

Main Features of Castes

The main features of caste prevailing through the past centuries may be described under nine heads: hierarchy, endogamy, and hypergamy; occupational association; distinction in custom, dress, and speech; pollution; ritual, other privileges, and disabilities; and caste organisation and caste mobility.

Caste and Village Community

The caste living in a village or a group of neighbouring villages, are bound together by economic ties. Generally peasant castes are numerically predominant in villages and they need carpenter, blacksmith, barber, and leather worker castes to perform agricultural work. Servicing castes such as priest (Brahmin as well as non-Brahmin), barber, washerman, and water carrier cater to the needs of everyone except Harijans. Artisan castes produce goods which are wanted by everyone. Most Indian villages do not have more than a few of the essential castes and depend on neighbouring villages for certain services, skills, and goods.

In rural India, with its largely subsistent economy, the relationship between the different caste groups in a village takes a particular form. The essential artisan and servicing castes are paid annually in grain at harvest. In some parts of India, the artisan and servicing castes are also provided with free food, clothing, fodder, and residential site. On such occasions as birth, marriage, and death, these castes perform extra duties for which they are paid a customary sum of money and some gifts in kind. This type of relationship is found all over India and is called by different names: *Jajmani* in the North, *Mirasi* in Madras, *Bara Balute* in Maharashtra, and *Adade* in Mysore. The relationship between the *Jajman* and his *Kamin* is unequal, since the latter is regarded as inferior. The right to serve is hereditary, transferable, saleable, mortgageable, and partible.

The *Jajmani* system bound together the different castes living in a village or a group of neighbouring villages. The caste-wise division of labour and the consequent linking up of different castes in enduring and pervasive relationships provided a pattern of alliances which cut across the ties of caste. The modern 'caste problem' is to some extent the result of the weakening, in the last sixty years or more, of these vertical and local ties and consequent strengthening of horizontal ties over whole area.

The relationship between landowner and tenant, master and servant, creditor and debtor, may all be subsumed under a single category—patron and client. This relationship is widespread and crucial to the understanding of rural India. Voting at elections, local and general, is influenced by the patron-client tie.

Ritual occasions like life-cycle ceremonies, festivals and fairs, require the co-operation of several castes. Certain rituals which are common for all the castes occur at birth, girls puberty, marriage, and death. Several castes are also required to cooperate in the performance of calendar, festivals, and festivals of village deities.

The functioning of the village as a political and social entity brought together members from different castes. Every village had a headman usually belonging to the dominant caste. The accountant was always Brahmin in South India. Every village had a watchman and messengers. In the irrigated areas, there was always a man to look after and regulate the flow of water in the canals feeding the fields. The headman and accountant collected the land taxes with the aid of Harijan village servants.

The village council performed a variety of tasks, including the maintenance of law and order, settling of disputes, celebrations of festivals and construction of roads, bridges, and tanks.

