
UNTT 26 TRIBES SOCIAL STRUCTURE - II

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26.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you should be able to

- discuss the composition of a group
- discuss how a tribe is divided into groups and further into smaller units like clan, family

- outline status and roles that different kin have at different times in the development of the domestic group
- discuss the major changes in recent times.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

In unit 25, we indicated the general features of social structure of tribes in India. Now we give our specific observations on the social structure of selected tribes.

In this unit we are going to discuss the internal features of the social structure of the Indian tribes. This we will discuss under the following headings: Habitat, Groupings, Family, Marriage, Kinship, Political and Ritual Authority. Finally, we will also briefly deal with recent changes. Since economy is an important factor, which enables people to meet their material needs and form some organisation to facilitate production, distribution, we will select a tribe from each group representing a major economic category. We select one tribe each from food gatherers and hunters, shifting cultivators, pastoralists and settled agriculturists. The groups we have selected are the Cholanaicken, the Khasi, the Toda, and the Mullukurumba. By discussing social structure of these tribes, we hope that you will get an idea of the internal features of tribal social life in India.

26.2 INTERNAL FEATURES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

All human groups have a tendency to demarcate themselves from others, as if making an imaginary boundary around them. This establishes their identity. In this the name of the group, the place/region it acquires for its habitation, its racial and linguistic features, customs and beliefs are important. The groups of these units acquire their identities, and in the process of growing up acquire statuses, roles, rights and obligations.

The family is the basic unit in all human societies, its nature may be different. Marriage is the starting point of redistribution of productive resources (who will own land, cattle and other wealth). Similarly, rules of reproduction (the persons with whom marriage is possible and with whom it is strictly tabooed) bring about changes in jural status of the spouses. A woman after marriage may move to her husband's house whereas her husband may acquire unrestricted rights over her sexual and economic services. This phase of the family begins with marriage and will expand when the children are born to them. The dispersal of the family begins with the marriage of the eldest and will complete with the marriage of the youngest child. The final phase begins when the heir in the family takes over the family responsibility and it ends when both parents die. This cycle of the family augmentation and depletion repeats over generations and is an ongoing phenomenon.

In this process of transformation the members of the group generate forces and values. The younger generation in the process of growing up may rebel and may like to change the arrangement. So there may be frictions among the people belonging to different generations. This friction may bring change in the social structure. This is the dynamic concept of social structure.

Formation of the family also indicates which relatives get what status, and what sorts of roles are given to them and what generally is expected of them. For example, in many societies, the responsibilities given to father's brother are different from mother's brother. Generally, most societies make a distinction between consanguineous (established through blood) and **affinal** (established through marriage) relatives.

Further, distinctions are based on sex, age and generation. Some relatives are put into such category with whom no sex relations can be established. Transgressing this rule would be considered incestuous. There may be some relatives with whom marriage is prescribed or preferred. There are some relatives with whom contact, oral communication or even sight has to be avoided. This is a relationship of avoidance. In many communities the relationship between father-in-law and daughter-in-law is of this type. There are some relatives with whom one has joking relationship or of easy familiarity. The relationship between a man and his elder brother's wife in many communities is of this type.

The economic, political, ritual rights are also associated with the development of family. Every generation when it reaches maturity must gain possession of the right to use and dispose of the reproductive resources. Thus, there is a built-in tension within the family and it intensifies as the members start coming of age. The force that it generates is channelised, controlled, and diffused in a variety of ways by different communities. The essential feature is that this force rises and diminishes with the augmentation and depletion of the family cycle. We will now discuss these aspects of social structure in relation to each of the selected tribes. We begin with the Cholanaicken of Kerala.

26.3 FOOD GATHERERS AND HUNTERS: THE CHOLANAICKEN

There are very few communities in the world today who subsist by food gathering and hunting alone. Such people do not have any knowledge of agriculture, do not domesticate any animal and generally do not import food by barter, trade or service. In order that such people are able to survive and lead their own way of life, they must inhabit a generous natural environment. The Cholanaicken of Nilambur valley, Ernad taluk, Malapuram district, Kerala (see Map) is one such group. In 2001 its total population was 205.

26.3.1 Habitat

The valley inhabited by the Cholanaicken is at an altitude of 400 feet above sea level. The rainfall is heavy ranging from 200 cm to 406 cm. The valley is covered by evergreen well preserved forest. The valley is dotted with streams and rivers.

The Cholanaicken usually live either on the banks of these rivers or in the caves. During rainy season they move away from the riverbanks. The rivers provide them water and fish. They protect them from wild animals and are used for demarcating their territories in relation to other Cholanaicken. Figure 26.1 shows the location of Cholanaicken habitat.



