Chapter- Two

Social Aspect of Tamil and Bengal.

Society:

By society we mean living together of different people with diverse cultural and social leanings. From the primitive ages, of the Homo Sapiens, the human beings started to live and grow in a society. Although any society comprises diverse characters and attitudes, it serves the people within it as catalyst to meet their individual needs through co-operations and exchanges. Thus every society stands on certain principles and values. It is imperative for members of any society to conform to certain unwritten set of norms and values evolved over centuries through mutual understandings by the earlier inhabitants of the society. Even the institutions and associations operating in a society are obligated to follow these ideals and values. In the past, the societies were run and regulated by persons nominated by the members of the society unanimously.

Indian societies composed of people having different languages, dresses, food habits, cultural activities were evolved over many centuries. A close look at different societies in India will reveal the fact that geographical atmospheres of different regions have contributed in a big way in the formation of a society in a particular region. The influence of geographical locations on the people of different regions in India in the matter of their physical built up, languages, food-habits, dresses etc was enormous. Naturally, therefore, each region of India over the years has evolved its own society based on its traditions and cultures. The efficacy of Indian society lies in its getting together diverse entities having different religious, customs, social practices, traditions etc. Notwithstanding regional diversities, the overall Indian society has demonstrated ‘Unity in Diversity at all times.

Indian society has experienced emergence of many communities with different religious beliefs and practices over several centuries. The study of Indian social history has laid bare the fact that from ages, two communities, namely, the Hindus and the Muslims with their respective religious beliefs and social customs were dominant forces in all corners of India.
The Indian society over many centuries has seen influx of different cultures in the country. The immigration of different religious and cultural entities in India made it a mixed society. The original divisions of the society into two broad cultures i.e. Hindus and Muslims faded away due to the import of various cultures into Indian society.

The probe of Indian society unveils that the structure and set-up of societies in rural and urban India were completely different. Although there has been a structural difference between urban and rural societies in India in relation to aspirations and hopes of the people of both the societies, the essence and purpose of living in a society remained same in both the contexts.1

**Society in Tamil land:-**

It is observed from study of social history of Tamilnadu that different tribal groups having different cultural values, social and religious activities, professions etc. inhabited the Tamil land before the Aryans made their passage to India.

In fact those tribal communities formed the basic structure of Tamil society in pre-Aryan era. The tribal groups had its factions and divisions. As such the tribal communities could not form an unitary society. Each factions of the tribal communities had its own cultural, social and religious traditions inherited from their ancestors over centuries. Thus each tribal group formed its own society that was unique and diverse. It is learnt from the study of history of Tamil society that a unified Tamil society came into existence after a long process of adjustments an assimilation among culturally different groups of tribals and people of Aryan origin. The assimilation and integration of different cultural and religious entities to make a broader and unitary Tamil society was not very easy. Tamil land experienced strifes and turbulations and lot of blood sheds among different groups over centuries before emerging as a strong and vibrant society in India.

The Aryan influence in Tamil cultures was so deep-rooted that ‘Varṇa’ system took the centre stage of Tamil society. Under the influence of Aryan culture, the Tamil society divided its people into four different groups, namely, Brāhmaṇa, Kasytriya, Vaisya, Sudra.

In ancient times, the Brāhmaṇa in Tamilnadu occupied an important position in socio-economic field in Tamil society. The Tamil Brāhmaṇa were placed in high esteem by all
other groups for their deep knowledge in Sanskrit and religious texts. They became the centre of power in Tamil society from the days of Āryan influx. In early ages the Brāhmīns of Tamil land performed all religious activities in view of their deep knowledge in the ‘Vedas’ and ‘Puranas’. Long before Āryan made their entry in Tamil land, the Tamil society was consisted of people pursuing different professions like hunting, fishing, cow gazing and so on. The tribals of Tamil land were so primitive in their knowledge and thinking that they believed the existence of God in trees and accordingly worshipped the trees according to their own system of rituals. In fact, all the tribal groups in Tamil land were plunged in the darkness of ignorance and as such believed in unearthly matters like ‘Voodoo’ etc. to overcome any natural and personal disaneter. The influx of Dravidians, in Tamil land created huge impact on the cultures of the origins, of the land. The Dravidians provided the people of Tamil land a language for communications among them. Besides, they were also responsible for the beginning of Tamil literature in ancient times.2

The Tamil land experienced migration of different cultures and religious followed and propagated by the Jains, Buddhists, Hindus (Brāhmaṇical) etc. There was also convergence of other communities and groups like Europeans, Christians, Muslims etc. in Tamil land. Although many different cultural and religious entities made their presence felt in Tamil society, the convergence of so many groups and communities did not cause any extinction of Tamil’s original tribals like the Patakās, the Tōṭas, the Kāḷars, etc. The co-existence of all the groups and communities made the Tamil society most vibrant and responsive. The agglomeration of different cultures followed by different religious and social groups was different from the native Kuti culture. The Brāhmaṇical culture ingressed from the North introduced the varna culture in Tamil society. The Brāhmaṇical culture by virtue of its established all round knowledge and wisdom imposed the caste system on Tamil society. But in the garb of castes, when the high caste Brāhmīns had let loose many immoral practices in the society to reap their personal benefits, many knowledgeable sections of the society raised their voices against caste systems and its main objective of social discrimination. In Tamilnadu, castes system was used as a tool to perpetuate oppressive measures upon the vulnerable groups of the society.
The Tamil tribals were the worst sufferers under the caste system. Their illiteracy, ignorance and beliefs in supernatural powers were used as tools by high caste Brāhmins to extract materials grains for them.

The Tamil society was all along caste-ridden. Although different groups and communities lived in Tamil society with individual beliefs, customs, different social moorings etc. they exemplified the unity of souls. All the groups and communities stood for a united Tamil society. They were living in cohesive units and formed the core groups in making of the Tamil society. The Tamil society from the beginning of the civilization made it imperative to ensure that all the groups and communities with in the system could maintain their separate entities without diluting the basic fabric of the society even against heavy odds.

As in other societies Tamil society had evolved over centuries. The social changes occurred at different stages of the formation of greater Tamil society due to influence and import of alien cultures like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Muslims, European etc. In this connections, the western culture following British rule in Indian had a lasting impact on Tamil society. At the beginning Tamil society was a closed society and did not like to surrender their beliefs and values to any other alien culture. The original inhabitants resisted migration of other communities and groups into Tamil for fear of dilution of their society build over the several centuries. Although the Tamilians resisted the influence of outside cultures initially, in course of time they realized that different cultural and religious entities would only help in building a larger and flexible. Tamil society. Accordingly, Tamil society accepted different cultural and religious entities to live together. Another notable factor about Tamil society was that the impact of social changes in rural and urban societies was not uniform. While the fruits of changes following building of cities and towns were enjoyed by urban elites, the people living in villages could not share the same. The developments in Tamil society was city centric. Accordingly, the people of cities and towns were more advanced than the people in villages. Notwithstanding rural and urban divides like all other societies in India, the Tamil society graduated from narrow and secluded units to an open united and accommodating society over several centuries.3
**Bengali Society:**

The Bengali society had its root in rural areas in ancient times. As the people of rural areas in Bengal lived on agriculture the society grew around rural Bengal. The society of rural Bengal was consisted of small farmers, tenant-farmers, landlords. Zamindars, money-lenders etc. in early stages.

Thus it could be easily visualized that poor farmers were at the mercy of Zamindars and money-lenders. In times of crop failures or under pressing situations like marriage of daughters, the poor villagers had to fall back upon the landlords or village money-lenders for credits to tide over the situations.

The wretched financial conditions of the poor villagers were exploited by the Zamindars and landlords to their advantages. The farmers of rural society were literally under debt trap. Thus the rural society in Bengal had experienced exploitation of poor by the rich due to disparities in income. The people of rural society in Bengal were also subjected to social deprivation as well. The high caste Brāhmīns and Kayaśīṭṣ, in rural society treated the lower segments of the society as untouchables. The caste distinctions in ancient rural society of Bengal created a fissure in the society. Although, caste discriminations in rural society of Bengal did not bring into surface the bitterness in relations between groups, nevertheless, the growing resentments among the victims of the caste divisions created strife and tension in the society.4

The rural society of Bengal during the period from 16th to 18th centuries projected a grim pictures of rural poors. Famines and starvations characterized the rural Bengali society during the above period. The fragmentation of land in Bengal caused the availability of land for tilling insufficient for livelihood.

