

# *The People*

## The People

**T**he Republic of India is a country in South Asia which comprises the majority of the Indian subcontinent. India has a coastline which stretches over seven thousand kilometers, and shares its borders with Pakistan to the west, the People's Republic of China, Nepal, and Bhutan to the northeast, and Bangladesh and Myanmar (formely known as Burma) on the east. On the Indian Ocean, it is adjacent to the island nations of the Maldives on the southwest, Sri Lanka on the south, and Indonesia on the southeast. India also claims a border with Afghanistan to the northwest. India occupies an area of 32,87,263 sq kms and is located between latitudes  $8^{\circ}4'$  to  $37^{\circ}6'$  north and longitudes  $68^{\circ}7'$  and  $97^{\circ}25'$  east and measures  $\sim 3,214$  km from north to south and  $\sim 2,933$  km from east to west. Total population of India is 1,065,070,607 where state of Uttar Pradesh is the most populated state with a total population being 100 millions. Politically India is divided into 28 States and 6 union territories (**Figure 3.1**).

It is the second most populous country in the world, with a population of over one billion, and is the seventh largest country by geographical area. It is home to some of the most ancient civilizations, and a centre of important historic trade routes. Four major world religions: *Hinduism*, *Buddhism*, *Jainism* and *Sikhism* have been originated from India. The official name of the country, India is derived from the Old Persian version of *Sindhu*, the historic local appellation for the *river Indus*. The Constitution of India and general usage also recognizes *Bharat* (Hindi) which is derived from the *Sanskrit* name of an ancient Hindu king. A third name, *Hindustan* (Hindi: *land of the Hindus* in Persian, has been used since *Mughal* times, though its contemporary use is unevenly applied due to domestic disputes over its representative as a national signifier.



Figure 3.1: Geographical map of Republic of India

### Brief History of India

Stone Age rock shelters with paintings at *Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh* are the earliest known traces of human life in India. The first known permanent settlements appeared 9,000 years ago and developed into the *Indus Valley Civilisation*, which peaked between 2600 BC and 1900 BC. It was followed by the *Vedic Civilisation*. From around 550 BC onwards, many independent kingdoms came into being. In the north, the *Maurya dynasty*, which included the *Buddhist* king Ashoka, contributed greatly to India's cultural landscape. From 180 BC, a series of invasions from Central Asia followed, with the successive establishment in the northern Indian subcontinent of the Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian kingdoms, and finally the *Kushan Empire*. From the 3rd century onwards the *Gupta dynasty* oversaw the period referred to as ancient India's "Golden Age". In the south, several dynasties including the *Chalukyas*, *Cheras*, *Cholas*, *Kadambas*, *Pallavas* and

*Pandyas* prevailed during different periods. Science, art, literature, mathematics, astronomy, engineering, religion, and philosophy flourished under the patronage of these kings.

Following the Islamic invasions in the beginning of the second millennium, much of north and central India came to be ruled by the *Delhi Sultanate*, and later, much of the entire subcontinent by the Mughal dynasty. Nevertheless, several indigenous kingdoms remained or rose to power, especially in the relatively sheltered south. During the middle of the second millennium, several European countries, including the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British, who were initially interested in trade with India, took advantage of fractured kingdoms fighting each other to establish colonies in the country (Majumder 2001). The English managed to thwart the other colonisers and came to rule much of the country by 1840. After a failed insurrection in 1857 against the British East India Company, popularly known in India as the First War of Indian Independence, most of India came under the direct administrative control of the crown of the British Empire.

### **India a land of diversity**

Survival of human population in Indian sub-continent since last ~60,000 years has been originated from different corners of the world. A large number of migrations from different parts of the world have created an extensive range of diversity in India. Geography, Language, religion, and caste are major determinants of social and political organisation within the highly diverse Indian population.

Ethnically, Indians belongs to different races with major ethnicity being Indo-Aryan (72%) followed by the Australoids or Dravidians 25% , Mongoloid 2% and traces of Negroid (1%) found in the island regions of Andaman and Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu.

Linguistically, India is home to two major linguistic families, those of the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian-derived languages. Apart from these two linguistic families, Austro-Asiatic languages are spoken by a large number of tribal populations in India, and some groups of the north-eastern India also speak various Sino-Tibetan languages. The Indian constitution recognises 18 official languages

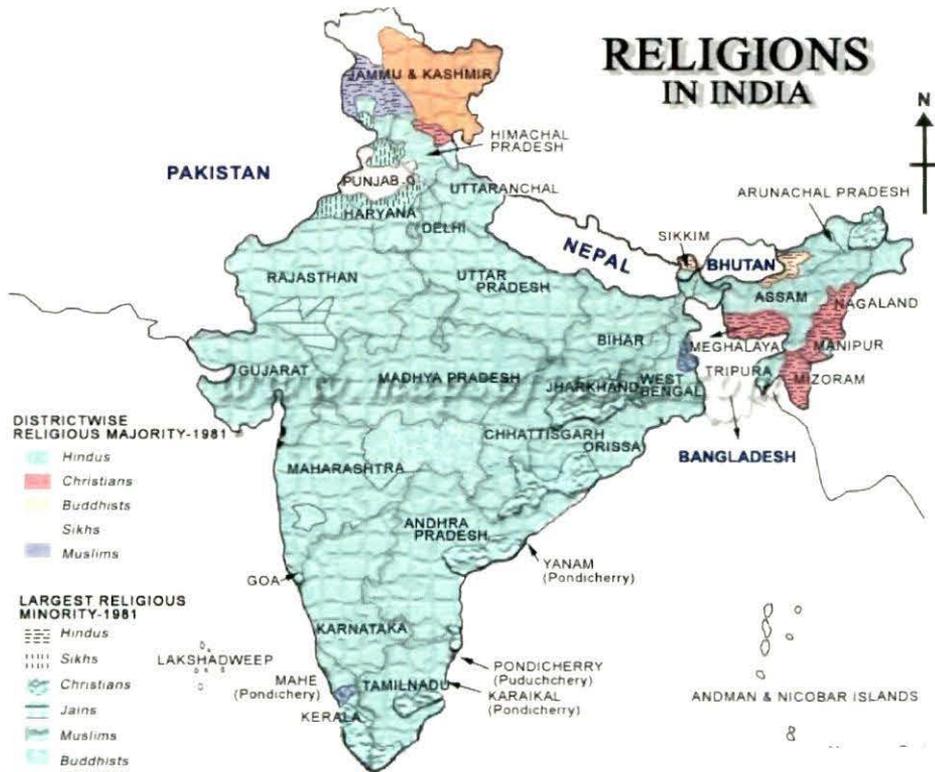
(Figure 3.2) with Hindi (an Indo-Aryan language) being the official language of Republic of India. Hindi is spoken all over north-central and western India. Two classical languages native to the land are *Sanskrit* and *Tamil*. Apart from the official languages there are more than 875 dialects spoken throughout the country.



Figure 3.2: Languages spoken in different parts of India

Socially Indian society is fragmented into different non-Tribal and Tribal groups. Tribals are considered to be the original inhabitants of India with majority of them being Austro-Asiatic. They constitute nearly 8% of total Indian Populations rest of the non-Tribal populations follows different religions where Hinduism is followed by ~75% of Indians. India is also home to the second largest population of *Muslims* in the world (13.4 %) after Indonesia. Other smaller religious minorities include *Christians* (2.33%), *Sikhs* (1.84 %), *Buddhists* (0.76 %), *Jains* (0.40 %), *Ayyavazhi* (0.12 %), *Jews*, *Parsis*, *Ahmadi*, and *Bahá'ís*. Hindus are found all over India. However, some of the religions have geographical majorities like *Muslim*

constitutes ~70% of Jammu and Kashmir populations and Sikhs forms ~80% of Punjabees (Figure 3.3).



**Figure 3.3: Geographical distribution of different Religions in India**

Modern India is divided into twenty-eight states and six Union Territories and the National Capital Territory of Delhi. India is the second most populous country in the world, with only China having a larger population. India's literacy rate is 64.8 % with 53.7 % of females and 75.3 % of males being literate. The sex ratio is 933 females for every 1000 males. Work Participation Rate (WPR) (the percentage of workers to total population) stands at 39.1 % with male WPR at 51.7 % and female WPR at 25.6 %. India's median age is 24.66 and has a growth rate of 22.32 births per 1,000.