Fig. 26.1: Kerala: Location of the Cholanaicken Habitat

26.3.2 Groupings

The Cholanaicken inhabiting the valley are divided into ten bands. Each band is identified with the territory in which it moves for its subsistence. The territory of the Cholanaicken is known as *tсенman*. The limits of *tсенman* are marked by hills, rivers, trees, rocks, etc. A Cholanaicken does not encroach into the territory of another for collection of any sort of forest produce. If this rule is transgressed knowingly or unknowingly, they think the spirits that guard their territories will give appropriate punishment to the culprit. However, the Cholanaicken have the right

to visit the territory of their neighbours as a guest on reciprocal basis. On such visits a guest is allowed to collect food and hunt and is also given food by each family in the territory he is visiting. He is also given gifts in the form of food when he departs. Such visits and gifts not only reinforce the mutual ties and ensure cohesion but also are very much helpful when the resources in one territory get depleted or a person is disabled. A *tсенman* may have two or more families in it related to each other. Territorial rights are inherited by sons from their fathers. Women move to the territory of their husbands. Thus a territory consists of people who are related to each other from father's side. The members of *tсенman* share many things in common like the resources of territory, the caves etc., and stresses and strains of living in an environment which may be bountiful but difficult. Each *tсенman* has a leader called *tсенmakkaran*.

The Cholanaicken bands move from one place to another in their territories for gathering food, hunting, fishing and collection of other minor forest produce. They also move to seek shelter in more secure caves and to protect themselves from wild animals and for social intercourse with other Cholanaicken of their territory and members of other territories. The food gathering activity is carried on round the year but their movement varies from season to season.

26.3.3 Marriage and Family

Pre-marital sex is allowed in the community but prohibited within the same territory. Apparently there is no formal marriage ritual but when the couple has sex and lives together and there is no objection from the community then such a union is recognised as that of husband and wife. They form family and raise their children. Generally such unions are formed between the members of neighbouring territories but care is taken to avoid such relatives with whom sex relations are prohibited. Although the men among the

Cholanaicken enjoy higher status, the consent of the woman is necessary to form a union. If she is willing, she indicates by accepting gifts from the man trying to woo her and elopes with him and eventually moves into the territory of her man. The approval of the community of the union is deemed to have been obtained when they are allowed to return to the camp and live along with others, and exchange food and gifts with other members. If there is any objection to this union the kinsmen of the girl bring the girl back to their territory. If for some reason she is dissatisfied with the man, she returns things that she had received from the man as gifts and the union is considered as broken. Such men and women are free to seek their partners afresh. **Monogamy** is the general rule among the Cholanaicken. The Cholanaicken prefer marriage with mother's brother's daughter. The Cholanaicken encourage widows to remarry.

Activity 1

Name another tribal group, which does not observe formal marriage ritual. Take help of video programmes for the first elective course of B.A. (sociology) at IGNOU for identifying such a group. Describe the procedure for marriage in this group.

A separate hearth emerges in the camp and a new family is formed when a couple starts living together in a camp with others. This unit like others is a unit for procreation, recreation and socialisation of children when born. This unit like others has to maintain itself by gathering tubers, roots, hunting, fishing and collection of

minor forest produce, which they have to share with other members of the camp. The division of the work in the family is clear. Collection of food articles and minor forest produce is done by men and women. But fetching water, collection of firewood, and cooking food and taking care of infants are the jobs of women. Hunting, making of baskets and instruments are the jobs of men. Also all exchanges and religious performances are done by men.

26.3.4 Sharing

Mutual sharing of food articles among the Cholanaicken is an important mechanism by which the cohesiveness of the members of a camp is demonstrated and relations across the group are reinforced. This way the whole community of the Cholanaicken gets connected.

A portion of the material, which a Cholanaicken family gathers and hunts, is given to each of the family in the camp. When the food is cooked in the evening after they return from their collection, equal portion of the food is given to each family in the camp. Thus, there is a multiple give and take of raw and cooked food among the families of a camp. This is a daily routine and followed methodically. This reciprocal exchange of raw and cooked food works alright as long as the number of families in a camp does not exceed four or five. If it does, a new camp is formed. The daughter's husband has the right to collect food from the territory of his father-in-law.

26.3.5 Authority

The eldest male member of the family is the head. He organises the gathering and collection of minor forest produce and is responsible for all exchanges. He plans for fishing and hunting. He commands respect from the other members of the family and has the authority to allocate work.

Each territory has a chieftain. His decisions are carried out by the members of the territory. It is believed that the chieftain has supernatural powers. He is the sole custodian of the idols of the deities of the group. The deities represent the spirit of the ancestors. He also acts as diviner. The Cholanaicken believe that diseases are caused either by such acts, which violate their customary norms, or if someone has invoked evil spirits. Only the diviner can give the cause and also the remedy for the problem. The chieftain, through this belief system, is able to maintain social control among the members of his territory and also between the members of the territories.

26.3.6 Recent Changes

Other groups and the contractors in search of minor forest produce are increasingly infringing the Cholanaicken area. Increasingly the Cholanaicken work more for collection of minor forest produce they exchange for food items. This has reduced their leisure time and is also responsible for increasing friction among them. The authority of the chieftains has decreased. The Cholanaicken women have been increasingly enticed by outsiders particularly by the members of a neighbouring tribe. As a result of these changes the existence of the Cholanaicken itself is threatened.

Check Your Progress I

i) Distinguish, in six lines, between joking and avoidance relationship.

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ii) Write, in seven lines, how the groups among the Cholanaicken are formed.

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iii) Give reasons, in four lines, why the Cholanaicken move from one place to another.

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iv) Write, in six lines, how people get married among the Cholanaicken.

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v) What is the social significance of sharing of raw and cooked food among the Cholanaicken? Use four lines for your answer.

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vi) What is the authority of chieftain among the Cholanaicken? Use five lines for your answer.