The village society in ancient Bengal was marked by distressed economic conditions of the small farmers. The influential Zamindars and landlords in rural society took advantage of the poor economic conditions of small farmers and forced them to part with their holdings in their favors in repayment of debts. The penniless farmers finding no other alternative migrated to towns and cities of Bengal to secure alternative employments for sustenance.

The notable feature of Bengali society in rural set-up was that both male and female members used to take part in agrarian activities. While the male members of the Bengal rural society worked in the field for sowing and harvesting the crops, the rest of works were
performed by the female members of the society in addition to household works. In rural Bengali society, the female had no equal status with the male members in all matters including education.

The girls in rural Bengal were looked upon as burdens by the families. As a result evil practice like child marriage was the order in rural Bengal up to 18th century. Bengali society, be it in village or in town was patriarchal and as such dominated by men only.

In the face of many social evils, the rural Bengali society in ancient times presented a picture of perfect harmony and unity. There were traces of cross-cultures among different communities in Bengali society but those did not present any problem for fostering amity and unity among people in the society. In the late 19th century, the rural society in Bengal started to change. The spread of education in rural Bengal during 19th and 20th centuries freed the people especially the women from the shackles of many social injustices.

The urban society in Bengal came into existence in 17th century in and around three villages namely, Calcutta, Sutanuti and Govindapur after the ‘East India company’ owned ‘pattas’ of those places and cleared the jungles for establishment of their settlements. The East India company selected Calcutta for setting up business establishment with an eye to trade with distant countries through the nearly river route. They developed port near Calcutta to facilitate trade. Following migration from rural areas of Bengal due to pancy of firm lands, people started their settlements in Calcutta (Sutanuti and Govindapur were merged with Calcutta) with a view to searching for jobs. The steady settlement of Bengali families in Calcutta gave rise to a society that was entirely different from rural society. The two main communities namely, the Hindus and the Muslims were inhabitants of urban Calcutta at the very beginning of the emergence of urban life in Bengal. However, in view of difference in religious beliefs, social and cultural practices the two communities developed and nurtured their respective societies. As for the Hindu society, the upper and lower castes dilemma as usual permeated in the society as a disease. The Brāhmīns and Kṣatriyas earned higher caste status by virtue of their inherent qualities. The Brāhmīns and Kayaśṭhiyas were learned persons in Bengali urban society. The other castes had no social status in urban Bengali society flourished in Calcutta. The superiority complex of the upper sections of urban Bengali society in Calcutta paved the way for serious caste discriminations. The 18th century Bengali society in urban area, mainly in Calcutta had experience serious oppressive tactics that were unleashed by high caste Brāhmīns and
Kshastiyas on the financially weaker sections of the society. The high caste sections of the society were indulged in oppressive means to corner the financially weak and educationally backward people in urban society.\textsuperscript{6}

The influence of English education in 19\textsuperscript{th} century brought a change in the thinking and behavioral pattern of the Hindu Bengalis in urban society. The Hindu Bengali society in 19\textsuperscript{th} century adapted itself to the growing English cultural and education.

A new generation of urban Bengali society during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century heavily leaned on British system of education and culture to seek employment in Government services and in offices opened by East India company to carry its vast Managing Agency businesses. The elites started to follow English way of life in the matters of food, dress, furniture etc. Many old timers in the urban Bengali society disliked this trend of imitations of British culture by new generations. In fact, the Bengali society in urban Calcutta was on the cross road of two different ethnic cultures during late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The new generations could neither renunciation their own cultural values nor they could adept themselves fully to the alien culture. At this juncture the national awakening propagated by great political leaders and noted social activities against the oppressive and misrule of British Government moved the new generations of Bengali society. They shunned the narrowness of their minds and vowed to drive away the British nationals from the country. The thought of nationality was at the upper most in the minds of Bengali people during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The Bengali society showed its strength of unity and courage even in the face of British oppression. The British Government in Bengal under Lord Curzon made a division of Bengal in 1905 to disintegrate the Bengali society to thwart any radical movement seeking freedom. They had to revoke the order in the face of serious protest movements started by Bengali society. The 20\textsuperscript{th} century urban Bengali society had seen the uprising of people against British rule. The Bengali society also exhibited their solidarity to free its people from many evil practices and blemishes that plagued it for ages. Many social reformers of Bengal during 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries pioneered the social reforms movement. The Bengali society in 19\textsuperscript{th} century influenced by wide spread education and awareness started to realize the ill effects of many immoral practices that had been long pursued in the name of social customs. The Bengali society at large opposed to the practice of ‘Sati’, ‘Polygamy’, ‘Child-marriage’, etc. This awareness among elite and educated members of Bengali families culminated into emergence of ‘Brahmo-Samaj’. The upper caste Brāhmins
vehemently opposed to the ideals and preaching of 'Brahmo-Samaj'. They raised hue and cry to make people understand about the bad intentions of the founders of 'Brahmo-Samaj, to destroy the Bengali Hindu society that developed over thousands of years on certain basic principles and values. The noted social reformers, writers, poets and spiritual leaders called the people of Bengali society to shun all inhibitions about castes and religions and fight unitedly against the unethical practices that governed the Bengali society for a long period of time.

The social history of Bengal reveals that Bengali society started to make rapid reforms in live harmony with other communities and ethnic origins. The society faced many social cultural and social front from 20th century onwards. The people of Bengali society learned to unrests and turmoils over communal issues, but it demonstrated resistance to create ambiencce for peaceful co-existence. The Bengali society inspite of its many short comings, has proved that its strength lies in its unity of culture and wisdom.7

**Caste system:**

Indian society is beset with the caste system for centuries. Caste system has been the core of Indian social system and more pronounced in Hindu society. In spite of high awareness among educated people the caste system has been embedded in the cultures of the Hindus of different regions since the ancient period of history.

The caste system or the 'Varṇas' was introduced during the time of Aryan. The occupation of people was the guiding force behind the creation of caste of 'Varṇa'. The varṇas comprised of Brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras. Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas were regarded as upper castes. The same system is still being followed in Hindu society of both Tamilnadu and Bengal. Each of the caste has its own group. All the social activities of a particular caste are confined to that particular group. This has compelled the fragmentation of the society at large. However, with the passage of time the concept of living in a group dominated by a particular caste has been changed. Marriage ties between different castes has made the imaginary boundary of caste system redundant.

Tamil and Bengali societies were not free from the clutches of this caste system. As the caste system was at the root of Hindu culture both Tamil and Bengali societies could not get relief from its impact.8
Caste System In Tamilnadu:-

The Tamil society had a long history of caste division. The caste or 'Varna' system had evolved on the basis of the professions pursued by the people of Tamil society. From ancient period preceding Āryan civilization, Tamil land had large numbers of tribal groups with diverse social and religious entities.

The varṇa system followed by the main stream Tamil people comprised of four groups of people namely, Priests (Brāhmins), Royals (Kaśtriya), Marcantile (Vaiśya) and Labours (Sūdras). The Tamil social-heads largely represented by priests namely Brāhmins, imposed upon various, sections of the people their identities by assigning caste on the basis of their professional abilities. The tribal groups by virtue of their numerous social affinities and customs were kept outside the Varṇa system. The tribals had there own way of living and religious customs and practices.

The Tamil society was all along divided on caste lines. Even the arrivals of Āryans did not create an impact on the minds of the people of Tamilnadu.

The Tamil priests by virtue of their knowledge and wisdom held their sway over other groups for centuries. The priests or self-styled Brāhmins considered themselves above all other groups of people, of the Tamilland in view of their contributions to religious studies. They were the symbols of learning and had the proficiency in analyzing and explaining the religious texts. This knowledge of scriptures and religious documents conceived and propagated by them made them different from other groups. Their supremacy of knowledge and understanding about lives of human beings and their subjugation to the Divine power enabled them to dominate over other groups of people.

Taking advantage of the caste division, the Brāhmins treat all other groups as Sūdras to impose their authorities. Although different castes were perceived on the basis of professional aptitudes the Brāhmins clubbed all other castes including tribals to treat them as Sūdras.

These feelings of superior status over other groups of people made the Tamil Brāhmins oppressive towards all other groups. The ill-feelings towards other groups of people on imaginary caste-lines gave rise to the untouchability. The caste system in
Tamilnadu had put restrictions in places on members of inferior classes in pursuing certain activities.

