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INDIAN SOCIETY: TRIBAL, RURAL AND URBAN

*I*ndian society has been broadly divided into tribal, rural and urban societies on the basis of their geographical surroundings and socio-cultural characteristics. Tribals live in relative isolation marked with distinct culture, language and religion. In the contemporary world, they are considered to be socio-economically backward. On the other hand, rural societies are village societies, which are mainly based on caste, attachment to the past, as well as having agricultural economy. Urban society is based on non-agricultural occupations like the industries and the service sector. However, there has been a continuous interaction between these three kinds of societies and we can not put them into watertight compartments.



OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the characteristics of tribal society;
- analyse changes among tribal societies;
- identify the tribal problems and know about the development measures being carried out for them;
- recognise the characteristics of village societies;
- explain changes taking place in village communities;
- explain the meaning and characteristics of urban society; and
- analyse the linkages between rural and urban societies.

26.1 TRIBAL SOCIETY

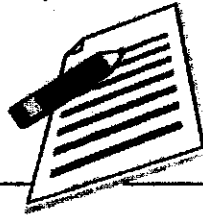
A tribe can be defined as a community living in hilly forest or well demarcated areas having its own culture, religion, language, and strong ethnic identity. Anthropologists have explained tribe as a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous in nature; with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal chiefs, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, conscious of their ethnic and territorial homogeneity.

26.1.1 Characteristics of Tribal Society

From the above definition, we may list the following characteristics of tribal society.

- i) They have usually a well-demarcated geographical territory.
- ii) Generally they live in forests or hilly areas.
- iii) Their territory is relatively isolated or semi-isolated compared to other social group
- iv) They have their own culture, folklore, cosmology and belief system.
- v) Economically they are self-sufficient, i.e. their economy is based on subsistence level where there is no concept of surplus. They cling to primitive technology. They lack monetary economy. Their economy is dependent on barter exchange.
- vi) They are more interested in earning their today's need and do not bother about their future requirements.
- vii) They have their own language; generally do not have any script.
- viii) They have their own political system, i.e. both stateless and state. Earlier they had stateless system, i.e. without any tribal chief. They manage their law and order system through family and kinship ties. Later on, came the state system, when tribals nominated or elected their own chiefs. Today, of course this autonomy has been lost and they have become part of the local administration.
- ix) Tribal societies are known as simple societies because their social relationships are primarily based on family and kinship ties. Besides they do not have any rigid social stratification.
- x) They have their own religion, i.e. having their own deities (gods and goddesses) and belief system. Their forms of religion are known as animism (worshipping the soul or ancestors), animatism (worshipping any non-living body like stone or wood), totemism (worshipping a tree or any animal as the

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founding ancestor), and naturism (worshipping objects of nature like river, stream, sun, moon, forest, etc.).

- xi) They have a sense of belongingness to their own community, they feel that they are the sons of the soil and hence they have a strong ethnic identity.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.1

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words from the brackets.

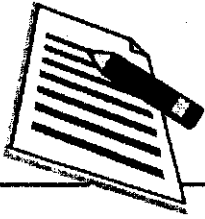
- (i) Tribal communities live mostly in _____ areas (hilly, urban, industrial)
- (ii) Economy of the tribals is found at _____ level (advanced, developing, primitive).
- (iii) Tribals have _____ religion (their own, Hindu, Christian).
- (iv) Tribal society have _____ form of inequality (intensive, little, moderate)

26.1.2 Distribution of Tribal Communities in India

There are about 461 tribes found in India distributed throughout the country. Their population is about 8.1 crores according to the census 2001 of India (constituting to 8.1% of total population). Their distributions can be broadly divided into the following five regions.

Region	Major Tribes
North East, Sikkim and Himalayas	Naga, Mizo, Adi, Lepcha, Gaddi, Khasi, Garo, Jaintia, Raji, Bhotia, Tharu
Western	Seheria, Bhil, Girisia, Rebari, Dang, Mina, Worli
Central	Munda, Oraon, Santhal, Gond, Ho, Chenchu, Bhumij, Birhor, Kondh, Saora, Poroja
South	Irula, Toda, Badaga, Paliyan, Cholanaicken
Island Communities	Great Andamanese, Jarawa, Onge, Sentinnoclose, Shompen, Nicobarese

Table 26.1: *Distribution of Tribes*



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Population-wise Gonds are found highest in number (about 8 lakhs), followed by Bhils (about 7.5 lakhs), Santhal (about 5 lakhs), Mina (about 2.2 lakhs) and Oraon (about 2 lakhs). The lowest number among them are the Jarawa (about 50), Onges (about 100), Andamanese (about 150), and Arandan (about 250).