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26.4 THE SHIFTING CULTIVATORS AND MATRILINEAL: THE KHASI

The Khasi are a Mongoloid population inhabiting the east and west Khasi hill districts of the State of Meghalaya in North-East India. They are well known as they practice the **matrilineal** system. Though all the Khasi share fundamentally the same language and social structure there are some sharp differences regarding their culture, dialect, economy etc., between the Khasi of different regions. Here, the discussion is limited to the Khasi inhabiting the plateau of the west Khasi hill district of Meghalaya.

26.4.1 History and Habitat

The Khasi Hills generally remained outside the influence of Assam and Bengal. They were governed by a number of petty native chiefs; there were 25 chiefs ruling the Khasi Hills when the British administration took over. Since then significant changes have taken place in the area. It was opened up for military, trade and commercial activities. The missionary activities too were intensified. Churches, schools and hospitals were opened up. The majority of the Khasi were converted to Christianity. The Khasi got their separate state, Meghalaya, in 1972. Their population is above 4 lakhs. Introduction to potato cultivation in 1830, brought many changes in the Khasi area. Potato cultivation to some extent replaced shifting cultivation. But is still practised in the Khasi region as well as other parts of Meghalaya.

The Khasi habitats are located on hilly tracts, slopes and valleys. The rainfall is heavy to very heavy. The region is rich in fauna and flora. The houses in Khasi villages form agglomeration. These agglomerations of houses develop as a result of the social custom. The elder sisters of the family are hived out of the ancestral homes. In the past they made their houses near about their ancestral homes but now in other villages also. The Khasi also practice village endogamy as a result of which most of one's **agnatic** and affinal kin are found in the village itself.

Activity 2

In a map of India, show the location of the state of Meghalaya and indicate the area of the Khasi hills in this state.

26.4.2 Grouping

The Khasi population consists of a number of *kur*, matrilineal clans whose members consider themselves to be descendants from a common ancestress. The members of the same *kur* have a common *mawbah* (grave stone) in which the bones of all the dead members belonging to the *kur* are buried. When a *mawbah* becomes full or some of its members move away to a considerable distance, a branch *mawbah* is found, creating a new *kur*. Thus, in course of time every *kur* throws up branches. Each branch has a *kur* name but can be grouped with a major *kur*. Members of a *kur* do not marry among themselves and also in the branch *kur*. The members of a *kur* are distributed over a wide area cutting across territories of different regions. Consequently, a village may be composed of people belonging to several *kur*. The Khasi have another unit called *kpoh*; its members are descendants of one great grandmother. Such a group of matrilineal kin is generally confined to one domestic family or a group of families linked by direct extension to the main family.

26.4.3 Family, Marriage and Kinship

The Khasi kinship organisation makes a clear distinction between matrilineal kin called *kur*, and non-matrilineal kin called *kha*. The Khasi have numerous prohibitions on marriages between kin on both paternal as well as maternal sides. The first and second parallel cousins are avoided. There is no preference for marriage with cross cousin (e.g. mother's brother's daughter) but such marriages are allowed.

The most important functional descent unit is called *iing*. It is the lowest unit of clan segmentation. It is smaller than *kpoh*. An *iing* may have people of two to four generations, sometimes it may have only mother and child. It is the *iing*, which arranges marriages. Husbands are excluded from wife's *iing* though they share a common household. The members of an *iing* consist of a set of strictly matrilineal descendants, who have a common right over the ancestral property, are subject to a common authority and practice some joint rituals.

The *iing* membership is through mother. The custodian of the property is the mother and her right is inherited by the youngest daughter while authority to manage property and to maintain the tradition is in the hands of mother's brother. His right is inherited by his sister's son. Thus the Khasi clearly separate the right to own property from the right to authority. A man continues to be a member of the same *iing* all his life. A woman if she is not heiress will branch off after her marriage and though she herself will continue as a member of her mother's *iing*, the third generation from her will form an independent *iing*.

The marriage may be arranged by the elders but generally the young men and women select their partners. The marriage is solemnised provided they do not belong to prohibited alliances.

26.4.4 Residence Pattern

Traditionally a man after his marriage stays in the mother's house and visits his wife's house at night. That is for a man there is two residences one of his sister and other of his wife. Thus, a domestic unit generally is composed of a woman, her children, woman's unmarried sisters and brothers including widows or divorcees. This form of residence, in course of time, may change. A husband may move into

the house of his wife. If he becomes a widower he may move into his sister's house again. These are the different stages in the development cycle of the domestic unit of the Khasi. If the marriage is with non-heiress that is, not with the youngest daughter, the couple may stay in the wife's house till the first child is born. Thereafter they may form a household of their own.

26.4.5 Authority: Political and Ritual

Traditional political structure of the Khasi is elaborate. It functions at four levels namely clan, village, *raid* (a group of villages) and state. Each level has a head and a council where issues are discussed before a decision is taken. The responsibility at lower level is to allocate clan lands for cultivation and to settle disputes.

Several *raid* together form a state. The head of the state is called *Syiem*. *Syiem* is elected by an electoral college consisting of the functionaries of clan *durbar*, village *durbar*, and *raid durbar*. *Syiem* is expected to protect his people as a mother would protect her children. The British had curtailed the power of the various traditional bodies. In independent India the region under Meghalaya comes under sixth schedule of Indian constitution which provides several provisions and safeguards for the region as well as traditional institutions.