Although 80.5 % of the people are Hindus, India is also home to the second largest population of *Muslims* in the world (13.4 %) after Indonesia. Other smaller religious minorities include *Christians* (2.33%), *Sikhs* (1.84 %), *Buddhists* (0.76 %), *Jains* (0.40 %), *Ayyavazhi* (0.12 %), *Jews*, *Parsis*, *Ahmadi*, and *Bahá'is*. India is home to two major linguistic families, those of the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian-

derived languages. The Indian constitution recognises 23 official languages. *Hindi* along with English is the languages used by the Central Government for official purposes. Two classical languages native to the land are *Sanskrit* and *Tamil*. The number of mother tongues in India is as high as 1,652. Language, religion, and caste are major determinants of social and political organisation within the highly diverse Indian population today.

India is home to several major rivers such as the *Ganga (Ganges)*, the *Brahmaputra*, the *Yamuna*, the *Godavari*, and the *Krishna*. The rivers are responsible for the fertile plains in northern India which are conducive to farming. The Indian climate varies from a tropical climate in the south to a more temperate climate in the north. Parts of India which lie in the *Himalaya* have a tundra climate. India gets most of its rains through the monsoons.

India's entire north and northeast states are made up of the *Himalayan Range*. The rest of northern, central and eastern India consists of the fertile *Indo-Gangetic plain*. Towards western India, bordering southeast Pakistan, lies the Thar Desert. The southern Indian peninsula is almost entirely composed of the *Deccan plateau*. The plateau is flanked by two hilly coastal ranges, the *Western Ghats* and *Eastern Ghats*. The *caste system* in India is an important part of ancient Hindu tradition and dates back to 1200 BCE. The term caste was first used by Portuguese travelers who came to India in the 16th century. Caste comes from the Spanish and Portuguese word "casta" which means "race", "breed", or "lineage". Many Indians use the term "*jati*". There are 3,000 *castes* and 25,000 *sub castes* in India, each related to a specific occupation e.g.

*Brahmin-Priest, Kshatryas—warriors, Vaishyas—traders, Shudras—menial jobs*

Beyond these four castes there are the *panchamas* (or fifths). These groups were regarded as impure due to their traditional handling of impure substances and therefore were "Untouchable" (*Dalit*) outcastes till a few decades ago. Caste not only dictates one's occupation, but dietary habits and interaction with members of other castes as well. Members of a high caste enjoy more wealth and opportunities while members of a low caste perform menial jobs.

The caste system has existed in India from time immemorial. The word "caste" is supposed to translate the *Sanskrit* word "*Varna*" but sometimes erroneously as "*jati*" which is actually a sub-caste in a local region. The sub-caste (*jati*) belongs to a particular "*varna*". *Jati* designates specialized hereditary functions to an endogamous community locally. Given the long history of humans on the Indian sub-continent and the semi-independent development of numerous socio-cultural groups, the population came to be differentiated by endogamous and occupational groupings, perhaps from pre-historic times. These were and still are subgroups (sub-castes) belonging to the four *Varnas* as shown above. By the time we see the development of a pan-Indian cultural notion of *Varna* essentially that of being a "Hindu", the sub-caste *jatis* had proliferated which led to the complexity of India's social structure.

Hinduism came to be "*Varnashrama Dharma*", the order of (four) castes and (four) stages in life. In pan-indian terms, each local *jatis* were associated with a particular *Varna* in pan-indian sense. The people belong to a *jati* or sub-caste are being identified by their social function/occupation locally and not determined by their economic status i.e, identified by their *jati*-dharma or *jati*-function/occupation. Perhaps the most interesting point about this caste structure is not that it is hierarchical (which it is without a doubt) but rather that the hierarchy disperses only social value but not necessarily economic power. Local *jati* sub-castes have also been largely endogamous except when different *jati* occupational groups merged their *jati* identification within a *Varna*. Hence, the proliferation of endogamous groups leading to *jati* diversity within each four *Varna*, as too the similarities across them.

Much attention has been paid to the limitations on marriages across *varna/jati* categories. Again it is instructive to note that many influential Brahmins, presumptive superiors in the traditional social ordering, had marriage relations that spanned *Varnas*. The *Varna* and *jati* system do not appear to have been the product of a conquering or dominating socio-economic class. Both systems have survived and indeed identification of *jati* has strengthened, long after the supposed era of "Brahmin dominance". The system is instead an implicit negotiation between India's numerous hereditary occupational (and infrequently ethnic) endogamous groups. The

jati system at any given point in time is a point of equilibrium between these elements of society both at the local and pan-Indian level.

In the beginning the caste system was not a strict system and people could move from one *Varna* to another. Indologists give different dates to this period of change. Some claim the change occurred around 500 B. C. and other claim 500 A. D. Until then, communities and even singular person moved from one *Varna* to another *Varna*, because of their desire to adopt different occupations. There were some kings who belonged to *Kshatria* (warrior castes) and changed their status to become religious *Brahmans*. There were also who changed their status to become warriors. And even after the caste system was organized in a strict manner there were many communities who did not always follow their status occupations. There was a case of a Jat that lost its high status because they did not profess the profession worthy of their *Varna*. The *Kayastha* of east and north east India originally belonged to the *Kshatria Varna* (warrior caste). Some time in the past among warrior's communities, there developed a bureaucratic unit whose job was writing and listing war events and they were called *Kayasthas*. Because these unit members were not warriors, they were excluded from the *Kshatria* status and were given a lower status. But the *Kayasthas* even today claim *Kshatria* status.

### **Matting pattern among Hindus**

As discussed above one of the basic elements of the Indian social structure is the caste system. The institution of caste is so elaborate and pervasive that no aspect of social life in India remains untouched by it. The multiplicity of caste can be illustrated by the fact that **Hutton (1961)** and **Jacob Pandian (1978)** has enumerated about 3000 castes in India. Caste has been defined by **Karve (1961)** as "an endogamous group or an extended family where in the members are related to one another either by blood or by marriage." This definition shows the close interrelationship between the institutions of caste and marriage in India (**Vinay Bahl 2004**). Marriage is an imperative duty for the Hindu. However, the mate selection for Hindus is a difficult task as there are a number of customary restrictions attached to it, as is implicit in the customary terms like endogamy, exogamy, hyper gamy,

prohibited kin marriage, virgin marriage and other marriage customs and restrictions enumerated by Blunt (1931). These customs have been defined by Blunt as under:

1. The custom of endogamy, which compels him to marry within a certain group. This group may be either the caste or sub caste, to which he / she belong.
2. The custom of exogamy, which forbids him to marry within a certain group. The exogamous group is a subdivision of the endogamous group.
3. The custom of Hindu table of prohibited kin; various castes have various such tables. In some it replaces the restriction of exogamy, in some it reinforces them. The effect is generally to forbid marriage with certain kinds of relatives who are not included in the exogamous groups.
4. The custom of hyper gamy, by which a bride may not marry a man of lower social rank than herself.
5. The custom of virgin marriage, which forbids a man to marry a widow.

Endogamy has been regarded as the most important attribute of the caste system by most of the authors. **Westermarck (1891)** has regarded endogamy as the essence of the caste system. (**Das et al., 1987, 1996**) The principle of endogamy compels a Hindu to marry within his own caste or sub caste. **Blunt (1931)** has indicated that save for certain quite exceptional castes the restriction of endogamy is universal in India. Each caste/ sub caste is further divided into mutually exclusive subgroups known as *gotras* whose members are forbidden to marry within the subgroups (Principle of exogamy).