26.1.3 Linguistic Classification Among Tribes in India

Most of the tribal communities speak non-Aryan language which are divided into four linguistic families: Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Chinese, Dravidian and Indo-European.

Linguistic Family	Major Tribal Languages
Austro-Asiatic	Khasi, Nicobari, Santhali, Ho, Mundari
Tibeto-Chinese	Bhotia, Lepcha, Abor, Miri, Dafla, Garo, Naga, Lushai
Dravidian	Korwa, Badaga, Toda, Kota, Kui (by Kondh), Gondi, Maler, Oraon
Indo-European	Hajong, Bhili

Table 26.2: Linguistic Distribution of Tribes

INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.2

Write short answers:

(i) Name five major tribes of India?

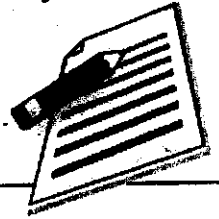
(ii) Name one major tribe who speaks the dravidian language.

(iii) Where are the Onges found?

(iv) Name three tribes of Western region.

26.1.4 Tribal Social Structure and Stratification

Most of the tribes are patrilineal and patriarchal in nature, like the Kondhs of Orissa, Santhals of West Bengal and Bihar, Bhils of Madhya Pradesh. Patriliney



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means inheritance of property, authority, residence, and line of descent is passed from the father to the son. In these societies male dominance is found. However, extreme patriliney is not found among them today. Compared with the non-tribal communities in India, the tribals have greater equality among the sexes. In the absence of industrial economy and formal structure, the tribal social structure is based on kinship groups like clans, lineages and families. Some tribal communities are matriarchal, also such as Garo and Khasi of Meghalaya. Initially, social stratification was not marked among them. There used to be broadly two divisions: the ruling clans and others. Economically they are termed as an egalitarian society. Later on due to contact with outsiders and non-tribals some forms of inequality are apparently noticed.

26.1.5 Tribal Problems

Certain types of tribal problems emerged with their contact with outsiders. Before the Muslim rule, the tribals lived fairly in isolation. During Muslim rule the process of revenue collection started. However, the Muslim rulers did not interfere with the tribal customs and traditions. Exploitative contact started during the British rule. This was found mainly because of three reasons:

- (a) The Britishers wanted to rule over the tribals.
- (b) They wanted to syphon off resources from tribal areas, which were rich in mineral resources.
- (c) They wanted to preach Christianity under the pretext of rationality.

Cultural contact came into being because of the following reasons:

- (a) Existence of mineral resources in the tribal areas
- (b) Entry of administrators and missionaries into tribal areas.
- (c) Entry of specialists like medicine man, agents and vendors into the tribal areas.
- (d) Development of transport and communication in the tribal areas, which facilitated the entry of outsiders.
- (e) Displacement of tribal population from their traditional habitat due to construction of industries and hydro- electricity and irrigation projects.

In this manner most of the tribal problems have emerged due to cultural contact. There are several tribal problems, which are as follows:

- a. **Land alienation** caused due to the introduction of monetary economy. For every consumption need, the tribals needed money, but did not have any source of earning. They mortgaged land or sold it off land. Besides, outsiders exploited



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them and grabbed away their land. Further industrialisation also resulted into acquisition of land by the state. Various State governments have passed several acts to abolish transfer or sale of tribal land to non-tribals.

- b. **Indebtedness** cropped in due to lack of adequate sources of income. Private moneylenders (like *mahajan* or *sahukar*) are readily available in tribal areas. They provided personal loan on heavy rate of interest. The consumption patterns of the tribals include regular consumption of liquor, bride price during marriage and fine for any deviant behaviour. All these require money. Hence they go to the moneylender. In this manner they are heavily in debt. Effective measures have been taken by various State governments to curb the entry of *sahukars* into the tribal areas and arrangements have been made to secure loans on nominal rate of interest from the banks and co-operative societies.
- c. **Bonded labour** is a serious problem, which came in due to rampant poverty and lack of stable income. In fact, land alienation, indebtedness; bonded labour and poverty are inter-related problems.