26.4.6 Recent Changes

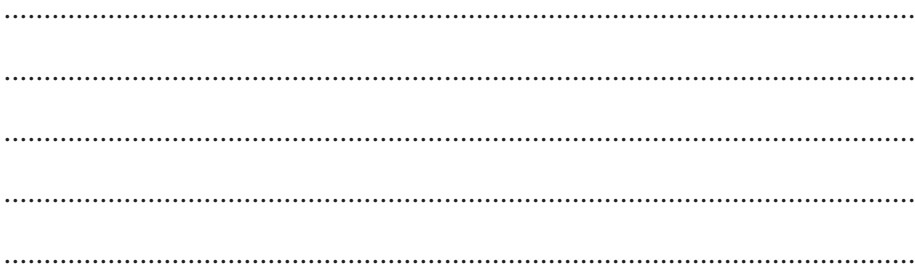
The Khasi area has been increasingly opened up for trade, commerce and industry. The economy too is changing. The literacy is high both among men and women. The most important change that is taking place is conversion of the public land into private. This has many far-reaching consequences. Family structure too is changing. More and more people are trying to form their own nuclear families. The authority of maternal uncle has become weak. Men are more busy with their own families rather than their sister's. Though the women still hold on to their rights, they are facing challenges and getting influenced by the patrilineal system of their neighbours. The Indian Constitution has strengthened the autonomy of the region as well as of the tribe.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Explain, in six lines, the terms kur, kpoh and iing.

- ii) Who has the right to property among the Khasi? Use one line for your answer.

- iii) Describe, in six lines, the traditional political units among the Khasi.



26.5 THE PASTORALIST AND POLYANDROUS: THE TODA

The Toda have attracted worldwide attention. In the literature they are known as one who practice adelphic **polyandry**. Under this system a woman on her marriage automatically becomes the wife of all the brothers of her husband. Physically the Toda look different from other neighbouring population. Toda men and women have their own distinctive hairstyles. Both men and women drape themselves in colourful embroidered cloaks. They are perhaps the only tribe who claims to be vegetarians. Their subsistence is dependent on their buffaloes. It has been established that they are an ancient population and belong to the region of their habitation.

Activity 3

Describe the practice of adelphic polyandry and give examples of its practice in India on the basis of your knowledge of Indian myths, tribal groups and literature.

26.5.1 Brief History, Habitat and Relations with Other Populations

The Toda inhabit the higher altitudes of the Nilgiris of South India. For centuries the Toda, the herdsmen of the buffalo, have shared the mountains with the Kota, who are cultivators, leather workers, smiths and potters and the Kurumba and the Irula, the forest dwellers who practice hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation. While the Toda and the Kota inhabit the higher regions, the Irula and the Kurumba live on the lower slopes. Sometimes before the beginning of 17th century, these four indigenous people were joined by Kannada speaking people called the Badaga. They came to the Nilgiris in several waves from the plains of Mysore region. They were agriculturists. These five Nilgiri peoples, the Toda, the Kota, the Kurumba, the Irula and the Badaga had ritual, economic and social relationships among themselves and developed a certain degree of mutual dependence. Though they exchanged goods and services among themselves, a certain amount of hostility too had developed there among them, on account of their different interests.

After the British entered into the Nilgiris in early nineteenth century, economic, demographic and social situation there changed rapidly. They started plantations there. They brought many more people to the Nilgiris from the plains. The market forces too entered. All these had far reaching impact on the indigenous people of the Nilgiris. The traditional ties between them also broke down.

The traditional Toda settlements look unique with half barrel shaped houses and dairy buildings. Their dairies are in fact their temples. The Toda life revolves around

the care and milking of buffaloes. Their dairy and buffaloes are considered sacred. The most important feature of their social structure is separation between pure and impure. There are different degrees of sacredness of their buffaloes, dairies and priests. The Toda try to maintain appropriate correspondence between them. In their settlement too, the underlying principle of separation of pure from impure is reflected. The domestic portion of the settlement is clearly separated from their dairies and buffalo pen. According to the Toda tradition no woman can be around their dairy or buffalo pen; and no Toda man who has not been properly ordained can enter into their dairy. The principal requirements for a Toda settlement are good pastures, a forest in the neighbourhood and water streams nearby.

The traditional Toda houses are built of mud, stone and cane. The half barrel shaped houses have a very low entrance. Inside the house, front and rear portions are clearly demarcated. The front portion is considered pure and rear as impure. Only in the front part of the hut churning of the milk to produce butter and buttermilk can be done. Since churning of milk is exclusively men's work, the front part is associated with men. The rear portion where the hearth is located is the women's area. The women are principal sources of impurity in the Toda society.

26.5.2 Grouping

The Toda are divided into two endogamous sub-groups called *Tartharol* and *Teivaliol*. The most striking contrast between the two Toda sub-groups is that the *Tartharol* people alone can own the most sacred dairy temples but only *Teivaliol* men can be the priests of those temples. However, *Tartharol* claim superiority over *Teivaliol* people. No *Teivaliol* women can visit a *Tartharol* settlement but no such restriction is imposed on *Tartharol* women. Each Toda sub-group is divided into a number of exogamous clans called *mod*. At present there are ten such clans among the *Tartharol* and five among the *Teivaliol*. These clans too are stratified.