Until recently breaches of caste endogamy were punished by excommunication from the caste, which was regarded as a social punishment for the violation of this principle. In recent times a trend towards inter caste marriages has been discerned by various authors. **Kapadia (1995)** has shown that willingness on the part of parents to give their children in marriage outside their own caste groups is on the increase. However, he has remarked that the change is in behavior and not in ideology. Some of the recent empirical studies conducted in Punjab have also reported few transformations in this traditional attribute of the caste system. **Bhatnagar (1972)** has shown that although education has not apparently made an

impact on the principle of endogamy but the attitudes of educated persons towards intercaste marriages are quite liberal. It was also reported that willingness of inter caste marriage has tended to increase in rural areas which are in proximity of towns or cities.

Despite such trends which indicate a relaxation in the marriage customs, the statistical estimates of the actual intercaste marriages are not very high. Empirically these deviations from the norm represent just a small fraction of the total number of marriages contracted. From the genetic stand point these departures from the norm can hardly be expected to alter markedly the constitution of gene pools. The magnitude of the genetic disturbances caused by intercaste marriages may attain a greater significance, if and when the trends which have just set in become more pronounced.

### **Uttar Pradesh**

Uttar Pradesh is one of the largest states of India with an area of 294,413 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 166,052,859 million with 87466301 males and 78586558 females. The male: female ratio is 916:1000 respectively. Uttar Pradesh is the most populated State of India. Demographic profile of India and Uttar Pradesh shown in **Table 3.1**

Uttar Pradesh has 70 different districts. Lucknow is its capital, which spreads over an area of 2528 sq. kms. It lies between parallels 26°30' and 27°10' north latitude and 80°34' and 81°12' east longitude. Detailed map of Uttar Pradesh with various districts is shown in **Figure 3.4**.

In the present study we have chosen three ethnic groups for studying the genetic makeup of these populations. First group comprised of caste populations i.e. *Kayastha*, *Mathurs*, *Vaishyas* and *Rastogies*. Second group is of Muslims i.e. *Shia* and *Sunni* Muslims and in third group we have taken North Eastern populations, which comprises of two tribal populations like *Lachung* and *Mech* while another is caste population i.e. *Rajbanshi*. The brief description of each of these groups is given below.

Table 3.1: Demographic profiles of India and Uttar Pradesh

	India	Uttar Pradesh
Population (2004 est)	1,027,015,247	166,052,859
Percent Population Increase (1991-2001)	23.9	25.8
Density (Population /Km <sup>2</sup> )	324	689
Percent Urban	26.1	19.8
Sex Ratio (no. of males per 1000 females)	933	916
Percent 0-14 Years	36.3	39.1
Percent 65+ Years Old	3.8	3.8
Percent Schedule Castes	16.7	21.0
Percent Schedule Tribes	8.0	0.2
Percent Literate	65.8	57.36
Exponential Growth Rate	2.14	2.27
Total Fertility Rate	3.6	5.1
Infant Mortality Rate	79	98

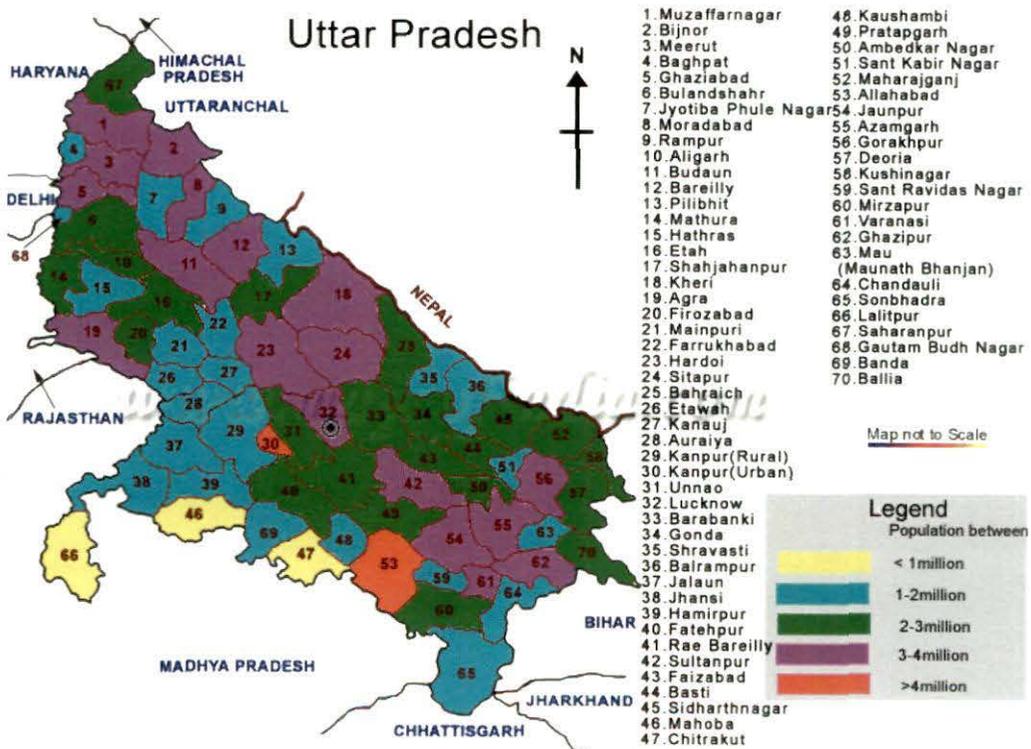


Figure 3.4: Geographical and Population Map of Uttar Pradesh

## Kayastha

### Origin of *Kayastha*

About the name of this community there is some difference of opinion. Mr. Colebrooke gave as the popular derivation the Sanskrit *kaya-sanstitah*, "staying at home," in reference to their sedentary habits. The caste themselves derive their name from *kaya-sitha*, situated in the body; incorporate, with reference to the legend of their descent.

Like all people who are on their promotion, the *Kayastha*, are particularly sensitive as to any imputations on the purity of their descent and it is from every point of view, unless to revive a troublesome controversy. Risley remarked that "the physical characters of the Bihar *Kayastha* afford some grounds for the belief that they may be of tolerably pure Aryan descent, though the group is doubtless a functional one recruited from all grades of the Aryan community."

The *Kayastha* of northern India has recently shown an inclination to admit them to full rights of communion. Risley writes: putting the tradition aside, and looking, on the one hand, to the physical type of the *Kayastha*, and, on the other, to their remarkable intellectual attainments, it would seem that their claim to Aryan descent can not be wholly rejected, though all attempts to lay down their genealogy precisely must necessarily be futile. It appears to be at least a plausible conjecture that they were a functional group, developed within the Aryan community, in response to the demand for an official and literary class, which must in course of time have arisen. This class would naturally have been recruited more largely from the peaceful *Vaisyas* and *Sudras* than from the warlike *Kshatriyas*, while the *Brahmins* would probably have held aloof from it altogether.

In *Padma Puran* (one of the ancient Hindu literature) we read: *Brahma* having remained in meditation for a while, there sprang from his whole body a male of godlike form bearing an inkpot and a pen. This being was named *Chitragupta*, and he was placed by *Brahma* near *Dharmaraja* to register the good and evil actions of all sentient beings. He was possessed of supernatural wisdom, and became the partaker of sacrifices offered to the gods and fire. As he sprang from the body of

*Brahma*, he is said to be of the *Kayastha* class. His descendants are *Kayastha* of numerous gotras on the face of the earth.

### Subgroups of Kayastha

The *Kayasthas* are divided into twelve endogamous sub-castes. These are *Srivastva*, *Bhatnagar*, *Saxena*, *Amisht or Anvasta*, *Aithan*, *Asthana*, *Balmik or Valmiki*, *Mathurs*, *Suryadhwaaja or Surajdhwaj*, *Kulsreshta or Kulasreshta*, *Karan or Karana*, *Gauda or Gaur* and *Nigam*, with a thirteenth known as *Unaya* or those of *Unao*.