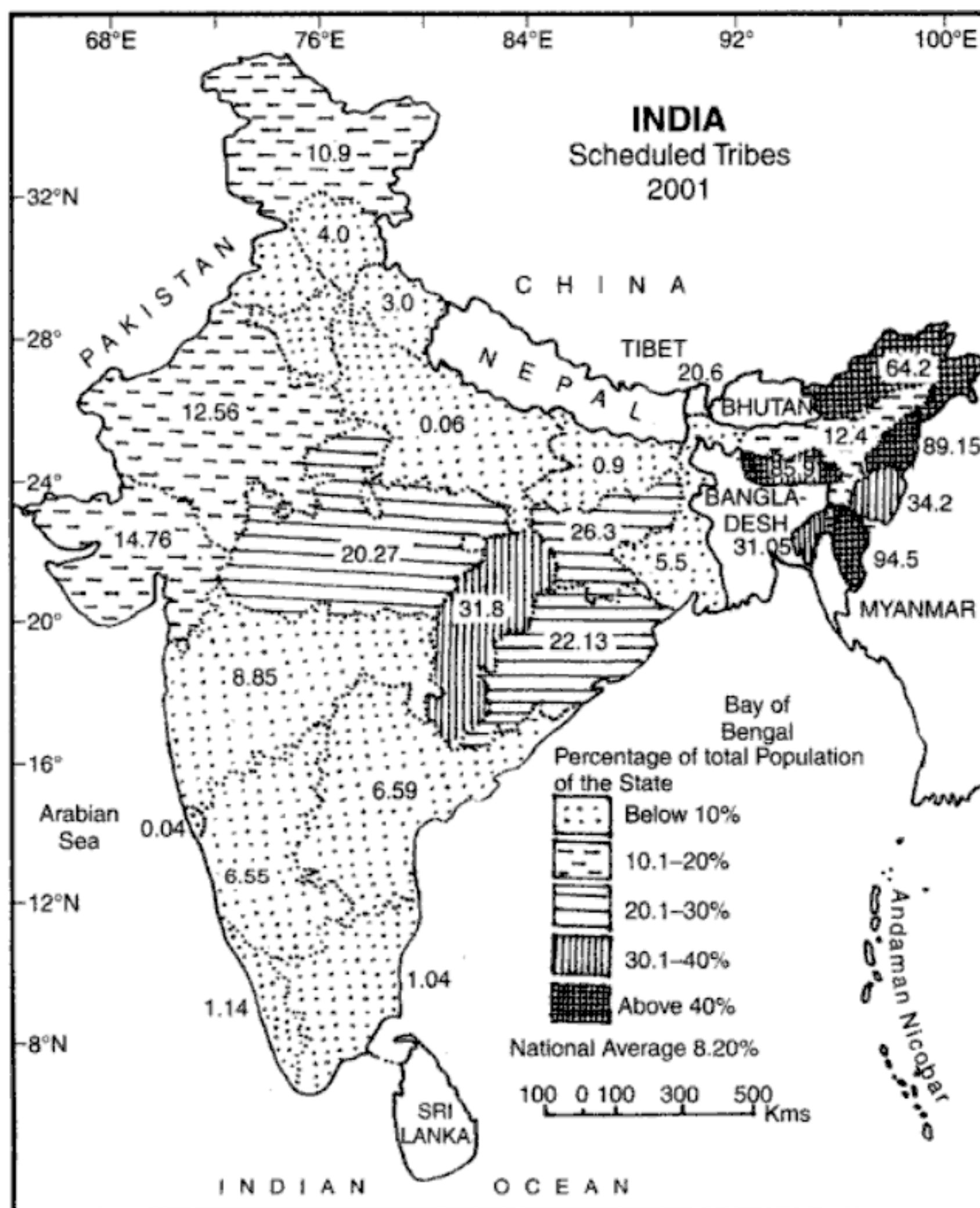


Fig. 13.5 Density of Scheduled Tribes, 2001

Table 13.3 India: Growth of Scheduled Tribe Population, 1951–2001

Year	Total Population of Scheduled Tribes in Lakhs	Percentage of Scheduled Tribes to Total Population
1951	22.5	6.23
1961	302	6.87
1971	380	6.94
1981	538	6.94
1991	678	8.08
2001	843	8.20

Source: *Census of India, 2001*.