The social order imposed by the superior class had forbidden the Sudras and other tribal groups to profess and follow the religious activities. The upper castes namely, the Brahmins did not allow any groups of persons other than their own groups to enter into the places of worship. The Brahmins had the prerogatives to perform the religious rights. The lower castes were not allowed to enter the temples or touch the deities during the early periods of Tamil civilization. The castism was rooted to the very foundation of the society, so much so that the upper castes forced the other groups to live in ‘Ghettos’ (colony). The rigours of caste system in Tamil society was so acute that lower castes did not have access to the tube wells dug specially for the higher castes to draw water. Similarly, the lower castes were debarred from using many others facilities for their living as per the wishes of the higher castes. The lower castes were regarded as the uncleaned groups and as such were outclassed by the superior groups of the society.

The ill-treatment of the superior groups were not liked by the higher segments among lower castes. The resentment among the lower groups grew up and resulted in a bitter caste-rivalry. Being humiliated in the hands of the upper castes in the society, the lower castes people forged unity among them to take retaliation against the superior castes. Thus caste system had brought animosity among the different groups of people in the society on castes lines. The caste war was the natural fallout of the caste discrimination that prevailed in Tamil society in early days.

Following the establishment of British rule in India the fabric of the Tamil society had undergone a change from its earlier set-up. The old values and systems practiced by the people at large in Tamil society before the British rule started to give way to new values due to coming of British culture. The establishment of big industries followed by growth of big cities and towns in Tamilnadu during British-Raj had brought a change in the mental set-up of the people of Tamilnadu. The impact of English education and British cultural influence brought about an attitudinal change in Tamil people towards division of people on the basis of castes.

Many social movements spearheaded by noted reformers of Tamil society forced the Government to pass legislation against caste discriminations. Although those legislations during the 19th and 20th centuries, reduced the oppressive measures of the upper segments
of the society on the poor and downtrodders on imaginary casteiest grounds, they failed to build a casteless society in Tamilnadu.\textsuperscript{11}

The contemporary social history of Tamilnadu has explicitly placed on records, the fact that the British administration in Tamilnadu itself indirectly promoted the caste-based society. In all the appointments in civil services, then the Government of Tamilnadu recruited people of high castes, specially, Brāhmīns. Thus the British Government had unwittingly, created a caste-based administration wherein all the lucrative posts were adorned by Brāhmīns and other high caste people. The people belonging to lower segments of society, namely, Śūdras and tribals were not allowed even to occupy the post of clerks or assistants. They were engaged in British administration to work as menial staff and attend to clerks and their assistants as messengers and bearers. Those so-called lower castes of the society were shabbily treaded by the upper castes in places of administration and the top administrators in the offices of the Government remained mute spectators to the dominance of high caste people over the lower castes.

The social movement against the injustice meted out to people of poor means on the pleas of castes compelled the government of Tamilnadu to create posts for people of non-Brāhmīns groups.

The great Tamil reformers felt the heat of the caste-ridden society in Tamilnadu very much when they observed the oppression and exploitation of the poor people of the lower section of the society by the Brāhmīns and other upper caste people. The noted reformers and erudite sections of the society took up the cudgels against the upper sections of the society who unleashed physical and mental tortures on the people belonging to Śūdras and other lower castes to establish their supremacy.

They aroused the moral passion in the large sections of the society to stand against the evil practices followed by a sections of the high-caste people in the garb of caste distinction. They fought to bring justice to the lower castes that were subject to oppression and exploitation of the upper castes. Although the caste discrimination could not be totally eradicated from the Tamil society, the exploitations and the oppressions on the vulnerable sections of the society in the name of caste difference was vastly reduced through the reformist movements in Tamilnadu during the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries.\textsuperscript{12}
Caste System in Bengal:

The Bengali society was divided on caste-lines since ancient times. The study of social history of Bengal has revealed that Bengal too had caste divisions of the Brāhmīns, Kāshṭriya, Vaiśya, Śūdras. The Bengali society during the early civilization was classified with the Brāhmīns at the top of the social ladder followed by Kāshṭriya and Vaiśyas. The other groups of the society were clubbed together and assigned the caste called Śūdras. The Śūdras in Bengal mainly comprised of people who were engaged in agricultural activities and also those groups consisted of service providers like milkman, washerman, carpenter, weavers, scavenger etc. The nature and practice of profession by lower groups of societies were frowned upon by the upper castes in the society. In view of the supposed menial nature of the works of the lower class the upper section of the Bengali societies always maintained a safe distance from them. Those weaker sections of the society became the victims of caste distinctions rigidly followed by the Hindu Bengali society during the 16th to 18th centuries.

The higher caste in the society enjoyed all the facilities be it in education or other social services at the cost of the vulnerable sections of the societies. The people of the lower caste were treated as untouchables by the upper caste in the society. The upper caste notably the Brāhmīns had projected themselves as superior beings in the society in view of their depth of knowledge and proficiency in deciphering the contents of the religious texts like the Vedas and Upanishad. In view of their wide-ranging knowledge in literatures and Holy Scriptures, they held sway over other castes. The lower caste in a Bengali society due to their inherent lack of education fell prey to the dictates of the upper castes. The Hindu Brāhmīns extracted undue advantages from the poor and vulnerable section of the society by displaying their authority on all religious matters. The caste system in Bengali society brought about serious discrimination and exploitation of the poor section of the society.

The illiteracy coupled with poor economic conditions made the weaker sections of the society as targets for exploitations by the upper castes. The high-caste Brāhmīns in Bengali society misled the unlettered and ignorant people belonging to lower caste by making fake claims that the difference between men had been the creation of God at the time of birth. The ignorant people of lower segment of society accepted the claims of the high caste.
Brāhmins that the castes of human beings were decided at the time of birth as designed by God. The high caste people of the society took advantage of the illiteracy and god fearing nature of the lower caste people to indulge in arm-twisting for their personal gains. Many immoral practice like ‘Sati’, ‘Polygamy’, ‘Child marriage’, etc were introduced in the society in the name of religion by high caste Brāhmins without any resistance from any other section of the society.

The spread of education during the 19th century both native and English made the people aware of the caste discrimination. The British rule in Bengal had taken many administrative decisions by which the social discrimination of the people on the basis of caste had been greatly reduced.

The untiring efforts of social reformers in Bengal like Raja Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and others to fight for justice for the socially backward classes like Śūdras made a much required headway in arousing awareness among the people of all class to stand and fight against the oppressions of the high caste people in the society. Their efforts made an impact so much so that the discrimination of the lower caste had been slowed down in the society. During the 19th and 20th centuries the caste distinction in Bengal became thinner due to new classification of the society into upper-middle class, Zamindar, middle-class, lower middle-class etc on the basis of the nature and status of the activities pursued by the people of Bengals. The impact of English education system and enlightened the people of Bengal during the 19th and 20th centuries brought about substantial reduction of the artificial distinctions of the society on the lines of caste. Although the caste remained at the root of the Bengali society the same had not been used as a tool to unleash oppression of the weaker section of the society.14

**Family Life :-**

Indian family life since ancient times meant to include husband, wife, sons and daughters. This family concept presented a perfect picture of a unit. Every member of a family owed its allegiance to the family. Both male and female members of any family worked in harmony to ensure well being of the family. Mutual trust and understanding was the
hallmark of a Indian family. Each member of a family had a cut-out responsibility towards the family. Indian family culture evolved round certain established practices, customs, traditions etc. pursued by people of different regions in India. From the very beginning of Indian family tradition, the younger generations of any family have been paying respect to the elders in the family.

Mutual trust and support were the keys to Indian family life. Tamil and Bengali societies followed the same Indian family culture over centuries. 

**Joint Family in India:-**

The study of Indian social history has established the fact that joint family norms were adopted by Indian people, especially, the Hindus since the beginning of Indian civilization. The concept of joint family set-up stemmed from peoples concern for the security. If ancient Indian history is of any guide one would notice that primitive inhabitants of India fought among inter groups and individuals to ensure survival. Gradually a sense of living together came into their minds to ensure protection of lives and means of livelihood from aggressions of other groups or individuals. Thus the joint family set-up had its origin in the primitive era. The joint-family structure followed by people in India after civilization used to be very beneficial to the members of the family. The joint-family structure worked like a well-orchestrated unit in which each member had a sense of belonging to the unit. The co-operation and harmony among members were keys to success of any joint-family set-up in India. In this family set-up, each member used to feel secured from any adverse situation. However, in view of the ever increasing numbers of family members and simultaneous dearth of space to run a big joint-family under one roof, the earlier set-up lost its efficacy. The joint-family set-up gave way to small nucleus family.