### Mating Pattern

In the matter of intermarriage, *Kayasthas* follow the standard rule of exogamy based on the text of *Yajnavalkya* as expounded by the author of the *Mitakshara*, which bars marriage between *sapindas*, that is, who are within five degrees of affinity on the side of the mother and seven degrees on the side of the father. Among the sub-castes which still maintain the organization of local groups or sections (al), marriage can not take place between persons belonging to the same al; nor can a man marry a woman belonging to the al of his maternal grandfather or great-grandfather. Adult marriage is the rule, and infant marriage the exception, among most of the *Kayasthas*. Sexual license before marriage is neither recognized nor tolerated, and the parents and other members of a girl thus offending would be promptly ex-communicated. Polyandry is utterly prohibited, and polygamy, though allowed, is rarely resorted to unless the first wife be barren, in which case the stringent necessity of begetting male issue makes a second marriage permissible. Re-marriage of widows is absolutely prohibited. There is no legalized divorce, but if a wife commits adultery, she is at once put out of caste, and she can not eat or associate with any member of the community, such women can not, as matter of course, marry again.

*Kayasthas* follow the highest form of the eight kinds of marriage recognized by *Manu* in his Institutes that known as *Brahma*. The ceremony is performed according to the rules laid down in the *Sanskrit* treatise known as the *Vivaha Paddhati*, with *Vedic* language (*mantra*), as in the case of *Brahmans* and *Kayasthas* are Hindus, but belong to various religious sects: some are *Saivas*, some *Saktas*, and

some *Vaishnavas*. Some few are *Nanakshahis*, *Kabirpanthis*, or *Acharis*, or belong to the *Arya Samaj*. The fact of their belonging to different sects does not prevent them from associating freely as members of the same brotherhood. A man of the *Vaishnava* sect may marry a *Sakta* woman, provided the rules of exogamy are observed. Notwithstanding the jealousy with which they are regarded by their less astute neighbors, the social position of the caste is a high one.

### Occupation

Some historians hold the view that during the reign of the Mughals, a number of Hindus who were educated and endowed with sharp intellect attained administrative positions through rapid adaptation to the Persian language and culture of India's new rulers. These influential Hindus got together and formed a new caste known as *Kayastha*. Two other regional communities also lay claim to the name *Kayastha*. These are the *Prabhu Kayasthas* of Maharashtra and Bengali *Kayasthas* of West Bengal. They were also the 'writing-castes' in Maharashtra and Bengal, respectively, like the *Chitragupta Kayasthas* of North India

## Vaishyas

### Origin of *Vaishyas*

Third in the caste system (*Varna*), *Vaishyas* supposedly evolved from *Brahma's* thighs. The *Vaishya's* duty was to ensure the community's prosperity through agriculture, cattle rearing and trade. Initially it was imposed by the society that *Vaishyas* can learn *Vedas* but can not preach *Vedas*. Later, the *Shudras* took over agriculture and cattle rearing while the *Vaishyas* became traders and merchants.

From the end of the 4th century BC, as the country became politically stable, trade routes to previously uncharted areas developed. The merchant community was the first to benefit. Artisans formed guilds and co-operatives in the urban areas and guild leaders became important figures in society. Guilds also provided technical education, though formal education remained the monopoly of the *Brahmins*. As their economic power increased, they were expected to give alms to *Brahmins*, throw feasts for them, and donate generously towards the building of temples and shrines.

However, though they were "twice-born" (*Upanayanam*) and economically strong because they controlled commerce, *Vaishyas* were denied a high social status, for which they resented the upper castes. One expression of this resentment was their support of the anti-Brahminical sects that developed around the 6th century BC, like Buddhism and Jainism. Later, however, many influential *Vaishyas* were honored with titles like 'Nagar Seth' (chief merchant of the town) and 'Tazimi Seth' (privileged to wear an anklet in the king's presence and in royal durbars) Members of trading communities originate mostly from the West Coast and from Sind (in present-day Pakistan). They are commonly known as *banias*, a distortion of the *Sanskrit* word *vanik* meaning "trader". In southern India, the *Chettiars* and *Mudaliars* are prominent *Vaishya* communities, who have contributed to society by building hospitals, endowing universities and developing industries. While the fortunes of the other castes have fluctuated with politics and invasions, the *Vaishyas* alone have preserved their social and financial stability down the ages. Many of them have funded wars and political movements, notably *Seth Amirchand Daga* of Bikaner (Rajasthan), who is believed to have financed the British in the Crimean War. In the last century, some of the most prominent *Vaishya* merchants and philanthropists came from the region of Marwar (Jodhpur), Gujarat and Sindh. Many of them funded Mahatma Gandhi's freedom movement and then evolved into modern India's leading industrialists.

### **Matting Pattern**

Mating pattern among *Vaishya* is strictly regulated in a way which necessitates out breeding and permits marital exchange between and not within, a set of exogamous familial lines. There is persistent and rigid following of the 'sapinda' regulations in this group which regulate marriages within the caste group strictly avoiding consanguinity. The regulations prohibit marriage between individuals related through common male ancestor up to the 7<sup>th</sup> generation on father's side and fifth generation on mother's side.

## Mathurs

### Origin of Mathurs

According to Indian history *Chitrugupta* married *Irawati* and *Nandini*. The 12 *Kayastha* sub-castes are traced to his 12 sons, eight by *Irawati* and four by *Nandini*. *Mathurs*, *Gaurs*, *Bhatnagars*, *Saxenas*, *Ambhasths*, *Nigams*, *Karns* and *Kulshreshths* became the descendants of the eight sons by *Irawati*, whereas *Srivastavas*, *Suryadhwaajs*, *Asthanas* and *Valmiks* became the descendants of the four sons by *Nandini*. As time passed, the name *Chittagupta* got transformed into *Chitrugupta*. Historically *Mathurs* are subgroup of *Kayastha*.

### Subgroups of Mathurs

As regards the origin of the *Mathur* sub-caste of the *Kayasthas*, there is no manner of doubt that they are so called because their original home was Mathura, much in the same way as *Shrivastavas* are so called because probably their original home was *Shravasti* which was a town famous in *Buddhistic* history and as *Bhatnagars* are do named after *Bhatner*. It is noticeable that there is a class of *Brahmins* too who calls themselves *Mathurs* and trace their ancestry to Mathura. So too there are some Bengalis who are known as *Mathur Babus*. According to Pauranic tradition the eldest son of *Shri Chitrugupta* whose name was Charu took up his abode at Mathura ---and so his descendants came to known as *Mathurs*.

The *Mathurs* ruled over Mathura till Qutab-ud-din conquered it. The *Mathurs* are also said to have ruled *Ayodhya*. Later on, their descendants accepted posts of Dewan of the same area under the *Surya Vanshi* family and *Bundra Mathur* and his nineteen generations held the above mentioned posts. The downfall of *Ayodhya* commenced during the Dewanship of *Bal Pratain Mathur*, who took reins of the kingdom in his own hands. His rule stretched through ten generations, after which the reins passed to *Maharaja Daleep*. The kings who followed were *Raghu*, *Dashrata*, *Rama*, *Lakshmana*, *Bharata* and *Shatrughana*. The surnames that the *Mathur* frequently adopt are *Dayal*, *Lall*, *Chandra*, *Andley*, *Berni*, *Saharia*, and sometimes *Bahadur*. The *Mathurs* are subdivided into *als* and *gotras*. People belonging to the same *al* claim to have descended from the same immediate ancestor and share a common totem. *Gotra* is a larger group being composed of a number of *als*.