Women on marriage are incorporated into their husbands' clans. Since infant marriage is the ritual requirement of the society, the incorporation of the girl in her husband's clan takes place in infancy. Young girls continue to live with their parents until their maturity but they are the members of their husbands clan. If she dies her funeral rites will be performed by her husband's family and not by her father.

26.5.3 Family, Kinship and Marriage

The lowest unit of their social structure is the family. The people who usually occupy a single dwelling hut are husband, wife and unmarried children. It may also include the widowed parent of the husband and sometimes the family of a married son who has not yet been able to build his own house. In the past, the Toda domestic unit was a polyandrous family; two or more brothers married to the same woman lived together with their children. Although their polyandrous system is fading away, a married man or woman is allowed a sexual partner in opposite sub-group. Such partners have some ritual role to play particularly on the death of the partner.

In the Toda society biological paternity has no importance. Paternity for social purpose is recognised when a man performs bow and arrow ceremony in the seventh month of the pregnancy of his wife. Thereafter, all the children born of that woman would be considered his unit until someone, usually his brother would perform another bow and arrow ceremony. The children born after that would be considered his brother's.

Siblings of parents belonging to same sex, that is father's brothers and mother's sisters, too are considered as parents. The behaviour towards parents is of respect and humility. When a woman meets her father or mother, actual or classificatory, she bows to them. In sharp contrast are the parent's **siblings** of opposite sex that is mother's brother and father's sister. The behaviour towards them is not that of restraint. The term used for them is the same as one would use for one's father-in-law and mother-in-law. Cross cousin marriage is preferred among the Toda.

The procedure for establishing a marriage begins with the boy's parents looking for a suitable girl. Their first preference will be the daughter of a mother's brother or a father's sister. Once the choice has been made on an appointed day, parents of the boy bring gifts for the girl before an assembly of the Toda men and women. After some discussions a person may announce that the proposal has been agreed upon by the concerned parties. The marriage rituals are initiated in infancy and completed at maturity when husband takes his wife from her parental home to his own parents.

Funeral rites of the Toda are elaborate and bring into focus the complex interpersonal, inter group relations and also the organisations of their dairies. All his relatives must assemble when a Toda man is near death. After the death, the corpse is washed and is draped in a new cloak. A day of the funeral is fixed for the funeral. During this period it is the duty of all relatives to pay their respect to the deceased. On the day before the funeral, men of the opposite sub-group bring wood for the pyre. *Bier* must also be prepared by the men of the opposite sub-group.

The animals sacrificed on funeral are female. If the funeral is for a man, both temple and domestic buffaloes will be sacrificed but for a woman only domestic ones. Custom not only decides what kind of buffaloes are to be sacrificed but also who is to give them. One buffalo must come from son-in-law of the deceased. The principle is that this buffalo must come from a man who has taken his wife from the clan of the deceased. The other buffalo is of the deceased. But now there are restrictions on the number of buffaloes that can be sacrificed.

At intervals, before the funeral the men of the opposite sub-group dance and sing in honour of the deceased. Finally, it is the members of the opposite sub-group who catch the sacrificial buffalo and bring it for sacrifice. The dairy buffalo is sacrificed by the principal dairyman, the other buffaloes by the appropriate category of people.

26.5.4 Authority: Political and Ritual

The Toda society does not have a headman except at the level of the household where the eldest male member has the authority. The Toda have a strong council, which ensures that norms of the society are observed, disputes are settled and actions taken against those found guilty. The Toda council meets frequently. Fines and punishments are imposed and quickly realised too. If the issue is not decided in one *noyam* (the Toda council) it will be in another *noyam* but it gradually emerges. Leaders are generally older and influential people. The issues nonetheless are thoroughly discussed. A man of the sub-group opposite to that of the guilty party announces the judgment of the *noyam*.

26.5.5 Recent Changes

In spite of significant changes in the economy, demography and ecology of the Nilgiri region, the Toda have remained consistent. They continue to remain dependent upon their buffaloes. Though some of them have acquired land, they do not practice agriculture themselves. They lease out their lands to other agriculturists. Their traditional relationship with other tribal groups of the region has almost broken down. Their internal division has remained the same but the endogamous character of the 'sub-group' is coming under challenge by young reformist group of the Toda.

They have also tried to stop the buffalo sacrifice, as well as child marriage as part of reform but so far the efforts have not been successful.

Their *noyam* continues to be a powerful body upholding the traditions of the community and punishing the deviants.

Check Your Progress 3

i) Describe, in four lines, the most characteristic features of the Toda.

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ii) Explain, in five lines, how paternity is decided among the Toda.

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iii) Write, in four lines, on the institution of noyam among the Toda.

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26.6 THE SETTLED AGRICULTURISTS: THE MULLUKURUMBA

The Mullukurumba are one of those tribes who have known settled cultivation for a long time. They have been successfully combining cultivation of paddy with other means of food procurement. Like many other food producing communities they have to share a part of surplus production to meet their other needs. The

Mullukurumba interact with the groups inhabiting their region and continue to live on the edge of the forest. With other groups in the past their relationship was hierarchical, based on the notion of 'purity'. They also got some services from a few functionary castes of the region.