Lack of money leads to taking loan from money lender by mortgaging land. The tribal community is unable to repay, hence serves as a bonded labourer.

- d. **Shifting cultivation** among tribal is a problem since it involves large-scale deforestation. Shifting cultivation is known by various names such as Swidden (slash and burn) cultivation, *Jhum* (in the North East Tribes), *Khallu* (among Maler of Bihar), and *Podu* (among Khonds and Parajas of Orissa).

Shifting cultivation involves clearing of a plot, usually in hilly or terrace area, i.e. cutting plants & shrubs and then broadcasting (sprinkling) seeds (usually of arhar, maize, bajra and barbati (beans)). It does not involve plough cultivation. The area is cultivated for one or two years and then is left hallow for five to seven years to allow the vegetation to grow densely and to repeat the cycle

- e. **Illiteracy** among tribals is a major hindrance towards their development. On account of inaccessible habitat among tribals, education has not spread fast among them. The school timings usually clash with the timings of economic and agricultural operations. However, several programmes have been launched to provide educational access by establishing a primary school within a radius of one kilometer.
- f. **Problem of health and nutrition** among the tribals has been found mainly due to lack of proper medical and sanitary facilities and poverty. Their practice of indigenous medicine and magical practices for treatments have been very good in the past. But today things have changed considerably. Disease range between diarrhea, jaundice, small pox, malaria, filaria to AIDS, heart ailments and hypertension etc. They require proper treatment in well-equipped hospitals

or dispensaries. Efforts are being made to establish primary health centres in every village.



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.3

Write short answers:

- (i) What is the chief cause of land alienation among tribes?
- (ii) What is shifting cultivation?
- (iii) Why the tribals have less interest in formal education?
- (iv) What is the cause of bonded labour among the tribals?

26.2 RURAL SOCIETY

Rural society means society that lives in village, and is dependent on natural environment. Rural economy rests predominantly on agriculture and allied activities. These societies have a low density of population, intimate group relationships and have oral traditions. Rural societies are rich in culture and tradition. However, from the contemporary point of view, they are considered to be socio-economically less developed. Therefore, several development activities have been undertaken in our country to improve their socio-economic conditions.

26.2.1 Characteristics of Rural Societies

The village community has the following characteristics.

- (i) Agriculture is the predominant occupation among them. It is not the only source of income but also the way of life for the villagers.
- (ii) The village community is small in size. It means they live in small geographical areas with lower density of population as compared to the towns.
- (iii) They have primary group behaviour, i.e. face-to-face relationship is found among the members of the village.
- (iv) Their social structure is based on kinship and family relationships. Here the role of lineage (*Vansh*) is very important.
- (v) Mostly they live in joint family. A joint family is a group of people who live under one roof, eat food cooked at one hearth, have joint property, participate in common worship and are linked to each other through kinship ties. The joint family has a greater generation bondage than the nuclear family.

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- (vi) They are more conservative and tradition oriented towards the performance of rituals as well as belief in deities.
- (vii) Group feeling and mutual cooperation is more evident among them. They have a brotherhood feeling. They co-operate with each other in times of exigencies.
- (viii) Their culture is also known as folk culture, i.e. consisting of customs, rituals and norms, etc. which are unwritten, but orally transmitted and learned. Since they have a common socio-economic background, they do not have differences in ideology towards life. Hence they are homogenous in nature.
- (ix) Traditionally, their economy is based on agriculture having primitive technology and mono-cropping pattern. It was less productive. Lack of proper marketing facilities and introduction of monetary economy has resulted in poverty. Further, decline in cottage industries has pushed them to migrate to neighbouring towns.
- (x) Village India is largely based on caste system, which has a hierarchical (castes are ranked according to their purity and pollution, their religious customs and practices and the nature of their occupation) base. For example, Brahmins are ranked as highest one because they do the purest occupation of performing rituals and teaching, whereas, shudras is ranked lowest because of his impure occupation of working as scavengers. They follow the above hierarchical system intensely.
- (xi) Modern way of living and thinking (based on achievement of the individual and their rational thinking) is lacking in rural society. They still follow the ascriptive model of life, hence their mobility is restricted.
- (xii) Any deviant behaviour is dealt with strictness in the rural areas.
- (xiii) Since modern technology has not gained firm ground in rural areas, people are still following the age-old methods of cultivation as well as solving the related day-to-day problems. It involves hard work throughout the day as it is a labour intensive occupation.
- (xiv) They have a relatively self-sufficient economy particularly in terms of production and consumption.
- (xv) They have a static economy, since they lack modern technology, modes of investment and a market economy.
- (xvi) They cling to conservative and traditional style of living: They have a strong tradition and is known as the little tradition. Their attachment to the past is strong.