According to tradition, there were only eighty-four big villages in *Brij Bhoomi* - i.e. in the *Ilaka* of Mathura. It is probably on that account that there are eighty-four further sub-sects called *Allas* of the *Mathurs*. Although all these *Allas* no longer represent or indicate those eighty-four villages as their origin and have been considerably changed under various influences such as some peculiarity of the personages belonging to them, nevertheless it is an acknowledged fact that the number of these *Allas* is still reckoned as eighty-four. Out of the 84 *Allas* families belonging to only 25 *Allas* or *Khamps* are to be found in *Rajputana* and of only 13 in *Ajmer*. The genealogies of quite a large number of *Mathur* families of these parts are given in their history. What is noticeable in the accounts of these families is that several of them had come either from Mathura direct or from Delhi and nearly all of them belonged to the administrative services of the then rulers and held offices such as Diwans, Ministers, Secretaries, or *Kanungoes* etc. receiving shares of the profits of land. That the 84 *Allas* or sub-sections acquired their names after those of the villages or *mauzas* of their origin seems probable enough *Sahariyas* were so named because their original residence was a village *Sahar* which was not very far from Mathura; *Golghotia Alla* is most probably derived by metathesis from *Gokalotia* i.e., residents of *Gokal Narnolias* from *Narnole*, *Mahabani* from *Mahaban*, etc. Other influences, however, operated later on to change them beyond recognition

### **Mating Pattern**

The 12 sub-castes of the *Kayasthas* are not only endogamous subdivisions, but they also have exogamous divisions based on *als*. An *al* would refer to a distinguished ancestor or the place of origin or it could refer to a characteristic acquired during migration. Members of the same *al* are prohibited to inter-marry and hence *als* performs the same function that *gotras* do in other castes. *Mathurs* are divided into different *als* and members of these *als* are prohibited to marry among themselves. The most common *als* are *Saharia*, *Kataria*, *Kakrania*, *Dewariya*, *Dilwariya*, *Tawakaley*, *Rajauria*, *Nag*, *Galgotia*, *Sarwaria*, *Andley*(*Endlay*), *Ranoria*.

### **Occupation**

During the reign of the Mughals, a number of Hindus who were educated and endowed with sharp intellect attained administrative positions through rapid

adaptation to the Persian language and culture of India's new rulers. Ancient *Sanskrit* texts dating back to the pre-Mughal period, though, have references to *Kayasthas* and *Chitragupta*. The *Smriti of Yajnavalkya* describes the *Kayasthas* as writers, scribes and village accountants. The *Vishnu* and *Parashara Smritis* have also similar references to them, describing them as magistrates, judges and chief executive officers. In the *Garud Puran*, Chitragupta has been described as the giver of the script (*Chitraguptaya namastubhyam veda aksharadatre* — salutation to Chitragupta, the giver of the script). The *Rig Veda* enjoins a salutation to *Chitragupta* before offering sacrifice — *Sri Chitraguptaya vai namah*.

## Rastogies

### Origin of Rastogies

The *Rastogies* form an endogamous caste group concentrated around the indo-gangetic plain in North India. They are fair, handsome, of medium height and stocky build. The community is industrious and has done well in business. Generally they have been identified as *Vaishya* because of their traditional occupation in trade, in particular the money lending. This traditional occupation of *Rastogis* has identified them as of a particular *Varna* in the *Chatur Varna Vyavastha*, but a thorough probe into the community and its history, as also opinions from the established *Vaishya* or *Bania* caste groups reveal a contradictory status for them. While, the majority of the *Rastogies* They considers themselves as definitely of *Vaishya Varna*, a group of enlightened educated elite among them has been claiming a *Rajput* status for the caste. This trend of mobility from within is naturally sought to be substantiated with myths and traditions. What makes the situation more interesting is that certain higher castes consider *Rastogis* as belonging to lower caste group. However, this is contradicted in their behavior as they do not observe any dietary prohibition against the *Rastogies* and freely accept food and water from them. It is also noteworthy that the *Rastogis* wear the sacred thread after due performance of *Yagyopaweeet* ceremony just before the marriage, which is a typical *savarna* Hindu caste trait. The point which is important here is not what is thought about them in

caste ranking or in ritual purity scale, but what caste group genetic elements are represented in this group identified as *Rastogis*.

Lastly, the creation of Sudra from the feet symbolizes them as footman, thus their duties are to serve the above three Varnas. The traditional activities of these four Varnas namely *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Sudra* confirm the '*Chatur Varna Vyavastha*' of the society. In India, today, there are innumerable castes, all of which associate themselves with one or the other *Varnas* of the above system. There have been inter-mixtures at various levels which must have modified the genetic structure of these castes, sometimes resulting into the formation of other groups of subordinate rank. There are a few *jatis* however, which are not clearly assigned to one or the other *Varna*, in their case their *jati* status in the *Varna* frame is differently defined at different times by different people, e.g. such is the case with the *Kayasthas* and the *Rastogies*. It is difficult to say that how these groups have come to exist. May be they are the product of fission or fusion within and outside the caste level followed by isolation.

### **Subgroups of Rastogies**

The position of *Rastogis* in the Hindu society of today is not very clear. Conflicting claims regarding their place in the *Chatur Varna Vyavstha* have been made. In view of their anomalous position in the caste hierarchy, it seems essential that a brief survey with respect to their origin and distribution be made. An attempt has therefore, been made here to give an account of the community in terms of its origin, distribution and patterns of mating as prevalent in the society. This survey will enable us to formulate the problem in better perspective.

### **Matting Pattern**

Mating pattern among *Rastogies* is strictly regulated in a way which necessitates out breeding and permits marital exchange between and not within, a set of exogamous familial lines. There is persistent and rigid following of the 'sapinda' regulations in this group, which regulate marriages within the caste group strictly avoiding consanguinity. The regulations prohibit marriage between individuals related through common male ancestor up to the 7<sup>th</sup> generation on father's side and fifth generation on mother's side.

## **Indian Muslims**

The other two populations selected for the present study from North India are Shia and Sunnis which belong to the Muslim sect. Muslim influx and influence in India started almost at the inception of the religion. The traders from Arabia were frequent visitors to the Indian subcontinent even before Prophet Muhammad revealed the Koran. They brought the word of Muhammad to India in the 7th century and this resulted in some peaceful conversions of Hindus to Islam.

In 711, the Umayyad caliph in Damascus sent an expedition to Baluchistan (an arid region on the Iranian Plateau in Southwest Asia) led by a twenty-year-old Syrian Muslim chieftain named Muhammad bin Qasim, who conquered Sindh (presently a province of Pakistan bordering on Baluchistan, Punjab, and Rajasthan, India) in 712 AD. However, this event in history does not seem to have influenced India as much as expected. Beginning with the invasion of Mohammad of Ghazni in the 11th century, followed by a barrage of invaders from Persia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Northwest and Central Asia in the 11th and 12th centuries, a full force of Islam was thrust upon India. Spread of Muslims in India began with the "Slave Dynasty" of Turkic ruler but flourished all over India during the reign of Mughal Empire whose first ruler was Babur, King of Farghana (at present in Uzbekistan).

It took several centuries to finally spread Islam in all portions of India. Many Hindus were turned to Islam by laws favoring Muslims or by, others turned to Islam voluntarily. Most Indian Muslims who converted to Islam were Hindu and some of their ancestors embraced Islam under duress, although some did willingly or under the influence of laws favoring Muslims. There were also some converts who belonged to the ruling families of the different kingdoms of the region, many of whom were given little choice in the matter. The Muslim rulers of India also brought businessmen, traders, merchants and slaves from different parts of the world. Many of them married local Indians who converted them to Islam.

## **Present day Indian Muslims**

Today there are more than a quarter of a billion Muslims living in the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangla Desh). This amounts to more than a quarter

of the total Muslim population of the world. Muslims form about fifteen percent of the Indian population.

### **(1) Categorization of Indian Muslims**

The Muslims in India are categorized into two distinct classes based on their origins namely, Ashraf and Ajlaf. The Ashrafs are again grouped as *Sayyeds*, *Sheikhs*, *Mughals* and *Pathans*. The Sayyeds are said to be descendents of the Prophet and regarded in high esteem. The Sheikhs are of Arab descent and are next in line in prestige. The Mughals are descendents of the greatest Muslim rulers of India, the Mughals occupy third place. Pathans including fighters hail from the northwestern regions including Afghanistan and form the last group of Ashraf. The Ajlaf on the other hand are the Indian converts and are considered to be of common ancestry.

### **(2) Distribution of Muslims in India**

Muslims constitute 13.4% of Total Indian population (**Census, 2001**). They are found in all the states of India and are nearly 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the total population of Jammu and Kashmir, more than 1/4<sup>th</sup> of West Bengal and Assam and nearly 1/5<sup>th</sup> of population of Uttar Pradesh. Majority of the Muslim population is of Sunnis (~87%) and they are scattered throughout India. On the other hand, majority of Shiites are found in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Hyderabad and its adjoining regions.