**Joint-Family Set-up in Tamilnadu:-**

As we know ancient Tamil society was divided into many factions and groups, small units of families even within a particular group were pervading the entire Tamil land. The Tamil literatures have vividly narrated how different family structures for different classes
were followed in early Tamil society. The concept of joint family set-up was relatively new following the Āryan’s arrival. Although, family structures close to joint family set-up were found in the tribal groups like Palliar and Enular in Tamil land in early ages, for all practical purpose those family structures did not represent particular group, rather a conglomeration of different tribal groups. The real joint family set-up in Tamilnadu could be traced from the times the Āryans made their passage into India.

The Tamil joint family structures resembled all other such family structures adopted elsewhere in India. Under the Tamil joint-family system, each member of a particular family was careful about its role and responsibility in the family. The exchanges of idea and shares of thoughts among the members of the joint family in Tamilnadu was mainstay of such family structures. As the Tamil people were basically religious minded the religious played an important role in the bounding of a joint family system.

The Tamil joint family property was regarded as a common property. The seniors in the family handled the property and controlled all financial matters as trustees for running the administration of the family. The joint family concept traditionally shaped the lives of the people and provided them the much needed support to build up their carriers. Individual ambition and freedom had no place in Tamil joint family set-up. Every major decision of a Tamil joint family was taken by the seniors as a rule.17

**Joint Family In Bengal:**

Joint family concept in Bengal was very old. In consonance with the rest of the country, the joint family structure in Bengal had evolved with the preference of married sons to live with their wives, sons and daughters under parental authority. In Hindu joint family in Bengal, the elders played key roles in the orderly running of the family. They were deciding factors for family investment, settlement of marriages etc. The Hindu Bengali joint family structures by virtue of their inherent strengths and unity survived against many
cultural and religious onslaughts from different communities and groups. The joint family set-ups flourished in Bengal even against many impediments. Although so many good things about the system could be aired, it had not without its serious pitfalls. Many a Bengali joint family set-ups crumbled due to cropping up of serious dissensions among earning and non-earning members of the family. The cost-benefit factors caused a serious fissure in the joint family set-up in Bengal. During 18th and 19th centuries people from rural areas migrated to urban Bengal for finding jobs. Large exodus of people from rural areas in search of jobs in cities in Bengal led to break-up of joint family set-ups in rural Bengal.

The rapid urbanization at the end of 19th century did upset the pattern of joint family structure in Bengali society. The growth of urban cities and towns with attending opportunities for alternative jobs encouraged people to opt out from joint family set-ups to settle separately for comfortable living. Besides, the influence of English Education system and exotic cultural affinity permeated through the Upper class educated society had driven the culturally aware people to switch over to new family set-up as distinct from joint family structure. 

**Marriage**

**Marriage in Indian Perspective.**

Marriage in Indian Hindu society since ages is being seen as bondage of minds and souls of two different sexes i.e, male and female. The study of Indian social history has laid bare the fact that from the days of "Adam and Eve", men and women came close to each other to satisfy their biological urges. During the pre-civilization era, the eternal carnal desire was supposed to be the reason for coming together of men and women. There was no such sacred relationship as the word “marriage” connotes in Indian society prior to civilization. With the evolution in thought process over several centuries, people in India society started to realize that apart from satisfying carnal desire, the marriage of two sexes (male and female) could leave behind progeny to carry the mantle of the family. The gradual spread of awareness also strengthened the belief that by selecting a right life partner, a person’s(he it a man or woman) creative persona could flourish. All the above
factors played an important role in tying the knots between a man and a woman. Marriages in Indian Hindu society over the passage of time turned into a customary rituals. Notwithstanding facilitating factors that encouraged marriages in Indian society, there is no denial of the fact, that majority of the people concur to marry because this has became a custom in the society. There may be myriad reasons for marriages in Indian has been accepted as a sacred institution to promote family life.

In early Indian society, the elders in joint family had the sole authority to settle the marriages, of boys and girls in the family. In early Indian society, arranged marriages formed the basic of matrimonial relations. The system evolved over the years with due regard to the society’s endorsement to the Hindu customs and practice.

The system of arranged marriage though has been the customs in Indian Hindu society it has its serious ramifications. The system of “arranged marriage” has given rise to the ugly head of the dowry system. The dowry system as we know has been the bane of the Hindu society.

In modern times, side by side with arranged marriage, people are using their discretion to select their own partners in life. As the complexion of the family life has undergone many changes over the years, it is but natural that the system of ‘arranged marriages’ with many of its immoral practices would not be liked by educated men and women in the society. The socio-economic conditions of the people of India at large and the emergence of nucleus family life have greatly influenced the decisions of men and women to opt for the right kind of marriage system in modern times. The pomp and gaiety with which the marriages in Indian society were performed remain absent in modern marriages. Today’s marriages are solemnized with a simple formality and in an austere manner.

**Marriages In TamilNadu:**

The history of Tamil society has revealed that from early ages, the normal matrimonial relations were based on negotiations in Tamilnadu. This was the principal system of marriage accepted by the people of all caste and communities in Tamilnadu since long time. The Tamil history has also recorded the fact that marriage by choice was not a forbidden act in Tamilnadu in early Tamil society. However those marriages which were
performed in hiding did not have the sanction of the society. Those marriages known as ‘Kalavu’ in Tamil society were devoid of any social rituals of normal marriages. The marriages performed in hiding, away from the glare of the society could be correlated with the ‘Gandharva’ system of marriages whose mention could be traced in mythological texts.

In Tamil society, many forms of marriages were in vogue in the past. Among many forms of marriages, the ‘Gandharva’ system had its place in Tamil society. Under different system of marriages in Tamil society in earlier era, the girls with the ages ranging between 12 years and 22 years were handed over to men with ages above 40 years. In Tamil society, the forcible elopement and seduction was regarded as marriages in pre-civilization era.

In case of normal marriages in Tamil society, Vedic rituals were followed. The Tamil marriages traditionally, have been associated with heavy gifts. In ancient times, the gifts were ranging from golden cows to golden bulls. The important aspect in Tamil marriages, even today, lies in chanting of Vedic hymns during the occasion of the marriages.

In normal arranged marriage with its attending rituals and customs has been accepted as an ideal system of marriage in Tamil society over other forms of marriages since early ages. In Tamil society the marriage by custom had the precendence over ‘Kalavu’ or ‘Gandharva’ system of marriage because of its general acceptance. The ‘Kalavu’ or ‘Gandharva’ system dissipated as people realized the inherent ills of such system of marriage. Gradually, the people of Tamil society rejected the ‘Kalavu’ system and opted for normal marriage system.

Tamil social history has recorded the fact that the Tamil society had institutionalized the marriage system in the past. This suggests that those marriages which had the approval of the society were only considered as normal marriages and could not be rescinded at will. The ancient Tamil people believed that an ideal marriage placed a man and a woman in equal footing. However, this was not to suggest that there was no ego clash between a husband and a wife after marriage.

The Tamil social history focussed mainly on ‘Kalavu’ system of marriage or ‘Gandharva’ marriages during pre-Āryan Tamil society. The normal marriages or marriage through negotiations formalized at a much later date. The Tamil society used to believe that a couple enjoyed the married life only after performing ritualistic marriage. It was felt in Tamil society that married couple transcended to ‘Karpu’ (chastity) level from ‘Kalavu’ stage through Vedic rituals of marriage.
The people of Tamil society with their vast experience and knowledge in respect of marital relationship came to believe that the kind of love that grew between husband and wife following marital ties was the natural love that would help keeping the married life inseparable throughout the life.

With this view in consideration the normal and ritualistic marriage was accepted as symbol of unification of mind and soul between two persons in Tamil society for all ages. Other forms of marriages arising out of abnormal relations and culminating into; 'Kalavu' or 'Gandharva' system did not receive well by Tamil society for their inherent impurities.

Under the ritualistic or arranged marriage, the parents or guardians of both the boy and the girl settled the marriage through negotiation. The same system is still followed in Tamilnadu under negotiation marriage. 20

Inter caste or cross section marriage was also found in Tamil society in ancient times. As those cross-community or cross-section marriages were solemnized without concern for 'castes' or 'gotras'. The majority in Tamil society, especially Tamil Brāhmiṇs did not approve the inter-caste marriages. But the inter-caste marriages in Tamil society are very common today.

Marriages at lower ages and on same 'Gotras' were in vogue in Tamil society since early days. The 'saha-gotra' marriages were the customs in Tamil society in ancient times. Even today the system of marrying girls to their maternal uncles is still in vogue. 21

Divorces and separations in Tamil society could be traced back to pre-Christian era. Divorces and subsequent re-marriages were also common in Tamil society in ancient times. In ancient times when Tamil society enjoyed absolute authority to sanction or reject the marriages performed by its members depending upon the nature of marriages, the issues relating to divorces and separations were decided by the society, if in its opinion the couples find it difficult to continue to live together.