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INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.4

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words from the brackets:

- (i) Rural areas are dominated by _____ occupation (agricultural, industrial, professional).
- (ii) Villages have _____ density of population (higher, lower, moderate).
- (iii) Village economy is _____ (developed, less developed, primitive).
- (iv) Indian villages have _____ system (caste, class, estate).

26.2.2 The Indian Village Community: As a Social Unit

British administrators held that village communities in India are like little republics. It means they have every thing they want within themselves, and they are not dependent on outsiders for their existence. But this has been proved to be a myth by Indian sociologists after the scientific study of Indian villages. Village in India is an integrated unit. There have been inter-connections and inter-dependence between villages on socio-economic and religious terms since ages. A study of Haryana village indicated that at least 300 villages are linked through marriage ties. Several consumption items like salt, edible oil, various tools cloth and jewellery were not produced in every village. All types of services were not available in every village.

Besides, for political purposes villages were always a part of some kingdom, feudal lords and used to pay revenue to the king. Further, various cultural and the pilgrim centres have attracted people to travel throughout the country. For example, the Char Dham concept of Hindus for attainment of *Moksha* by people has been popular. Besides, trade practices have linked the villages with world. Therefore, we cannot say that villages are in isolation, but they were always a part of the larger society.

26.2.3 Changes in Rural Society

After independence, the community development programme was started in 1952. It meant an all round development of village communities. The involvement and participation of community was the main aim. Later on in 1959 Panchayati Raj (Local Self Govt.) was started. Both the programmes are running successfully even today. However, Integrated Rural Development Programme has replaced the Community Development Programme in 1979.

The rural and urban societies have a continuous interaction among them. The



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villager visits the urban areas and comes into contact with the urban people. Some urban culture enters into the villages. Gradually some sense of heterogeneity becomes imminent in the rural areas by urban influence. It is said that Indian cities have retained some of the rural characteristics. Primary food and raw material are supplied by the villages to the towns, hence both have relationship of an interdependence. Thus it is termed as rural urban continuum (continuous interaction). Construction of roads and transportation have brought about lot of social and economic changes e.g. Caste System is weakening. Now, there is more mobility and it is becoming cash market from barter system etc.

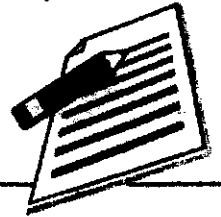
26.3 URBAN SOCIETY

Urban society includes the towns, cities and metros with a specific way of life. An urban society can be defined as an area having higher density of population, people engaging mostly in occupations other than agriculture and domestication of animals, having a distinct ecology and culture different from that of the large society's culture.

26.3.1 Characteristics of Urban Society

Urban societies have the following characteristics:

- a. The cities and towns have a higher density of population than the rural areas.
- b. Cultural heterogeneity is found in the urban areas because people from various areas having different cultures migrate to the towns in search of employment, education and medical and health care.
- c. Cities have a distinct environment that is not natural but a man made environment.
- d. The occupation of the urban areas is mainly non-agricultural, i.e. based on manufacturing, trade & commerce, professional and governance, etc.
- e. In urban areas more social mobility is found in the sense people gradually adapt to class structure (lower, middle or upper class based on economic criteria).
- f. Formal social control is found in the urban areas in the form of courts, police and other administrative bodies.
- g. In urban areas interaction among people is based on secondary contact and not primary contact. It means face-to-face and individual to individual interaction is not possible in the urban areas.
- h. People in the cities have an urban way of life. Which means they have formal



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interaction, impersonal behaviour, non-kinship relationships, cultural exhibitionism, passing leisure time in clubs, parks, restaurants, cinema halls or markets.

