dimensions have been described in this unit. We have examined the various aspects of social mobility amongst the scheduled castes during the ancient, medieval and colonial periods. We discussed the different approaches to the problem of scheduled castes taken by B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi.

In this unit, you have learnt about the present situation of the scheduled castes. You have come to know that the policy of ‘protective discrimination’ was adopted by the Indian government in order to protect and promote the socio-economic interests of scheduled castes. The horizontal mobilisation of the scheduled castes can be seen through the formation of political parties, such as, the “Republican Party of India”. You have also learnt about the process of Sanskritisation amongst the scheduled castes and the impact of urbanisation on them. Finally, you have looked at the problems faced by them.

22.7 KEYWORDS

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Protective Discrimination | This refers to the policy of the state to safeguard and promote the interests of the backward classes of population through giving preferential treatment to them. This is reflected in state policy of reservation in education, services and legislature to the scheduled castes. The terms “affirmative action”, “reverse discrimination” and “compensatory discrimination” are also used. |
| Sanskritisation | According to Srinivas, “Sanskritisation is the process by which a low Hindu caste or tribe or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently twice-born caste”. |
| Social Mobility | The process of shifting of social position by individual or social group in social hierarchy is called social mobility. It could be of two types viz., horizontal and vertical. Horizontal social mobility refers to the process of transition of individual or group from one social position to another situated on the same level in social hierarchy. Vertical mobility refers to the process of shifting of individual or group from one social stratum to another, which may be either upward or downward in social hierarchy. |

Westernisation

This term is used by Srinivas to “characterise the changes brought about in society and culture as a result of over 150 years of British rule, and the term subsumes changes occurring at various levels-technology, institutions, ideology, values”.

The Scheduled Castes

22.8 FURTHER READING

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22.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The term ‘scheduled caste’ was coined by the Simon Commission in 1927.
- ii) The scheduled castes were prohibited from drawing water from the ‘savarna’ wells. They were not permitted to wear clothes or jewellery worn by the higher castes.
- iii) Social mobility is described as the process of shifting of an individual or social group from one social position to another in the social hierarchy. It is of two kinds, horizontal mobility and vertical mobility.
- iv) (C)

Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) No
b) Yes
c) Yes

- d) No
- e) Yes
- ii) During the colonial period the Nadars of Tamil Nadu became upwardly mobile. Traditional occupation of toddy tapping which was considered polluting earlier became so profitable in the British period that they earned considerable amount of wealth from it. This wealth they used for purchasing land, for education, and so on. This enabled them to raise their status socially and economically.
- iii) To raise the status of the scheduled castes Ambedkar emphasised horizontal mobilisation of the scheduled castes. He wanted to turn them into a political force. He considered political power and secular means like education, administration, etc. an important tool for social mobility. Mahatma Gandhi on the other hand described their complete integration in the Hindu society. This he thought could be done through raising the consciousness of the upper castes against untouchability and other constructive works.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) (d)
- ii) The urbanward migration has not resulted in raising the social status of the scheduled castes because in urban areas also, they are generally employed in low status and low income occupations, like, scavenging boot polishing, and so on.