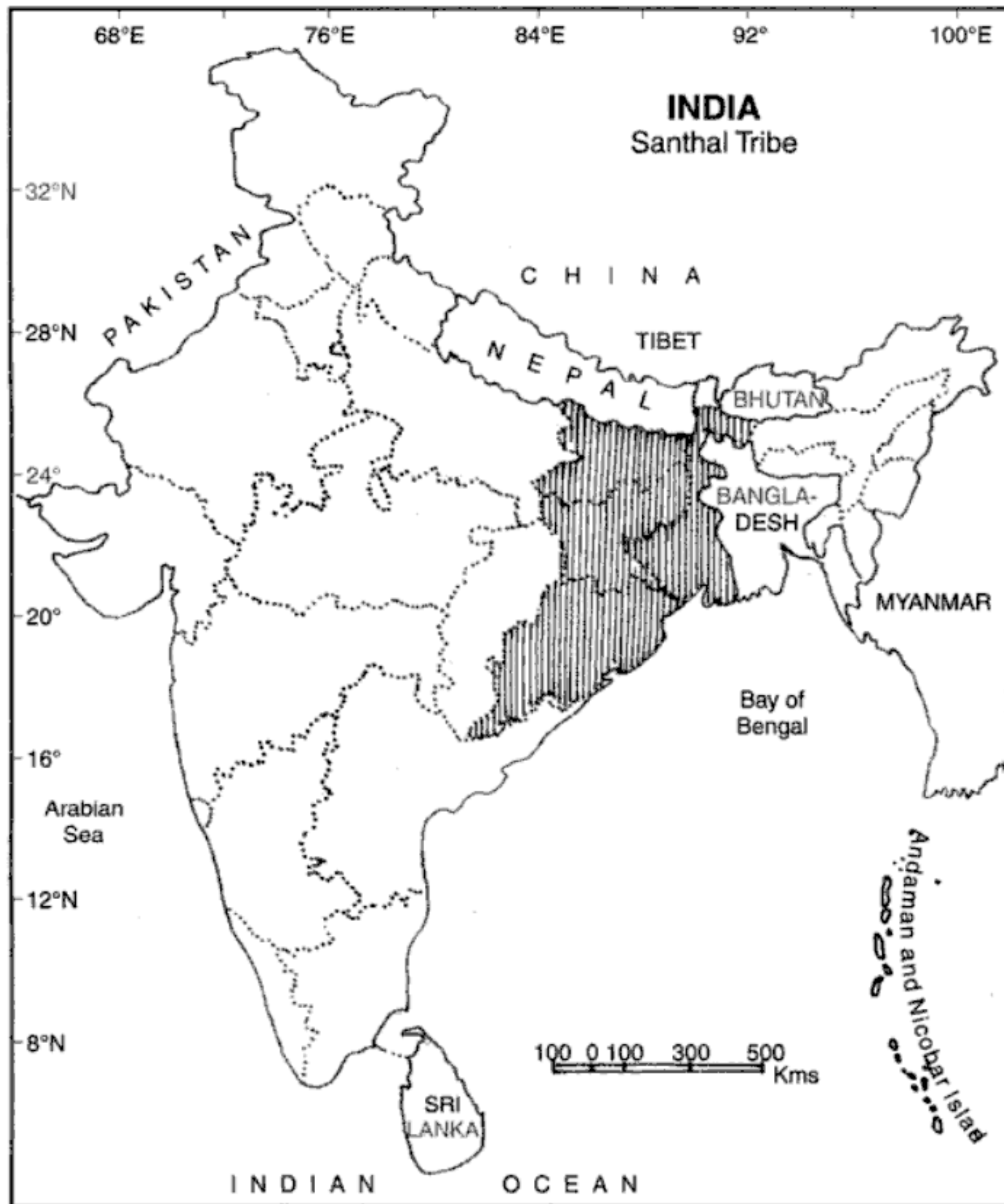


Fig. 13.9 Distribution of Santhals (2001)

The Santhals are basically agriculturists (68%). They own landed property and hardly any Santhali is landless. Their subsidiary occupations include hunting, fishing, and collecting forest products. With increasing literacy and cultural contacts, they are also engaged in service, trade and contracting business. Their demand is for a Greater Jharkhand which extends over the Santhal areas in West Bengal and Orissa.

The Santhals have a great cultural heritage and have a well defined social order. Widow remarriage is permissible. The Santhal society is patriarchal. The Santhal woman is deemed a strong labour force and contributes to the family income. She participates in the agricultural operations and decorates her house before the Bandana festival.

Marathi stands fourth in numerical strength. Its linguistic core lies in Maharashtra (93%) with speakers also in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Goa. Konkani, spoken in the Konkan coastal areas and Goa, is an offshoot of Marathi.

Tamil occupies the fifth rank in numerical strength, but best represents the Old Dravidian script. It has rich literature commencing with the beginning of the Christian Era. Its linguistic core lies in Tamil Nadu (92%), but it extends its influence in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Pondicherry.

Gujarati has its core area in Gujarat and has carved out its influence in Maharashtra and Rajasthan. Kannada stands next to Gujarati. Its linguistic core lies in Karnataka (91%) and it has its extension in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh.

Among the Dravidian languages, Malayalam has the smallest number of speakers. Its linguistic core lies in Kerala (92%) and extends in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.

Oriya has a distinctive character as it is the old Apabhramsa and has enriched itself with Sanskrit.

Assamese has its distinctive pronunciation and grammar, but is often included in the Bengal Assam group.

Religion as a Determinant of Cultural Region

Religion has been defined differently by different scholars. Friedrich Schleimacher defined religion as '*feeling of absolute dependence*'. According to William James, '*religion is the enthusiastic temper of expousal*'. Otto defines the essence of religious awareness as awe, a unique blend of fear and fascination before the divine. The main characteristics of religious life are: (i) traditionalism, (ii) myth and symbol, (iii) concept of salvation, (iv) sacred places and objects, (v) sacred actions (rituals), (vi) sacred writings, (vii) the sacred community (monastic order), and (viii) the sacred experience.

Religion, like language, is a symbol of group identity and a cultural rallying point. All societies have value systems, common beliefs, understandings, and expectations which unite their people. Religion plays a crucial role in the socioeconomic life of the people and even their utilisation of natural resources is closely controlled by the religion of the people. Geographers are concerned with the interaction between religion and landscape (resources). Thus, religion provides a good basis for the demarcation of cultural regions.

India is a multi-religion country. It is the birth place of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Subsequently, the successive waves of people of other religious faiths came to India. They maintained their religious identity. For example, the Syrian Christians appeared on the west coast of India in the first century AD. They are still found in Kerala. The Muslims came to India from South-West Asia and Central Asia and maintained their religious identity.

Concentration of Religious Groups

Hindus According to the Census 2001, over 82 per cent of the total population of India is Hindu by faith. They are predominantly distributed throughout the country, but in a few areas, like the Kashmir Valley, Punjab, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and parts of Kerala, they are in minority (Fig. 13.14).