### **(3) Distribution of Muslims in Uttar Pradesh**

Muslims constitute about 18.5% of the total populations of Uttar Pradesh and are found extensively in areas of Lucknow, Kanpur, Rampur, Hardoi, Saharanpur, Bahraich, Moradabad, Gorakhpur, Ghazipur, Mau, Allahabad, Mirzapur and other eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh. Among these Shiite Muslims are mainly found in Rampur and Lucknow divisions.

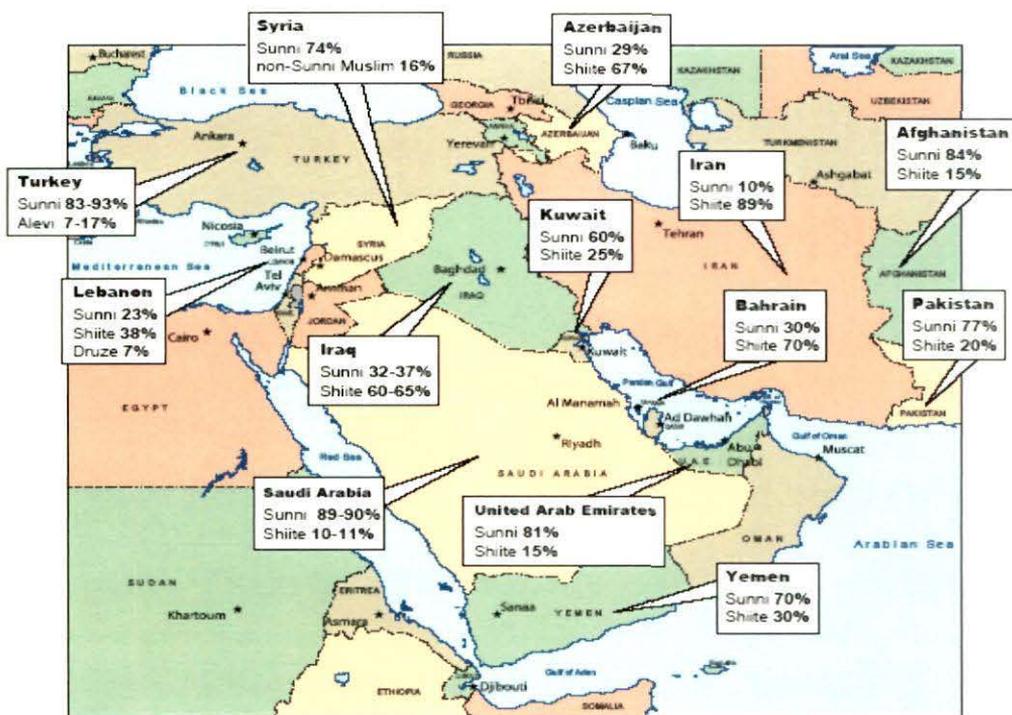
### **(4) Marital Patterns of Muslims in India**

Muslims of India practice large scale of consanguinity and except the real sibs, marriages are permissible in between cousins. Marriages between Sunni and Shia sects are very rare, however, marriages in other religions has been frequently seen and has been a major reason of large-scale conversions of Hindus to Muslims. If

one marries a Muslim boy or girl then he or she has to embrace Islam. Overall, it has been seen that migration rates from other religions to Muslims is several fold higher in females. Sunnis being the descendents of the Muslim rulers all over India have been able to marry and admixed with local Indian caste population more profusely while Shiites to a large extent remained confined to their own sects. Another important issue regarding the marital pattern of Muslims is high rate of polygamy.

**(5) Possible origin of Indian Muslims**

Possible place of origin of Indian Muslims varies from Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq), to North West Asia (Turkey), Central-west Asia (Afghanistan and Iran) and some part of Eastern Europe (Uzbekistan) as shown in **Figure 3.5**. Although a large number of Indian Muslims are local Hindu converts.



**Figure 3.5: Possible place of origin of Indian Muslims**

Muslim influx and influence in India started almost at the inception of the religion. The traders from Arabia were frequent visitors to the Indian subcontinent even before Prophet Muhammad revealed the Koran. They brought the word of

Muhammad to India in the 7th century and this resulted in some peaceful conversions of Hindus to Islam.

In 711, the Umayyad caliph in Damascus sent an expedition to Baluchistan (an arid region on the Iranian Plateau in Southwest Asia) led by a twenty-year-old Syrian Muslim chieftain named Muhammad bin Qasim, who conquered Sindh (presently a province of Pakistan bordering on Baluchistan, Punjab, and Rajasthan, India) in 712 AD. However, this event in history does not seem to have influenced India as much as expected. Beginning with the invasion of Mohammad of Ghazni in the 11th century, followed by a barrage of invaders from Persia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Northwest and Central Asia in the 11th and 12th centuries, a full force of Islam was thrust upon India. Spread of Muslims in India began with the "Slave Dynasty" of Turkic ruler but flourished all over India during the reign of Mughal Empire whose first ruler was Babur, King of Farghana (at present in Uzbekistan).

It took several centuries to finally spread Islam in all portions of India. Many Hindus were turned to Islam by laws favoring Muslims or by, others turned to Islam voluntarily. Most Indian Muslims who converted to Islam were Hindu and some of their ancestors embraced Islam under duress, although some did willingly or under the influence of laws favoring Muslims. There were also some converts who belonged to the ruling families of the different kingdoms of the region, many of whom were given little choice in the matter. The Muslim rulers of India also brought businessmen, traders, merchants and slaves from different parts of the world. Many of them married local Indians who converted them to Islam

### **North East group**

North East India accounts for 7.8 per cent of the total land space of the country, of which again 70 per cent is hilly terrain and about 98% of this region's borders form India's international boundaries.

Eastern and North Eastern Indian region consists of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, and West Bengal. They have about 30 million people (out of a total of about 120 million)

living below (those with incomes of less than \$ 1 a day) the poverty line (Ray & De 2003).

**Table 3.2: Demographic profiles of India and North East India**

Particulars b	Unit	NE9a	India
Area	Share in India (%)	9	
Population (2001)	Share in India (%)	12	
Population Density (2001)	Per sq. km.	442	347
PCI in 1970-71 <sup>c</sup>	US \$ (at current price)	89	320
PCI in 1999-2000 <sup>c</sup>	US \$ (at current price)	300	363
Percent Literacy		69.22	65.8
Sex Ratio (no. of males per 1000 females)		934	933

a. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Maghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and West Bengal.

b. Considers average data of nine NEs.

Sources: Various issues of Economic Survey, Government of India and Profile of States, CMIE. Preliminary Results of 2001 Census, Register of Census Operation, Government of India.

The region shares borders with China in the north, Bangladesh in the southwest, Bhutan in the northwest and Myanmar in the east (Figure 3.6). This region has absorbed many waves of migrations. Here Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burmese, Chinese, and Mon-Khmer races have mingled with the aborigines to create colorful communities and different political systems amid the fertile Brahmaputra and Surma valleys, the resource-rich Eastern Himalayas, and their foot-hills. It has been hypothesized that a plethora of migrations, particularly through the northeast Indian corridor, has contributed to the present day population of northeastern India.

The partition of the country in 1947 broke the natural and age old linkages with rest of the country and this land locked region is connected to mainland India through a narrow corridor in north Bengal, popularly known as the 'Chicken's neck' or the 'Siliguri neck', having an approximate width of 33 km. on the eastern side and 21 km. on the western side. The socio economic and political settings of the northeastern region bear direct linkages and fit in the order where the tribal form of society and economy occupy the vantage positions. The north eastern part of India is inhabited by numerous endogamous tribes and castes that have their own distinct

social, linguistic, and biological identity. Ethnically speaking, most of the tribal groups are Mongoloids, whereas caste groups are either Caucasoid or show a mosaic of features of both the ethnic groups. The Mongoloids/Indo-Mongoloids have come to India from different directions at different times and perhaps earlier than the Caucasoids (Das *et al.*, 1987). While the Mongoloids have migrated from eastern, southeastern (Rapson 1955; Dani 1960), and central Asian regions, the Caucasoid may have entered from western and northern boundaries of this region. While a majority of the Mongoloids are tribes affiliated with the Tibeto-Chinese linguistic family, excepting Khasi, most of the Caucasoid are caste groups and speak Indo-European languages. Although these groups have been broadly classified on the basis of language and ethnicity, they show considerable variations within these broad categories. Both the Mongoloid and Caucasoid groups show a certain degree of differentiation within themselves in cultural and biological traits such as anthropometry, genetic markers, and dermatoglyphics.