26.6.1 Brief History and Habitat

One of the theories is that modern day Kurumba are the descendants of the ancient Pallava, who were once powerful throughout southern India. Recent researches suggest that the indigenous population of the Wynad participated in rebellions against the British.

The Mullukurumba inhabit the hilly tracts of Wynad in Kerala and Gudalur *taluk* of the Nilgiris in Tamilnadu. The Mullukurumba settlements are known as *veedu*, no other tribe or caste live in their settlements. The Mullukurumba settlements have a striking appearance by which they are easily identifiable.

For centuries the Mullukurumba share their region with the Chetty, the Uralikurumba, the Katu Naicken and the Paniya. Each one of these groups lives in exclusive settlements. Of these, the Uralikurumba, besides practising agriculture were expert basket makers, potters and blacksmiths. These groups exchanged services and goods among themselves and were tied in a hierarchical relationship. The Chetty were at the top, followed by the Mullukurumba. At the bottom of this hierarchy were the Paniya. This hierarchy is clearly reflected in their day to day relationship and also on ritual occasions.

In the past the Mullukurumba were mostly dependent on agriculture, fishing and hunting. Now hunting has been totally stopped. Those who have been successful in retaining their land, practice intensive cultivation of paddy, cash crops like pepper, tea and coffee. A good number of the Mullukurumba now work as wage labourers on the fields of others and on plantations.

26.6.2 Grouping

The Mullukurumba population is distributed in an area of about 20 miles in radius. According to the Mullukurumba, their population is distributed into four regions. The boundaries of these regions for them are well demarcated. The function of this territorial division is now notional.

The Mullukurumba are strictly endogamous. They have four exogamous matri clans. The clan title is inherited through mother. Now these clans have only ritual importance. They also have patrilineal clans. For a marriage one must avoid patri clan as well as matri clan. The property is inherited from father to son.

26.6.3 Family, Kinship and Marriage

The domestic unit or the family of the Mullukurumba generally consists of husband, wife and their children. But this unit in course of time grows and it may also have married sons. In such cases, often the married sons have a separate house to sleep in. The girl on marriage moves to the house of her husband, which always is in another village because the Mullukurumba observe village exogamy. The growing domestic unit breaks into nuclear units when there is more than one married son in the unit or when the grandparents die. Thus, the Mullukurumba domestic unit goes through the process of augmentation and depletion by natural events like birth and death, and social events like marriage and partition. The breakaway domestic unit

among the Mullukurumba is formed in the same village. Another house structure comes up in the village. There is very little out migration of the Mullukurumba males from their respective villages. In the family the eldest male member has the authority. He makes most of the decisions. The eldest son gets more importance than others in the unit. The daughters-in-law of the unit are given complete charge of the work of the house such as washing, sweeping, bringing water, husking grains, cooking etc. They also work in the field or may go for wage earning. The Mullukurumba girls of different ages in a village from approximately seven years onwards sleep in their age-grade dormitories. Generally, there are separate dormitories for girls of the age group seven to eleven, twelve to sixteen and seventeen and above.

Avoidance and Joking Relationship

The relationship between the daughter-in-law and her real or classificatory father-in-law or husband's real or classificatory elder brother is that of avoidance. But her relationship with her husband's younger brother is friendly. They can cut jokes with each other. A woman has relationship of avoidance with her younger sister's husband. While a man avoids talking to his younger brother's wife, he has joking relationship with his wife's younger sisters. People who stand in avoidance relationship to each other are said to belong to *theenda kulam* (untouchable clan).

Father's brothers are given status and respect, almost equal to that given to father. If one's father is not alive, he has to take guidance from his father's brother. The term used for them is *peyappan* or *eayappan*, meaning elder father or younger father. Similarly mother's sisters too are treated with respect as one would treat one's mother. The terms used for them are *peyamme* and *eayamme* meaning elder mother and younger mother. Interestingly their husbands are called by the same terms as for one's father's brothers. *Chetan*, *eniar*, *eattathi* and *eniathi* are terms used for a large number of classificatory kin. *Chetan* means elder brother, *eniar* younger brother, *eattathi* elder sister and *eniathi* younger sister. These terms are used for one's brother and sister as well as one's cousins, parallel or cross. The cousins have equal status; difference is made on the basis of age.

Marriage

The Mullukurumba maintain endogamy. They observe clan and village exogamy. Kin are also avoided in choice of marriage. Earlier marriage by elopement and marriage by force were more popular among them. In the marriage by elopement, the consent of both the boy and girl was there whereas in the other i.e. marriage by force, the boy kidnapped the girl from the pond or riverside when she was bathing or washing clothes. The former type is called *odi koodal* (run and join) and the latter, *atru kadavu* (transporting from the riverside). The arranged marriages are referred to as *veetu kadavu* (through the house). *Atru kadavu* is so much popular among them that they have introduced a mock flight in arranged marriages too. In this mock flight the groom's party pulls one hand of the bride, uttering the words "Come to our *veedu*, we have a big river there for fishing and bathing. Leave this place". The bride's party resists them by pulling the bride to their side holding her other hand.