From 18th century onward, the marriage in Tamil society as an Institution has undergone rapid changes. The impact of awareness and education changed the attitude of the people of Tamilnadu towards marriage. In modern times, the marriages in Tamil society are no longer looked upon as a ritual with a purpose to leave the mantle of the family to its posterity. Marriage in modern times is viewed as more than that. In present day Tamil society, the marriage is considered as bindings of love and mutual trust between men and
women. Although marriages in Tamil society in modern times are performed according to social customs and practice, the earlier mandates of the society about the castes, gotras etc. in deciding a marriage life is no longer followed by the educated men and women of Tamil society.  

**Marriages In Bengal:**

In the days of Puranas, the marriage system in Bengal took the forms of ‘Sayambara’. Under this system, the girl had to select her life companion among the contenders who assembled at the would-be bride’s place for the ‘Sayamvara’ function. In early 17th century, the Bengali society had a system of marrying the girl child with an age below 8 years. The system was eulogized in then the Bengali society as ‘Gauri-Dan’. The system was introduced by the heads of the society in Bengali villages and towns much against the opposition from the learned and erudite sections of the society. Bengali society in ancient times followed the joint family norms. Under the joint family set-ups, it became customary to arrange for marriages of boys and girls at the early ages. Although the practice of ‘Gauri-Dan’ gradually abolished, the system of early marriage continued even during British rule in the Bengali society. As was the custom, the elders of the Bengali family used to negotiate marriage ties for girls and boys of the family. The concerned boys or the girls had no say in the matter. Bengali society in early ages had also witnessed marriages by consent between girls and boys. There were also cases of application of force to secure consent of the parents of girls to agreeing to marriages.

However, the negotiation was the foundation of marriages in Bengali society in olden times.

The negotiations mainly hinged on the ability of the bride’s parents to pay cash or in kinds also known as ‘Bar-Pan’ to the parents of the groom. In many occasions, the negotiations for marriage failed because the parents of the girls could not meet the huge demands from the boys’ side. This often forced the parents of the girls to fix marriages of their daughters with persons much older in ages. These uneven matches brought miseries to the girls after marriage so much so that they had often to come back to their parents’ houses and settled for the rest of the life. The girls of Bengali society in their teens could hardly
comprehend the real meaning and purpose of the marriage in life. The Bengali society in the past was controlled by conservative people, who infused the feeling among the community that marriage was a social obligation and accomplishment of the same even before development of mind and body was the sacred duty of the members of the society. This immoral dictates often had left many marriages to end up in futility. In fact, in the name of sacred marriage, the girl were virtually sacrificed at the alter of the wishes of self-proclaimed saviours of the society in the dark days of Bengal. Because of the social compulsions imposed by so-called preserver of Bengali culture to customize the marriages on their own dictated lines, the happiness and marital bliss of many Bengali girls ended up in beds to meet the carnal desire of their partners.

Early Bengali society was so much caste-ridden that even in negotiating marriages of boys and girls 'castes' and 'gotras' of the families of the boys and girls were given weightage. In fact, the Bengali society during early civilization was completely with in the control of some narrow minded upper caste Brāhmins, so much so that the marriages of boys and girls had been confined to relatively matching 'castes' and 'gotras; superficially imposed upon people by the so-called beholders and saviours of Bengal society. In early days, there was an unwritten convention and practice by which a Brāhmin boy with a 'kulin' family lineage could not get married to a non-Brāhmin girl in Bengali society. By the same token of social orders set out by group of Brāhmin priests for pursuasion by the people of the society marriages in same 'gotras' were deemed as sins and hence forbidden in Bengali society. The caste dispensation and strict rule for arranging marriages with matching 'gotras' led to a crisis so much so that many prospective marriages could not taken place due to non availability of candidates of matching 'gotras' during 18th and 19th centuries in Bengal. The high caste Brāhmins with 'kulin' lineage in Bengali society at the material time took the situation to promote their own selfish interests. The 'kulin' Brāhmins of Bengali society proclaimed that they were God-sent to free the unmarried 'Brāhmin girls' from the shackles of 'virgin' women by accepting them as life partners. Thus the sins of 'Polygamy' rooted in the social fabric of Bengali society in 18th century following unethical dictates and mandates of the so-called knowledgeable and powerful elements in the upper segments of Bengali society. The system of many marriages followed by 'Kulins' of Bengali society had led to the growth of moral degradation of religiously superior caste i.e, the Brāhmins. 23
Another important aspect of marriages in Bengali society in olden days was the rituals that were associated with the marriage ceremony. In case of arranged marriages the rituals started with the chanting of hymns from religious texts. The exchange of garlands and placing vermillion marks on the forehead of the bride were the other formalities followed in marriages in Bengali society. The couples also moved round fire or ‘Agni’ as a part of the ritual of the marriage. The filing past of the fire or ‘Agni’ was meant to be completing the uniting of the two souls through marriage in the presence of ‘Agni’ or fire. The ‘Agni’ or fire was resembled with witness of the marriage.

In case of settled marriages in Bengali society in the distant past the parents of the boys would demand cash, jewellery, furniture e.t.c. as dowry for the marriage. In pre-civilization era, people even demanded cultivable lands or live stocks e.t.c. as dowry in rural areas. Notwithstanding, inherent immoralities the dowry system was accepted as traditions of Hindu Bengali culture.

In early Bengali society, marriages by choice or love-marriages were not socially accepted marriages. Even then the love-marriages did exist since ancient times. In the case of love-marriages, the couples had the right of conjugal lives only after completion of formal marriages.

However, with the advent of good education system and withering of Brāhmanical society, all the ills pertaining to marriages in Bengal started to disappear since 19th century. The marriage system that prevailed during early days has undergone rapid changes over the centuries due to rise of awareness among people of Bengali society about the efficacy of marriage as an Institution, for the healthy growth of any society. The understanding of the philosophy of marriage has helped the people of modern Bengali society to drive away inhibitions of castes and ‘Gotras’ that deep-seated in the minds of Bengali people over many-years.

In modern Bengali society pride of caste and gotras standing in the way of good marriages has been overshadowed by considerations of family upbringing and status in the society. Socio-economic conditions, standing in the society, educational back-ground are important criterion for good matches in the marriage system followed in Bengali society in modern times. Inter-caste marriages one no longer social taboo in Bengali society today.
Polygamy:- In India Context:

Polygamy or multiple marriages had its root in the northern parts of India. It had extended to other parts of India since Aryan's arrival in Indian land. Men of upper castes, namely, Brāhmins, Kaśṭriyas etc. irrespective of their cultural and social back grounds were indulged in polygamy.

It is observed in the course of study of social histories of Indian states that people were involved in polygamy with the sole purpose of having sons from wife even if that necessitated marriages of several times to save the family from sins for not having male posterity to hold the mantle of the family.²⁵

Polygamy In Tamilnadu. :-

Polygamy was rooted in Tamil culture from the days of Aryan civilization. The practice of polygamy received institutional status in 18th and 19th centuries in Tamil land. The study of Tamil social histories has, revealed that people from all castes and communities in Tamilnadu had practiced polygamy. The indulgence in polygamy had arisen from a wrong notion that the departed souls of ancestors could not live in peace in heaven unless male progenies in the family performed oblation ceremonies to save the ancestors from falling grace. The Tamil society dominated by high caste Brāhmins had advocated the practice of polygamy, if for any reasons, the first wife of any Tamil person failed to deliver male child. The system ultimately led to many marriages, if successive wives of any Tamil man failed to give birth to male baby. The practice of polygamy in Tamil society during 18th and 19th centuries invited problems to many Tamil families. The women members of Tamil families who opposed to this evil practice were the targets for unleashing tortures. They became the victims of discrimination and all sorts of ill treatments from the spouses for their inability to give birth male child in the family. The Tamil Brāhmins were instrumental in institutionalizing the polygamy in Tamil society in ancient times. They took the advantage of the illiteracy of the general Tamil people to campaign for their candidature for accepting unmarried girls as life partners. Those crooked Brāhmins convinced the unlettered and poor Tamil people that as they were the direct descendents of god, only they could save their daughters from sins of remaining unmarried.
by accepting them as their wives. The Brāhmīns of Tamil society in early days very 
shrewdly crafted the idea to engage themselves in multi marriages. This crafty policy 
served the two purposes at one stroke. Firstly, the parents of unmarried daughters who 
spent many a sleepless nights for failing to arrange any marriage for their daughters due to 
their poor economic conditions were convinced that their daughters will be free from all 
sins due to their engagements with high caste Brāhmīns, no matter if they were already 
marrried. Secondly, the Brāhmīns through the play of their own tricks could indulge in 
many marriages without shouldeering any responsibility. In early times, the girls who 
marrried to a Brāhmīn already having a family had to live with their parents after marriage.