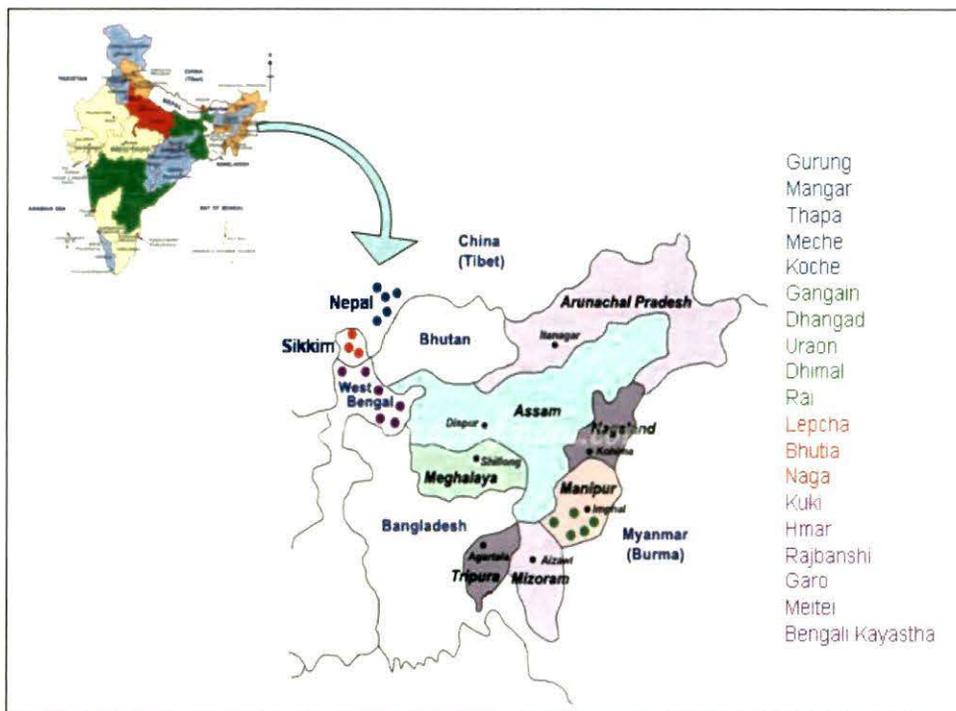


Figure 3.6 Map showing different North Eastern regions

The populations of this region show a mosaic pattern and represent a diverse population from different regions such as Nepali populations of Indo-European and

Tibeto Burman family like Gurung, Mangar, Thapa, Meche, Koche, Gangain, Dhangad, Uraon, Dhimal, Rai etc. Lepcha, Bhutia of Tibeto-Burman family mostly from Sikkim. Naga, Kuki, Hmar, etc. from Manipur, which, are also Tibeto-Burman speaking groups. Rajbanshi, Garo, Meitei, Bengali, Bengali Kayastha etc are few Indo-European populations from West Bengal. On basis of ethnicity, prevalence of endogamy, Linguistic characteristic anthropological significance we selected only three populations from this North East region. These three populations were selected as origin of these populations were from different geographical regions like Lachung from Lachungpa valley (Sikkim), Meches from Jhapa district of Nepal and Rajbanshi from Koch Behar and Jalpaiguri.

## Lachung

The Bhutias are people of Tibetan origin, who migrated to Sikkim(India), India and Bhutan some time after the 15th century. They migrated through the different passes ("La" in Tibetan) in the Himalayas. Geographical denotations in the names of Bhutias last names is common. In Northern Sikkim for example, where the Bhutias are the majority inhabitants, they are known as the Lachenpas or Lachungpas, meaning inhabitants of Lachen or Lachung respectively (**Figure 3.7**).

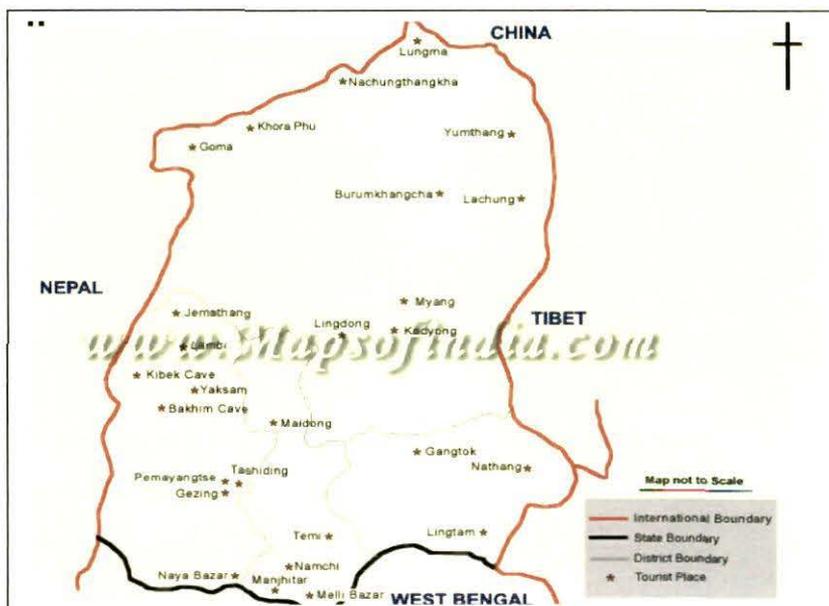


Figure 3.7: Map of Sikkim showing Lachung Valley

The Bhutia aristocrats were called *Kazis* after similar land lord titles in neighboring India especially during the waning days of the Mughal period. This feudal system was an integral part of Chogyal monarchy prior to 1975, when Sikkim was an independent monarchy. Among the Bhutias, the Lachenpas and Lachungpas have their own traditional legal system called the “Dzumsa” which means *the meeting place of the people*. The Dzumsa is headed by the village headman known as the *Pipon*. Bhutias are traditionally rice eaters with animal fat fried vegetables or meat usually pork, and beef, and occasionally mutton or chicken. Other well known foods are momo- steamed meat dumplings, and the Thukpa- noodle in broth. The Losar and Losoong are two among many festivals celebrated by the Bhutia community. Almost all Bhutia festivals hold religious Buddhist significance.

### **Marital Pattern**

Bhutias practise intermarriage within their clans and follow a very hierarchical system of bride and groom selection. Clan discrimination is widespread and marriage outside the community is looked down upon.

### **Mech**

Being residents of the Mechi River banks and the neighborhoods in the district of Jhapa, they are called the Meches. Jhapa district, a part of Mechi zone, is one of the seventy-five districts of Nepal, a landlocked country of South Asia (**Figure 3.8**). The district, with Chandragadhi as its district headquarters, covers an area of 1,606 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population (2001) of 688,109. Jhapa is the easternmost district of Nepal and lies in the fertile Terai plains. It borders Ilam district in the north, Morang district in the west, the Indian state of Bihar in the South and east, and India's West Bengal state in the east. It has an area of about 1606 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of about 7,000,000 (according to the census). Jhapa is home to many indigenous tribes such as the Rajbanshi, Satar (Santhal), Meche, Koche, Gangain, Dhangad, Uraon, Dhimal, Rai, Limbu, Magar, Gurung and many others, besides the Brahmins, Chhettris, and Newars. Jhapa receives 2,500 to 3,000 mm of rainfall a year, and mostly during the monsoon season in the summer and its hilly northern part receives more rainfall than down south. Its major rivers like Mechi, Kankai Mai,

Ratuwa, Biring, Deuniya, Hadiya, and Ninda provide water for irrigation purposes. Due to its alluvial soil best suitable for agriculture. Its name itself is derived from the Rajbanshi word "jhapa" meaning "canopy", which proves that the area was a dense forest in the past.