There is another form of marriage prevalent among the Mullukurumba. It is locally called *mukka vazhi* (three-fourth of the way) in which a bride, who is a widow or a divorcee is met by groom's party not in her house but somewhere half way between her house and the groom's house and taken to groom's house.

The Mullukurumba have a system of taking bride price and this amount has been increasing. Divorces are not frequent in their society. Remarriages of widows and widowers are allowed.

Activity 4

Like the Mullukurumba have different terms for various forms of marriage in their society, look for similar terms for different forms of marriage in your society. Make their list and describe each form in one line.

26.6.4 Authority: Political and Ritual

The Mullukurumba have an elaborate structure of the council of elders. The chief of this council used to be a Nair but that office has become defunct. But the structure below him headed by the Mullukurumba is intact. A group of the Mullukurumba villages are under a Mullukurumba chief called *moopan*. There are 13 such chiefs who form the council of elders. The offices are hereditary but the chief of the council of elders is the eldest person. The functions of the council are to settle disputes between the Mullukurumba and to see that the traditional rights are maintained. The chief has a variety of roles in social and religious functions of their respective villages. Authority of the elders is recognised by the Mullukurumba at every level-household, village and inter-village.

The Mullukurumba observe various life cycle rituals of which birth, puberty, marriage and death are most important. In these rituals various kin, the chief of the village, and people of other castes and tribes have roles. In birth, puberty and death, they have rituals to remove pollution. On such occasions they have to collect *ennai* (ritual oil) from a Nair barber. On childbirth and attainment of puberty of a girl, they have to collect *mathu* (ash and water) from a Nair washerman to remove the pollution.

These rituals promote social solidarity among the Mullukurumba and show internal division of privileges and responsibilities and their relations with other groups.

26.6.5 Recent Changes

The Mullukurumba continue to remain a closely-knit group but on account of various economic, social, political changes, there has been some dispersal in their population. The authority of the *moopan* is now basically confined to religious spheres.

The hierarchical relations with neighbouring groups have broken down. The Nair barbers and the Nair washermen do not provide the ritual services any more.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) Name, in two lines, the groups living in the neighbourhood of the Mullukurumba.
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- ii) Write, in six lines, on joking and avoidance relationship among the Mullukurumba.

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iii) Explain, in six lines, the different ways by which a person may marry among the Mullukurumba.

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iv) Describe, in six lines, the structure of the council of elders among the Mullukurumba.

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26.7 LET US SUM UP

At whatever level the human groups may be, they tend to establish their identity by having a name, inhabiting a particular territory and by observing certain customs and practices. Such defined groups internally are further divided into sub-groups. Basis of this division may vary from group to group but one of the important functions such divisions perform is to regulate marriages within the group. Marriage is the most important event in the family. It ensures reproduction of human beings in an ordered manner and thereby continuation of the group. Developmental cycle of the family shows that it goes through the process of augmentation and depletion by natural events like birth and death and social events like marriage, separation, etc.

Family members have certain statuses and roles, which are passed on from one generation to the other. This process of transformation generates force and may cause friction among different categories of people. A group may have a formal or

informal authority, which may regulate the affairs of the group and exercise social control.

These various structural issues have been examined by taking the example of a hunting and food gathering group, a shifting cultivator and matrilineal group, a pastoralist and polyandrous group, and settled agriculturist group.

The Cholanaicken, do not produce any food. They depend upon forest for their subsistence. Territory is the basis of the division among their society. Though they do recognise close blood relatives among whom marriage is tabooed, concept of clans has not emerged among them. Division of labour is based on sex. The status of women is lower than men. Sharing of resources and food is the most important principal of their society. It ensures survival of the group and brings cohesiveness among the Cholanaicken. The Chief among them has the power of divination and derives his authority from supernatural sources. His son inherits his authority.

The Khasi produce their own food. They are matrilineal and have a well-developed concept of clan in which the immediate descendants are distinguished from the distant to make the concept functional. They have clearly divided the roles among the kin. The youngest female in the family has the power, the maternal uncle has the authority. Women have a higher status. They allow cross cousin marriage but village endogamy is preferred. The Khasi have elaborate authority structure from village to the state level. Progressively the secular and sacred roles of the authority are separated from one level to the other.

Though the Toda do not produce their own food they have been a part of the regional network in which goods and services with others are exchanged. They are divided into two endogamous groups. These groups remain within the fold of the Toda society as they have many reciprocal roles to perform. The clan organisation is well developed. Their notion of hierarchy is based on the concept of purity and pollution. Based on this concept they grade their dairies, buffaloes and other activities. The status of women is lower than men though they practice polyandry. In kinship structure like many other groups they make clear distinction between the siblings of the parents of the same sex and siblings of the parents of the opposite sex. The Toda do not have an institution of chief but their council is powerful.

The Mullukurumba produce their own food. Like other food producers they have been a part of a regional network in which goods and services are exchanged. They have territorial and also well developed clan divisions. The former has become notional. Their relationships with other people and within the community are guided by the concept of purity and pollution. They maintain village exogamy. They do not allow marriage between cousins, parallel or cross. They do not make distinction as the Toda do between the siblings of the parents of same or opposite sex. The authority of the male as the head of the family is clearly established. They too have the system of chiefs, which is well developed, but their authority is much eroded in the present context.

