

given up their traditional occupation. As early as 1950, F.G. Bailey observed in a village situated in a relatively backward state like Orissa, "Not every person works at his traditional occupation. The distillers do not touch liquor. The Knod potters (?) do not know how to make pots. The fishermen do not fish. The warriors are cultivators. Everywhere there is a scope for practising a hereditary occupation not all members of caste engage in the work ". In the 1950s, Kathleen Gough also observed a similar pattern in Tamilnadu. She noted, "The caste community is no longer homogeneous in occupation and wealth, for caste is today a limiting rather than a determining factor in the choice of the occupation. Exactly half of Kumbarpettai's adult Brahmins are now employed in towns as Government servants, schoolteachers or restraint workers. Of the remainder, some own up to thirty acres of land, others as little as three. One runs a grocery store and one a vegetarian restaurant. Among the non-Brahmins, the fisherman, toddy-tapers, Marathas, Kallans, Koravas and Kuttadis have abandoned their traditional work ". Village studies carried out in the fifties and sixties from different parts of the country bear out the same trend. And, diversification of occupation in non-farm sector has increased within most of the castes with the spread of the green revolution.

But there are still several Jatis whose members have more or less similar economic condition. One can find such instances among several Scheduled Castes and numerically small other backward castes. Such castes have still less than 10 per cent rate of literacy and all the households depend on manual labour for their livelihood. On the other hand there are number of castes which are internally stratified. There are three types of economic differentiation within different castes: (1) A caste characterised by sharp polarisation; (2) A caste having a majority of members from upper strata; (3) A caste with a majority members belonging to poor strata. Rajputs and Thakurs of Rajasthan, UP and Gujarat fall in the first category. A few households own large estates and factories and a large number are agricultural labourers. Most of the households of the several upper castes such as Brahmins, Baniyas, Kayasthas are well off. On the other hand a large number of the Backward castes have overwhelming majority households who are small and marginal farmers, tenants and agriculture labourers. Economic stratification affects their cohesiveness on political issues. Dominant stratum projects its interests as the interests of the caste; and gives it priority while bargaining with the government.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the main features of caste?

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2) What is the relationship between caste and land ownership in rural India?

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3) Give example of one caste showing intra-stratification.

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4) What is the difference between social caste and political caste?

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## 22.8 PRESSURE GROUP: CASTE ASSOCIATIONS

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Numerical strength of a group is important in a democratic polity. All the Jatis do not have equal numerical strength and spread in a geographical region - village, cluster of villages, taluka or district. A few are very large, some are small and some are minuscule. Some are concentrated in a village/taluka and some are scattered in four to five households in a village. Numerically large Jatis have an edge over others in political bargaining with the government and political parties. Jatis confined to endogamous character alone cannot muster a very large number at district levels and beyond for political activities. Some of the leaders of such Jatis form caste associations called Sabha or Sangam consisting of cluster of Jatis having similar social ranking in a region. A few caste associations are also consist of multi -castes having different social ranking in traditional order. They may be called caste "federation".

It should be remembered that caste association is not the same as caste panchayat or council. Generally the office bearers of caste council enjoy hereditary position. This is not the case with association. Often the latter has written constitution specifying power and responsibilities of different office bearers. The former has judicial authority dealing with ritual and social aspects related to marriage, divorce and other family disputes of the members. Its decisions are binding to all caste members. Caste associations carry out economic, educational and political programmes. All caste mates are not members of the Sabhas. The decisions of the Sabha are not binding on all caste members. It is not so with caste panchayat. In that sense caste association is closer to voluntary organisation. Many caste associations though hold an objective "to promote and protect the interests and rights of the community," do not necessarily directly involve in electoral politics. Some caste associations are active in electoral politics at one time or another. Rudolph and Rudolph call the participation of caste associations in politics as "the democratic incarnation of caste". Kothari calls it "democratisation" of castes.