The poor and unlettered persons from Brāhmīn families who believed the ‘fairy tales’ 
of the Brāhmīn priests about their close contact with the ‘god’s and their power to absolve 
their unmarried daughters from all sins had no other choice than to surrender their 
daughters in the arms of those wicked persons. The ploy of the influential Brāhmīns in 
Tamil society compelled the god-fearing persons of the society to reluctantly hand over 
their daughters to greedy Brāhmīns who were father-figures to the girls due to age 
difference. Thus polygamy played havocs during 18th and 19th centuries in Tamil society.

The worst sufferers of the game of polygamy in Tamil society were the house wives. 
They were treated shabbily for not being able to fulfill the desire of the male members of 
the family to give birth of baby son. When a wife failed to deliver the boy child, she was 
not only replaced by a new wife, but also her role in the family was cut-out. Her status was 
reduced to a domestic help. This explains how polygamy in Tamil society in ancient times 
brought humility and disgrace to womanhood. However, the situation changed for good 
since the end of 19th century due to widespread education among women in Tamilnadu. 
Armed with education and awareness, they successfully met the challenges thrown by the 
evil practices of polygamy. Following social reforms and increase in awareness among 
people of Tamilnadu, the practice of polygamy has been virtually wiped out from modern 
Tamil society.²⁶

**Polygamy In Bengali Society:**

Polygamy had its origin in Hindu Bengali society way back in 16th century. The society 
heads of Bengal at the material time, namely ‘Kulin Brāhmīns’ and ‘Kulin Kayasthas’ were
indulged in the evil practice of polygamy or many marriages. They led other caste and groups in the society by their own examples to follow suit. The high caste Brāhmins took advantage of widespread illiteracy and distressed financial condition of the general people and forced them to follow the evil practice of polygamy to sub serve their own interests. Those upper crust of the society by virtue of their caste supremacy used to black-mail parents of unmarried girls. They infused a kind of religious fear in the minds of parents of unmarried girls that if the girls were not married during their life times, their souls after death would not be freed. Accordingly, those shrewd Brāhmins and other high caste people used to put pressure on the parents to settle marriages of their unmarried daughters with them although they were much in advance in age and also married earlier. The poor illiterate people reluctantly consented to such unethical practice to save their daughters from imaginary sufferings. This shocking social condition led to widespread polygamy in Bengali society during the period from 16th century to 18th century had declared that the gates of heaven for unmarried girls in the society would remain open if they were handed over to Kulin Brāhmins. The ‘kulin’ represented an ornamental ‘title’ awarded to certain groups of Brāhmins and Kayaśthas in early Bengali society, who were famous for their knowledge, wisdom and humanity. There was a guide-line framed by heads of the society as regards eligibility to become Kulin family. The Kulin families, be it Brāhmiṇ or Kayaśtha, misutilised their position for personal gains. The dictates of the Kulin Brāhmins about unmarried girls resulted in their marriages with persons having Kulin status even at their death-beds. The polygamy was so rampant at a time that a Kulin Brāhmiṇ eventually married to 40-50 girls who were half his age, many of whom could not have married life at their husband’s house. The wretched girls had to spend rest of their lives in their parents’ house.

The polygamy helped the Kulin Brāhmins to extract money from their in-laws by making visits to meet their brides after long intervals.

The practice of polygamy in Bengali society during 17th and 18th centuries brought shame to the society. The plight of the women who become the victims of many marriages could be easily visualized.

The mind set of the people of Bengal since 19th century started to change following the spread of education and awareness. The progressive men and women in the society raised their voices against the evil practice of polygamy. The widespread protests against the
menace of polygamy ultimately turned into a formal complaint with the British Administration for introduction of legislation for banning the system. The noted academician and social reformer Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar spearheaded the movement for abolition of polygamy from Bengali society. He made an appeal before the Administration followed by people’s petition for introduction of legislation for abolition of the system.

The large scale protests by people against the polygamy were not liked by the conservatives of the society for fear of losing their grip on the society. Therefore, they started to counter the spontaneous movement against polygamy by raising the issue of religious endorsements of the ongoing system. However, the erudite and learned sections of the society were able to convince the general masses through continuous campaigns that the existing religious texts of the Hindus did not have reference of any such provision by which the polygamy could be justified as social requirement on religious ground. As the supporters of polygamy gave religious tinge to the practice of polygamy, the British administration could not do much to hurt religious sentiments by introducing laws for abolition of a social practice like polygamy. Accordingly, they did not take any initiative to pass the legislation. Nevertheless, the learned people’s tirade against the ills in the system gradually caught the imagination of general people who started to feel the ill effects of polygamy. Their wholehearted support ultimately paved the way for rooting out the polygamy from Bengali society. Gradually, the polygamy withered away from the society without the help of any legal teeth.28

FESTIVAL – INDIAN PERSPECTIVE:

Festivals of different kinds have been integral parts of the social lives of the people of India since the ancient times. Since early ages, different regions of India notwithstanding their separate sovereign entities prior to annexation with greater Indian Territory had been performing religious and other social festivals in their own cultural traditions. All the provinces are still following the same traditions even after merger with Indian Territory. In
India, festivals of different kinds having different social and religious intonations are regarded as symbols of unity among the people of the nation.

Indian festivals are not without the attending rituals and formalities. The remarkable feature of Indian festivals is the wholehearted participation of the people. Indian festivals, irrespective of their religious or cultural backgrounds draw people of all castes, creeds, communities and religions together to exhibit their solidarity and unity. In fact, Indian festivals transcend all borders of religious faith and belief to make them universally acceptable.

Although different regions of India have been performing different festivals according to local customs and practices over centuries, they have nevertheless, acquired the character of Indian festivals in broader perspective due to participation of people of different religions and castes. In fact, harmony and cooperation among different sections of the people have made any particular festival of any region an all-Indian affair. There has been cultural transformation among the people of different regions. As a result, any particular festival of a region is no longer confined to that area only. Other regions also celebrate the same festival to give it to a national status. The Indian festivals from ages are being performed on religious grounds. However, the cultural activities associated with those religious performances have enticed people from all hues and faiths for their participation wholeheartedly. The festivals of India, cutting across different regions are characterized by exchange of happiness and good wishes among the participating masses. Indian festivals are time tested. No outside forces could stop people from coming together to observe different religious and social festivals according to established customs and traditions. The festivals of India have infused a sense of national feeling among the people of different regions. In this connection, the festivals of Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra and Durga Puja in West Bengal during the British rule laid the platforms for people's participation in the call for freedom of the country from British rule. Thus the Indian festivals in the past succeeded in raising national spirit among the people of the country in addition to religious fulfillment. The Indian festivals played an important role since ancient times in fostering social harmony and cordial relations among different groups and communities. The unity in diversity has been widely reflected through Indian festivals.

Indian festivals, especially, the religious ones are observed with many rituals and customs like worshipping of deities, offerings and sacrifices before the gods etc. followed by
cultural activities like dances, music and recitation from religious texts. Indian festivals are not without their glitz and colour. During any festival, the cities and towns wear a new look with confettis and graffitis all round. The decorations and lightings of the places of festivals attract people from far-off places to come in hordes and participate in the festivals of either religious or social. People revel in groups along the spots of the festivals with great joy and fervors. It is noteworthy to mention that women of the particular area where the festival is being observed participate in large scale with attractive attires. They also wear new jewelleries acquired for the occasion of the festival. However, behind all these glitterati, the actual essence of Indian festivals lies in their strength to forge unity and solidarity among the people of different castes, religions and communities.29