It was such a dense and dangerous forest that it was called Kaalapaani and prisoners were sent here to die of malaria and other diseases in the jungles. Though the forest area has decreased in recent times due to ignorance, people are waking up to the fact that forests are necessary. Consequently, community forests can be seen in the district these days. Jhapa is diverse and rich in culture and traditions due to its different tribes. All the tribes have their own languages, customs and traditions, and they celebrate their festivals with huge favour and enthusiasm every year.



**Figure 3.8: Map of Nepal.** Jhapa district is shown at boundry of Sikkim and Bihar

Meches are closer to the Bodos in civilization. According to historians, Meches were nomadic until a few decades ago. Their myth connects them with

Limbus. They became settlers when the land range and forest frontiers of their free roaming became demarcated and restricted. They are animists and Ai Bali Khungri and Batho Barau are their principal deities. They also worship the deities of the forest. Their language derives from the Tibeto-Burman family. Meches are also called Bodos. They are at present engaged in farming. According to Census 2001, their population is 3,763. According to the mythology of Meches, they are brethren of Rais, Limbus and Kirats, who settled in the Terai as they were left behind in course of their journey.

In India Meches are described under the Kachhari community. In the Indian census of 1881, the Kachharis are shown to have 18 groups, including Bodo, Dimasa, Lalung, Madahi, Mech, Rabha, Sarania, Hojai, Garo, Rajbanshi or Koch, Chutiya, Moran, Hajong, Tippera, Mahaliya, Dhimal, Solanimiya and Phulgaria. Their language has been placed in the Tibeto-Burman group. But there is less use of <sup>a</sup> (kna), ` (ayan), of (ana), g (na), d (ma) in this language like in between Brahmaputra and Kankai rivers. Boche or Bodo are spread around Duars of North Bengal and Bhutan. Their settlements, in most of the cases, are based in jungles or on the banks of rivers and streams. The way of living, costumes, ornaments, rituals and culture of Meches are unique and resemble those of the Bodo tribe of India. Birth pollution is not over until the umbilical of a newborn falls off its body. Their priest, Raja, makes the family purified. Marriage is of different types. Meches observe Chharkela (the worship of Laxmi). They are very much fond of songs and dances. Drums, pipe and bamboo split canes are their musical instruments. They celebrate both the planting and harvesting of crops. Meches have 13 thars (clans). They have traditional village councils and the councils have a chief. Their Gaunburas (village chiefs) are called Makhhal. The vocations of Meches also vary with their thars (Basumatari-Meche, BS2054/55). Mainao or Aibali Khungri and Batho Barau are their prominent gods and goddesses. River worship of Meches is famous. For them siundi (a kind of milk and thorny plant) is a plant where gods and goddesses live. They do not worship idols nor do they have temples to gods or goddesses. Meche women are very industrious. They are seen weaving clothes for their family's use by installing looms in almost every house

### **Marital Pattern**

Meches marry very strictly in their community. They are highly endogamous and they generally do not get admixed with people of different community in particular geographic region.

### **Rajbanshi**

The ethnic status of Rajbanshi is not clear, and different opinions are advanced regarding this (Dalton 1872; Risley 1915; Waddel 1975; Das *et al.*, 1987). Rajbanshis are hypothesized to be a mixture of different tribal groups (Rabhas, Tiwas, Kacharis, Garos, Karbis, etc.) that were converted to Hinduism and in the process became admixed with certain Caucasoid caste populations (Das *et al.*, 1987).

The Ahom and the Rajbanshi, who were originally tribal groups, held a dominant position in terms of economy as well as power. Both of these groups tried to perpetuate their domination and obtain social sanction for it by becoming an upper caste group. In this process, they might have tried to emulate the cultural and social ideologies of the neighboring upper caste groups and developed marital ties with them. It may be pertinent to note that Das (1981) suggests that Rajbanshi is a fit example of a Tribe–Caste continuum not only in their socio cultural aspects but also in their biological makeup. Therefore, one may infer that what appears to be a purely sociological phenomenon of a Tribe–Caste continuum may well be reflected in their genetic structure. Rajbanshi were originally affiliated with the Tibeto-Chinese linguistic family but now have become semi-Hinduized caste groups, like Chutiya, and Ahom. These groups have currently assumed caste status and speak Indo-European languages (Vikrant Kumar *et al.*, 2004). Rajbanshis are mostly the inhabitants of Jalpaiguri and Koch Behar, their geographical position is shown in the **Figure 3.9**.

It is also reported that the Koch-Rajbanshis belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of the Mongoloid origin. Popularly known as the Nomoshudras, this community has always been in the periphery of the Hindu caste hierarchy. In fact in 1496 A.D when Visvasimha the Koch chieftain rose to power, he did so by

converting into Hinduism and adopting Hindu practices through Sanskritization. The Brahmins who were brought in from as far as Kanauj, Mithila, Srihatta legitimized his political power by bringing him into the Brahmanical fold through Hindu rites and rituals.

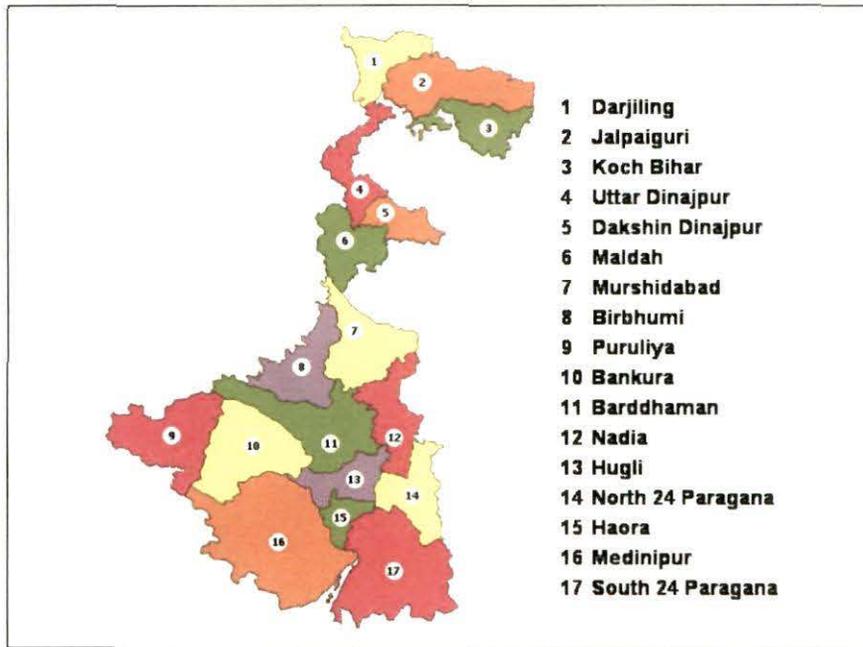


Figure 3.9: Map showing geographical distribution of West Bengal

They also traced the descent of his lineage and tribesmen as Kshtriya's, who had thrown away their sacred thread when fleeing from the wrath of Parashurama. Thus many of Vishwasimha's followers had given up their tribal designation and called themselves Rajbanshis. Thus it is widely held that Koches after undergoing Sanskritisation assumed the name Rajbanshi.

Hinduised, poor and illiterate Rajbanshi's could not really enter the Hindu fold successfully due to the resistance offered by the high caste Hindus, and in fact fell a easy prey to the insatiable greed of the Brahmins. While in 1891 the Rajbanshi's described themselves as Vratya Kshtriya , from 1911 they began to claim pure Kshtriya status legitimized by priests, genealogists and pundits. Since 1912, a number of mass thread wearing ceremonies (Milan Kshetra) were organized in different districts by the "Kshtriya Samiti" where lakhs of Rajbanshi's donned the

sacred thread as a mark of Kshtriya status. The immediate objective of the “Kshtriya samiti” was to regain the lost social status of the Rajbanshi community in the hindu social system.

**Marital Pattern**

It is considered that Rajbanshis were conglomeration of various tribes that were converted into hindus and in the process they become admixed with certain caste groups after that they started following strict endogamy.