The history of caste associations goes back to the late 19th century, though their number has increased after Independence. They are found in all states. Let us take a few illustrations. As the Government decided in the early 1880s to debar Kulmis as Kulmis of Uttar Pradesh from being recruited in the police service. The government servants belonging to Kurmis formed the "Sardar Kurmi Kshatriya Sabha" in 1884 to protest against the decision. Another example can be cited of Nadars of Tamilnadu. In order to enhance their economic development, the wealthy Shanars of Tamilnadu formed the Nadar Mahajan Sangam in 1895. In Gujarat, the Rajputs after independence

having lost political power as rulers and ownership of land under land reforms realized a need for a larger numerical support base, as they constituted only 4 per cent of the population. Some of the political aspirant Rajputs formed Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha. The caste organisation embraced various Jatis of Kolis who aspired Kshatriya status. Caste pride and sentiments were invoked through various ways among the Rajputs and the Kolis as the Kshatriyas brethren. Caste associations make representation to the government demanding educational facilities, land ownership and its distribution, government jobs etc. for their caste members. Some of them submit memoranda or organise public meetings demanding infrastructure facilities like irrigation, electricity, loan and subsidy for fertiliser for agriculture development.

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## 22.9 POLITICAL PARTIES

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Several castes join together and launch movements. Non-Brahmin movement in Tamilnadu and Maharashtra are the examples. Jyotirao Phule started Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873 challenging Brahminical hegemony. In Tamilnadu several peasant castes such as Vellala, Gaunda and Padayachi, trading castes such as Chetri, artisan castes - Tachchan (Carpenter), Kollan (Blacksmith), and Tattan (Goldsmith), individually and jointly initiated non-Brahmin movement. The movement followed several caste associations such as Parayan Mahajan Sabha, Adi-Dravin Mahajan Sabha in the 1890's. In 1916 the Non-Brahmin manifesto was brought out highlighting dominance of the Brahmins in government services and injustice to non-Brahmins who constituted a vast majority. The formation of the Justice party followed in 1916. The party sent a delegation to England in 1919 to present the non-Brahmin case before the joint Parliament Committee which was responsible for preparing the Government of India Bill. DMK is its offshoot. Two factions Vanniyaakkula Kshatriya Sangam of the Nadars formed Tamilnadu Toilers' Party and Commonwealth Party and fought the 1952 elections. They then bargained with the Congress for positions in the state cabinet. Scheduled Caste Federation was formed in the forties by Dr. Ambedkar and the Republican Party formed in 1956 by Dalit leaders. They primarily remained the parties of and by the Dalits. Jharkhand Party formed by Adivasi leaders of Bihar, has primarily remained a party of Adivasis. Bahujan Samaj Party launched by Kanshiram is a party of Dalits aiming at forming alliance of Dalits, minorities and OBCs.

After Independence some caste associations were formed with political objectives to compete in elections. In Gujarat some of the leaders of the Kshatriya Sabha contemplated in the early fifties to form the party of the Kshatriyas. They soon realised that they could not muster enough support to contest elections only on the strength of the Kshatriyas. Similarly, political elite of the Kurmis, Yadavas and Koeris formed the Bihar State Backward caste Association in 1947 to contest elections. The plan did not take-off thanks to the resistance of the Congress leaders belonging to these castes.

Such caste associations are asserted with different leading political parties to see that their caste members get party tickets in elections. These parties initially resisted such pressures because of the counter pressure from the dominant castes that controlled the party. The latter accused the former as castiest or communal. But as the competition among the parties intensify and as the caste association successfully mobilised the members for political activities, all parties began to woo leading aspirants of the caste who could mobilise caste votes. Such political aspirants join different political parties. As they are primarily interested in gaining political positions for themselves rather than serving social or ritual interests of the caste, they either launch a new association or split the existing one. For them caste association is among several instruments to gain political power.

Some of the political parties identify with certain castes for nomination of the party candidates and mobilisation in elections. Bha:atiya Kranti Dal evolved an alliance of