This presentation clearly brings out the distinction in social structure between the food procurers and food producers. However, each case has its own unique features. It is clear that both the Toda and the Mullukurumba are nearer to caste people.

26.8 KEYWORDS

Affinal	Those who are related through marriage, like husband and wife, one's wife's or husband's relatives
Consanguinious/agnatic	Those who are related through blood like parents and their children, brothers and sisters etc
Matriliny	A system in which the descent is traced through female line
Monogamy	A marriage in which a husband has one wife only
Polyandry	A marriage, in which a woman has more than one husband, they may be related to each other as brothers or may not be. If they are related it is called adelphic polyandry
Siblings	Children of the same parents

26.9 FURTHER READING

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26.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) When contact, oral communication or even sight are forbidden between some relatives, we say that there exists the relationship of avoidance between them. In some societies, the relationship between father-in-law and daughter-in-law is of this type. With some relatives, one has, on the other hand, relationship of easy familiarity. This is called joking relationship. In many communities the relationship between a man and his elder brother's wife is of this type.

- ii) Group formation among the Cholanaicken is based on territory. They are divided into ten bands. Each band is identified with a territory in which it moves for its subsistence. Such a territory is known as *tseman*. Each *tseman* may have two or more families in it related to each other. As territorial rights are inherited by sons from their fathers, a territory consists of people related to each other from father's side.
- iii) The Cholanaicken move from one place to another for (a) gathering food and other minor forest produce, hunting and fishing (b) seeking shelter to protect themselves from wild animals (c) establishing social intercourse with other Cholanaicken of their territory and members of other territories.
- iv) There is no formal marriage ritual among the cholanaicken. A woman accepts the gifts from the man trying to woo her and elopes with him. She eventually moves to his territory. The man and the woman live and exchange food and gifts with other members of the group. They are then considered married.
- v) Sharing of raw and cooked food among the cholanaicken demonstrates cohesiveness of the members of a camp. Exchange of food articles across the groups reinforces the connectedness of the whole community of the cholanaicken.
- vi) Chieftain of a territory has the authority to take decisions, which are carried out by the members of the territory. He acts as a diviner to give cause and remedy of diseases. He maintains social control among the members of his territory and between members of the territories.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) A matrilineal clan whose members consider themselves to be descended from a common ancestress is called *kur*. Descendants of one great grandmother are grouped in a unit called *kpoh*. Such a matrilineal kin group is generally confined to one domestic family or a group of families linked by direct extension to the main family. The lowest unit of the clan segmentation is called *iing*. It is the most important functional unit. It may have people of two to four generations, sometimes, it may have only mother and child. Marriages are arranged by *iing*, members of which consist of a set of strictly matrilineal descendants, who have a common right over the ancestral property, are subject to a common authority and practice some joint rituals.
- ii) Right to property is inherited by the youngest daughter from her mother.
- iii) Political units among the Khasi are clan, village, *raid* (a group of villages) and state. Each of the four units has a head and a council where issues are discussed and a decision is taken. At clan level the clan lands are allocated and disputes are settled. Several clans form a village and several villages form a *raid*. A state is a cluster of many *raid*. The head of the state is called *Syiem* who is elected by the functionaries of clan *durbar*, village *durbar* and *raid durbar*. *Syiem* protects his people as a mother protects her children.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Main characteristic features of the Toda are:
 - a) adelphic polyandry, b) their own distinctive hairstyles and colourful embroidered cloaks, (c) vegetarianism, (d) buffalo dependent subsistence.

- ii) The Toda do not recognise the principle of biological paternity. For social purposes paternity is recognised when a man performs a bow and arrow ceremony in the seventh month of the pregnancy of his wife. After one ceremony all the children born of that woman are considered his children, until another man (usually a brother) would perform a bow and arrow ceremony. The children born after that would be reckoned as the other man's children.
- iii) The Toda have a strong institution of *noyam*, which is a council to ensure that norms of the society are observed. This council also settles disputes and takes action to punish those found guilty. Leaders of the *noyam* are generally older and influential people.

Check Your Progress 4

- i) The groups living in the neighbourhood of the Mullukurumba are the Chetty, the Uralikurumba, and the Katu Naicken.
- ii) Avoidance relationship among the Mullukurumba exists between the daughter-in-law and her real or classificatory father-in-law or husband's real or classificatory elder brother. People who stand in such a relationship to each other are said to belong to *theenda kulam* or untouchable clan. Joking relationship among the Mullukurumba exists between a woman and her husband's younger brothers. Similarly, it also exists between a man and his wife's younger sisters.
- iii) Earlier, marriage by elopement and marriage by force were common among the Mullukurumba. The former type is called *odi koodal* (run and join) and the latter, *atru kadavu* (transporting from the river side). The arranged marriages among the Mullukurumba are called *veetu kadavu* (through the house). The marriage of a widow/divorcee is called *mukka vazhi* (three fourth of the way).
- iv) The Mullukurumba have an elaborate structure of the council of elders. It's chief used to be a Nair. But now this office has become defunct. But the composition of the council below this office remains intact. A group of Mullukurumba villages organise under a Mullukurumba chief, called *moopan*. Thirteen such chiefs form the council of elders. The office of the chief is hereditary while the office of the chief of the council is according to seniority in age.