- i. The urban economic organisation is based on market and monetary economy.
- j. Civic facilities like roads, electricity, water, communication, park, hotels and cinemas, etc. are found in urban areas.
- k. Anonymity is a feature of urban societies. It means people do not know each other in the city as in the villages.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.5

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words from the brackets:

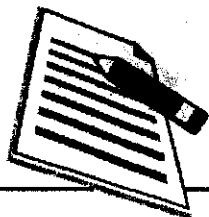
- (i) Urban societies have mostly _____ occupation (agricultural, priestly, non-agricultural).
- (ii) _____ is the important feature of the urban societies (personal contact, anonymity, kinship).
- (iii) Urban societies have _____ economy (monetary, agricultural, barter).
- (iv) In urban areas people have cultural _____ (homogeneity, heterogeneity, pluralism).

26.3.2 India's Urban Communities

In India the urban area has the following Characteristics:

- a. An area having some urban administrative unit like a Municipality, Metropolitan Council, Notified Area Council or Cantonment Board, etc.
- b. An area having more than 10000 population.
- c. 75% of population engaging in non-agricultural occupation.
- d. Should have a density of 1000 persons per sq. mile.
- e. Having some urban amenities like an industrial area, a large housing settlement, having centre of entertainment and tourist importance or having some civic amenities.

On the basis of population, India has the following types of cities:



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Nomenclature	Population
Metro	10,00,000+
Class I City	1,00,000+
Class II Town	50,000+
Class III Town	20,000+
Class IV Town	10,000+

Table 26.3: *Types of cities in India*

26.3.3 Urban Social Problems

Urban society has several social problems such as congestion of population, slums, crime, and acute shortage of resources and facilities (such as water, electricity). Certain problems emerge from anonymity in cities, where personal relation and primary group have broken down. It causes tremendous mental pressure and tension. That is why; psychological ailments are numerous in cities. Because of large migration to cities unemployment is found in large number in the urban areas. This happens due to push and pull factors. This causes a lot of frustration among the people.

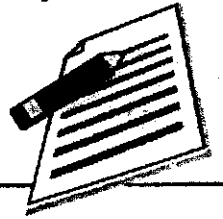
Push factor means that lack of employment in the villages pushes the villagers to the towns in search of jobs. Pull factor means the relatives in the town invite their close people and try to give them jobs. Besides, the entertainment aspect of urban life attracts or pulls the people to the towns.

The migrants in the cities do not have a respectable place to stay. They generally settle down as clusters on the outskirts of the cities. These clusters grow into slums. Their conditions deteriorate from bad to worse with the passage of time. There is a high incidence of crime in the cities. It is mainly found because of unemployment, and frustration among the youth and also due to the large density of population.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 26.6

Write short answers.

- (i) What is the minimum population of a metro?
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(ii) Why some people in urban areas have mental problems?

(iii) What is push factor of migration?

(iv) What is the cause of unemployment in urban areas?



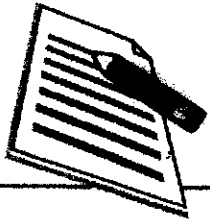
WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- In this lesson you have learnt about the tribal, rural and urban communities of India, particularly in terms of their co-existence.
- These three societies are found in India with perfect cohesion, inter-dependence and cooperation.
- The tribal and rural societies are relatively economically backward than the urban societies.
- However, through various economic development programmes their socio-economic status is being improved upon.
- These societies have a distinct culture with a natural environment.
- People from urban areas usually miss the simplicity and non-polluting environment of the rural areas.
- The cities of India have attracted people from throughout the country as well as abroad because of the distinctive civilization.
- However, because of the large density of population and heavy migration from rural areas, some problems like unemployment and growing slums have occurred in the cities.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Why tribal societies are called simple societies?
2. Describe the major tribal problems in India.
3. What are the main criteria of an urban area in India?
4. Describe briefly the changes that have taken place in rural society after independence.



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5. Describe briefly urban social problems in India.



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

- 26.1 (i) hilly (ii) Backward
(iii) Their own (iv) Little
- 26.2 (i) Bhil
(ii) Kond
(iii) Andaman Island
(iv) Mina, Rebari, Dang
- 26.3 (i) monetary economy
(ii) Cultivating without plough in a terrace by clearing the plot.
(iii) Because the syllabi and time is not according to their culture and need.
(iv) Lack of money
- 26.4 (i) agricultural
(ii) Lower
(iii) Less developed
(iv) Caste
- 26.5 (i) non-agricultural
(ii) anonymity
(iii) monetary
(iv) heterogeneity
- 26.6 (i) 10,00,000
(ii) Breaking down of primary group behaviour.
(iii) Poverty in villages pushes one to town in search of employment.
(iv) Heavy population.