FESTIVALS: TAMILNADU

Since ancient times, the people of Tamil land have been very religious minded. The Dravidians were the original descendants of Tamil clan. The Dravidians in fact had spiritual bend of mind. They were the initiators of invoking gods through idol worshipping in Tamil land. The traditions of religious practices are being followed over centuries by the inheritors of Dravidian clans of Tamil land. That the people of Tamilnadu were religious minded could be viewed from the myriad number of temples dotted in Tamil lands. It is but natural that the festivals in Tamilnadu were mainly religion-based. Tamil people are following religious festivals even today with great devotion and gaiety. The religious festivals in Tamilnadu since 19th century acquired new dimensions. Contrary to earlier centuries when the religious festivals were observed with piety, the Tamil festivals have become colorful from 19th century onwards. There has been a paradigm shift from simple performance of religious activities to one of gorgeous festivals. Religious expression is no longer confined to devotion and obeisance to gods but it has been transformed into observance of a festival of lights and decorations. During Tamil religious festivals the houses in the main thoroughfares are hugely decorated and the buildings are also illuminated. Feasts are important aspects of Tamil festivals. People participating in religious festivals also enjoy the accompanying feasts. In ancient times, the Tamil religious
festivals were coincided with the renewal of lease agreement of firm lands and finalization of revenue accounts of the Government. The important festivals of Tamilnadu are summarized as under:  

**SIVARĀTRI**

Śivarātri is a religious festival performed in Tamilnadu since ages. The festival is celebrated for three days during new moon in the month of February by the followers of the Lord Shiva with great enthusiasm. The principal ritual associated with the festival is that people who worship the idol or ‘Śivā Lingam’ on the occasion of the Śivarātri remain on fasting. The followers of the festivals throng the Shiva temples from early morning clad in ‘Pattabastram’ and holding pots of milk or water in their hands to pour the same on the idol as a mark of respect with the chant of prayers. In the evening, on the days of the festival, the Shiva temples are illuminated with lights. The musical performance in the nights of occasion of Śivarātri is an additional attraction of the festival. People assemble in large numbers to enjoy the cultural activities on the nights of Śivarātri festival.

**GAURĪ :**

Gaurī festival is held in Tamilnadu in the month of September every year during the new moon. This is an age-old festival performed with deep sense of religious belief. The Gaurī festival per se is solemnized in domestic houses with hopes of better living. The ritual associated with the Gaurī festival is the worship of goddess for Her blessings for eternal use of the household implements like utensils and tools for the preparation of food for the family. All the household implements are placed before the idol of Gaurī on the occasion of the worship to seek her blessings. The people perform the festival of Gaurī in a bizarre fashion. The housewives and other females of the domestic houses of Tamilnadu prepare images of Gaurī, the wife of the Lord Shiva with molded rice and place the same in pedestals and adorn the idols with garlands. The people offer prayers with the belief that Gaurī resembles housewives. The farmers, artisans, weavers and fishermen all over Tamilnadu celebrate the festival of Gaurī with pomp and fervors.
MAHĀNAVAMI:
The Mahānavami is a religious festival celebrated in Tamilnadu for many centuries. The most distinguishing feature of this festival is that every Tamil family offers sacrifices on the occasion of Mahānavami to please their ancestors. On the occasion of Mahānavami festival, the students of schools and colleges dressed up with new garments participate in a street march to mark the occasion. The marchers on the occasion of Mahānavami festival received packets of gifts and cash in the past. However, the festival is held in a modest way in modern times.

DUSSEHRA:
The people of Tamilnadu have been performing the Dussehra festival on a grand scale from ancient times. In the distant past, the kings, soldiers and commoners celebrated the festival of Dussehra in Tamilnadu. The festival is traditionally associated with the sacrifice of lamb or goat to please the god. The underlying objective of the celebration of Dussehra festival is to surrender before the god weapons of destruction in a bid to shun the animosity among the people. The sacrifices also resemble the surrender of in-built human enemies in the forms of passion, greed, violence etc. at the altar of the god. The festival of Dussehra is celebrated throughout Tamilnadu with great joy and enthusiasm. On the occasion of Dussehra festival, people of all castes and communities assemble together at the place of celebration of the festival to exchange greetings and happiness among themselves for prosperous future. As Dussehra is a religious festival, the worshipping of god and offerings of sacrificial animals are integral part of the festival. The priests perform the religious activities on the occasion of Dussehra festival amidst chanting of religious hymns from the religious texts. After the formal prayers and worship of the god, the sacrifices of lambs or goats are held. The area covering the Mandapam, where the festival is celebrated is decorated and illuminated hugely. People stream in large numbers to offer their pujas and surrender their arms and weapons before the god. Many cultural functions are performed on the occasion of Dussehra festival.

At present the Dussehra is celebrated in Tamilnadu with more grandeur and aplomb than with the spiritual urge. People look into this religious performance as recreational object and leave no stone unturned to make it a grand festival of decorations and lightings. The
real deep-seated spiritual feelings that were inherited from the earlier generations have been missing during the celebration of Dussehra festival by the country folk of Tamilnadu in present times.

**DEEPAVALI:**
Deepāvalī is another grand old festival of Tamilnadu celebrated from ancient times. The festival of Deepāvalī is celebrated in the month of November every year. Deepāvalī is also regarded as the festival of lights. The religious intonation is very much underlined in the celebration of Deepāvalī. The Deepāvalī is observed with a view to driving away the evil forces that may have surrounded the social lives of the people of Tamil land by lighting the lamps of residential places on the night of the festival. On the night of Deepāvalī, the people of Tamilnadu place earthen lamps at their doorsteps and hang up lanterns on the bamboo mast atop their building terraces. All the roads and thoroughfares are illuminated with lights on the night of Deepāvalī. People come out on the streets in a large number and burst firecrackers and lit different kinds of fireworks to illuminate the skyline whole night on the occasion of Deepāvalī. In the past, the farming community used to assemble in their firmlands and offer prayers to the standing crops on the occasion of Deepāvalī. They also used to sacrifice lambs or goats as a mark of respect to agricultural produce that were ripen and fit for human consumption. There was an element of religious belief in the minds of rural folks in performing certain rituals on the occasion of Deepāvalī in the past. However, in modern times the occasion of Deepāvalī is celebrated as a festival of rejoice and merriment.

**PONGOL:**
From time immemorial, the festival of Pongol is being celebrated in Tamilnadu to coincide with the harvesting of rice. The festival is more of a cultural than religious. On the occasion of Poṅgol, people of Tamilnadu wear new clothes and jewellery. Many cultural activities are performed on the occasion of Poṅgol festival. People consider this as auspicious event and accordingly they go to temples to offer their prayers to gods and goddesses. The farming communities celebrate the occasion in a big way. On the day of the occasion the Tamil men and women in rural areas clean their courtyard and smear it with cow-dung to
give a fresh look. People of Tamilnadu celebrate Pongol by paying visits to each other's house and participating in grand feasts. Good wishes and happiness are also exchanged among people on the occasion of Pongol.  

**Tamil New Year's Day:**
Tamil New Year's Day is celebrated on the first day of the month of Chaitra according to Tamil Almanac. Tamil people regard Tamil New Year's Day as a very auspicious day. Tamil New Year's Day is not strictly a religious festival. But people clad in new dresses and jewellery storm into temples from early morning on the day to offer prayers to God Dhandayuthapani. People remain on fasting on the Tamil New Year's Day until the end of the puja. Grand feasts are arranged at many places of Tamilnadu to mark the auspicious occasion for participation of people. Tamil New Year's Day celebration earns a special place in Tamil society for a long time.

**Agni Nakshtra Festival:**
The Agni Nakshtra festival was performed in ancient times in Tamilnadu in a big way for fourteen days during the months April – May each year. On the occasion of the festival people with high religious beliefs made rounds of hills in the morning and evening to express the religious sentiments.

**Festivals: Bengal**
In Bengal, festivals of different kinds are being celebrated since ancient times. Since at least 16th century, Bengal witnessed different religious festivals with attending rituals and formalities. The religious festivals of Bengal have flourished over the centuries due to large participation of people. From ages, the cultural activities of Bengal have been transformed into religious festivals due to their inherent religious overtones. In the past, the religious activities in the forms of prayers and obeisance to the Gods were confined to domestic houses. But in course of time, majority of the religious performances crossed the thresholds of the houses to become universal festivals. Some of the major religious festivals, namely,
Durga Puja and Kali Puja no longer remain within the boundaries of the houses of some rich people of Bengal. These important religious festivals have earned the status of community festivals in course of time. In early times the different festivals of Bengal were celebrated quietly with the participation of local people. A sense of belonging was the hallmark of any festival of Bengal, especially, in rural side. People of all castes and communities used to gather on the occasion of religious festivals and exchange pleasantries and good wishes among themselves to mark the occasion of the festivals. In case of religious festivals, people thronged the temples to offer their prayers and sought blessings of the gods. In earlier eras, people's spiritual sentiments were expressed by the nature of their wholehearted participation in the religious festivals. People of ancient times had expressed their religious beliefs in more than one way. They ensured that the religious sanctity of any festival do not get diluted by the influence of any cultural decadence. People were very particular in following the rituals and formalities associated with any religious festival in true spirits to satisfy their religious sentiments. However, with the passage of time, the religious festivals and their attending formalities and rituals in Bengal have undergone a change. Present day religious celebrations have least of faith and more of festivals. The religious festivals of Bengal in modern times have been turned into outward show-game. In Bengal most of the important religious celebrations have been taken over by the local communities and clubs and therefore religious inhibitions of people have been overshadowed by outward glitz and glamour of festivals. The devotion and religious sentiments of the past are absent in today's celebration of festivals. People are attracted by gorgeous decorations and lighting rather than the spiritual affinity in the celebration of religious festivals. Modern day socio-economic situation has brought about a change in the attitude of the people. They try to seek pleasure from the colorful celebrations of religious festivals. The aura of spirituality surrounded the religious festivals of earlier eras is totally absent today. People are more inclined to expose their wealth and financial powers on the occasions of religious festivals by adorning expensive garments and jewellery. This outward show of colorful dresses on the occasions of the festivals may bolster the egos of people; nevertheless, this cannot by any chance hide the erosion of the value of spirituality within. Some of Bengal's important festivals are briefly summarized as under:
DURGA PUJA:

Durga Puja is the single most important religious festival celebrated in Bengal since ancient times. There may be disputes as to the dates of origin of Durga Puja in Bengal. However, the social historians have opined that the festival of Durga Puja had firmly rooted in Bengal as the most popular religious festival in 16th century A.D. The Government Gazettes of the past revealed that the Durga Puja was celebrated in the houses of influential people of Bengal for four days in accordance with the religious principles laid down in the religious texts determined by the ancient pious priests and learned Brahmins of Bengal. The same religious traditions and practices associated with the worship of Goddess Durga are still being followed. The occasion of Durga Puja or the Puja of Mahamaya as commonly called has many rituals and formalities associated with it right from the day the image is installed. The Hindu religious text has divided four days of the worship with different rituals and formalities set out for each day. The rituals and formalities followed in the worshipping of the Goddess Durga are stupendous. Performing the worship or puja in itself is huge affair in view of the difficult and elaborate formalities that are required to be followed to accomplish the task. Durga Puja, traditionally, has been a grand social and religious festival in which people from all walks of life participate and rejoice. It is important to note that Durga Puja brings people of different communities and culture closer to each other. In a sense, Durga Puja in Bengal in addition to fulfilling religious and cultural sentiments of people, tend to forge amity and bond of friendship among people of different communities. In the past, the celebration of Durga Puja was held in a modest way. But people’s participation was overwhelming. The performing of the pujas with utmost devotion and sincerity was the single most important thing in the past. There was no scope for any gorgeous decorations or lighting to switch people’s devotion from worshipping the Goddess single-mindedly. The unblemished faith and devotion was the be all and end all of the celebration of Durga Puja in Bengal in the past.

The festival of Durga Puja traditionally, has been associated with the sacrifice of goats or rams. But in today’s culture, the practice of offering goats or rams before the deity has been done away with in community pujas. Nevertheless, the system of sacrifice of goats or rams is still being followed in a handful of domestic pujas. Keeping in tradition of the past, during the four days of the festival in addition to religious practices associated with the
worshipping the image of Durga, many cultural activities are performed in a big way. The Puja sites wear a new look with extravagant decorations and illuminations. People are attracted with the outward glaze and glamour of the Durga Puja festival in modern days. In the distant past the festival of Durga Puja was the symbol of demonstrations of faith and obeisance to the divine almighty. That very essence of devotion and religious urges are not ostensible in the celebration of the festival today. Nevertheless, the festival of Durga Puja lifts up the spirit and passion of the people to a great extent for the enormous entertainment prospects associated with the festival. In Bengal, the festival of Durga Puja generates a sort of hysteria among the people. People’s participation is spontaneous. With all the pleasure-induced activities, the four days of the festival occupy special position in the hearts of the people of Bengal. Right from the installation of the images to their immersion, the Durga Puja in Bengal has kindled the indomitable enthusiasm among the people.

**SYAMA PUJA:**

People of Bengal have been celebrating Syama Puja as religious festival since last three centuries. The festival of Syama Puja is associated with the worshipping of the goddess Kali. The believers of ‘Sakti’ or the sect known as ‘Saktya’ traditionally have been performing the festival of Kali Puja or Syama Puja. In view of the festival’s popularity over the ages, all the people of Bengal, irrespective of their castes, creeds, sects etc. participate in the festival of Syama Puja with great enthusiasm. The festival of Syama Puja in Bengal is coincided with the Deepavali or Diwali celebrated elsewhere in the country. The festival of Syama Puja is also known as festival of lights. In the past, the festival of Syama Puja was celebrated in every places of Bengal with religious spirit and in a solemn manner. On the occasion of Syama Puja festival, the worship of the Goddess Kali is performed at dead of night on the day of Amavasya in the month of Karthika. The worship of the Goddess Kali on the occasion of Syama Puja is done on ‘Tantra’ custom. As it is a festival of lights, on the night of Syama Puja, the houses and the streets are illuminated with bright lights. The festival is observed with the bursting of crackers and display of fireworks everywhere in Bengal. The Hindus of Bengal revere the Goddess Kali as universal Mother. There is a myth that people wanting to shun their greed and passion for earthly pleasures, surrender before the Goddess Kali on the occasion of the festival and seek Mother’s blessing by way
of worshipping to get rid of the evil desires. In modern times, the Syama Puja is celebrated with great rejoice and fervor. The decorations of pandals and lighting in community pujas attract people to participate and enjoy. On the occasion of Syama Puja, all the resources of entertainment are within the reach of the people. The normal revelry and pandle-hopping by the public on the occasion of Syama Puja have made the festival very popular among the participants and the organizers of community pujas. The festival is associated with many cultural activities like dance, drama, music, recitations, competitions etc. The festival of Syama Puja is widely celebrated in Bengal for all its entertaining resources. The true spirit of devotion and religious feelings are rarely seen among the people on the occasion of the Syama Puja at present. People are more keen to participate in the fun and fair and bask themselves in the glare of the festival provided by the occasion of Syama Puja in modern times.

SARASWATI PUJA:
Bengal has witnessed the festival of Saraswati Puja or the worship of the Goddess of Learning from 17th century. Saraswati Puja is a religious festival and celebrated between the months of January and February every year. As the festival is connected with the worshipping of the Goddess of Learning, the same is celebrated mainly in domestic houses and educational institutions. On the occasion of the festival of Saraswati Puja, cultural programmes, mainly, dance, drama, recitation, music etc. are performed on a grand scale. The students of Bengal participate in the festival of Saraswati Puja spontaneously.

RĀŚ MELA:
Rāś Mela is an event of religious festival celebrated in all parts of Bengal since ancient time by people to offer their respect and reverence to Lord Krishna and His all time spiritual companion Sri Radha. In early times the Rāś Mela was celebrated with great rejoice and religious fervors in rural Bengal. The festival of Rāś Mela in due course of time transcended the boundary of rural settlements and firmly placed its foothold in urban Bengal. The people of urban cities started to celebrate the festival in their own inimitable fashion. In cities the festival is mainly confined to the houses of riches. The festival of Rāś Mela is celebrated in the month of Chaitra as per Bengali Almanac. The festival is
celebrated for 10 days. During the festival of Rāṣ Mela big fares are held wherein stalls are erected for vending various items like clay-dolls, earthen pots, sweetmeats, household utensils and miscellaneous items. People in large hordes visit the sites of Ras Mela festival in the evening to pay their respect to the idols of Lord Krishna and Sri Radha on the occasion of the festival. They also throng into the fare sites and make purchases of various items of their choice.

In the main area of Rāṣ Mela festival, a wooden plank with a ‘jhula’ fixed thereon is placed. The idols of Lord Krishna and Sri Radha are placed on the thrones put up on the ‘jhula’. Arrangements are there for the swing of the ‘jhula’ with the idols sitting on the throne. In addition, clay models depicting the various characters of the mythological era are also placed on the site of the festival. The decorations and lighting are additional attractions for the onlookers. On the occasion of Rāṣ Mela, devotional songs praising the Lord Krishna and Sri Radha for their eternal blessings on mortal beings in the fight against evils. People in large numbers attend the cultural program held on the occasion of the Rāṣ Mela festival.
Reference

2. Ibid. pg- 252.
3. Ibid. pg-259-265.
7. Ibid. Pg-298-300.
10. Ibid. Pg- 33-34.
31. Ibid. Pg-139-143.
34. Ibid. Pg-269-281.