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions of the world. It is a polytheistic (multiplicity of gods and goddesses) religion. The proportion of Hindu population is the highest in Himachal Pradesh (96%) and lowest in Mizoram (5%). It is higher than the national average in Andhra Pradesh,

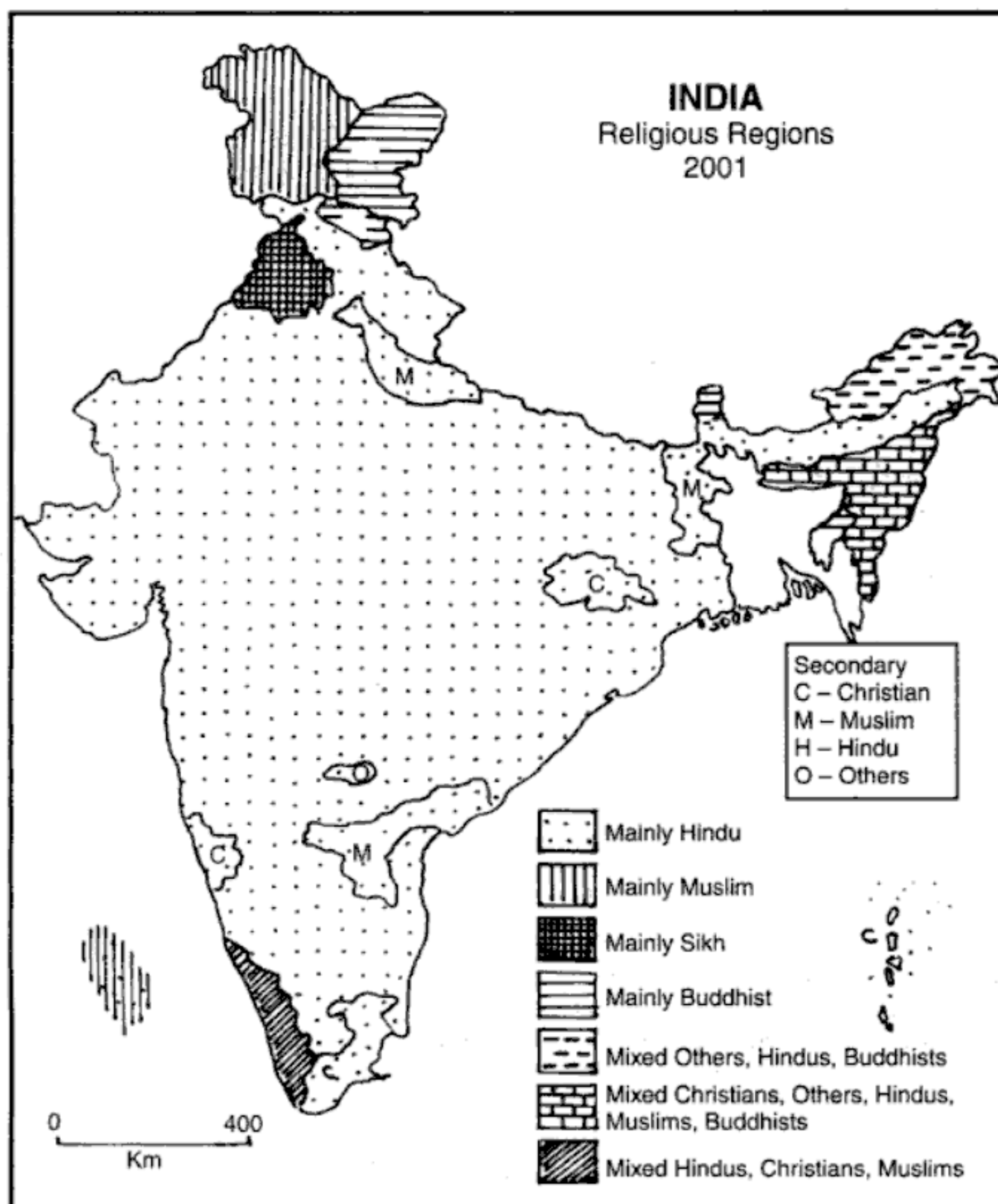


Fig. 13.19 Religious Regions 2001

It may be seen from Fig. 13.19 that the greater part of the country has a dominance of Hindu religion and culture with sprinkled populations of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and tribals. The hill states of north east India are however, characterised by the mixed population of Christians, Tribals, Hindus, and Muslims. The Muslim dominated regions are the Kashmir Division and Kargil District of Jammu and Kashmir state. Muslims are quite significant in northern Kerala and in Agra, Meerut, Lucknow, Rohilkhand, and Saharanpur divisions of Uttar Pradesh. The state of Punjab and the Union Territory of Chandigarh are the Sikh dominated parts of the country (Fig. 13.19).

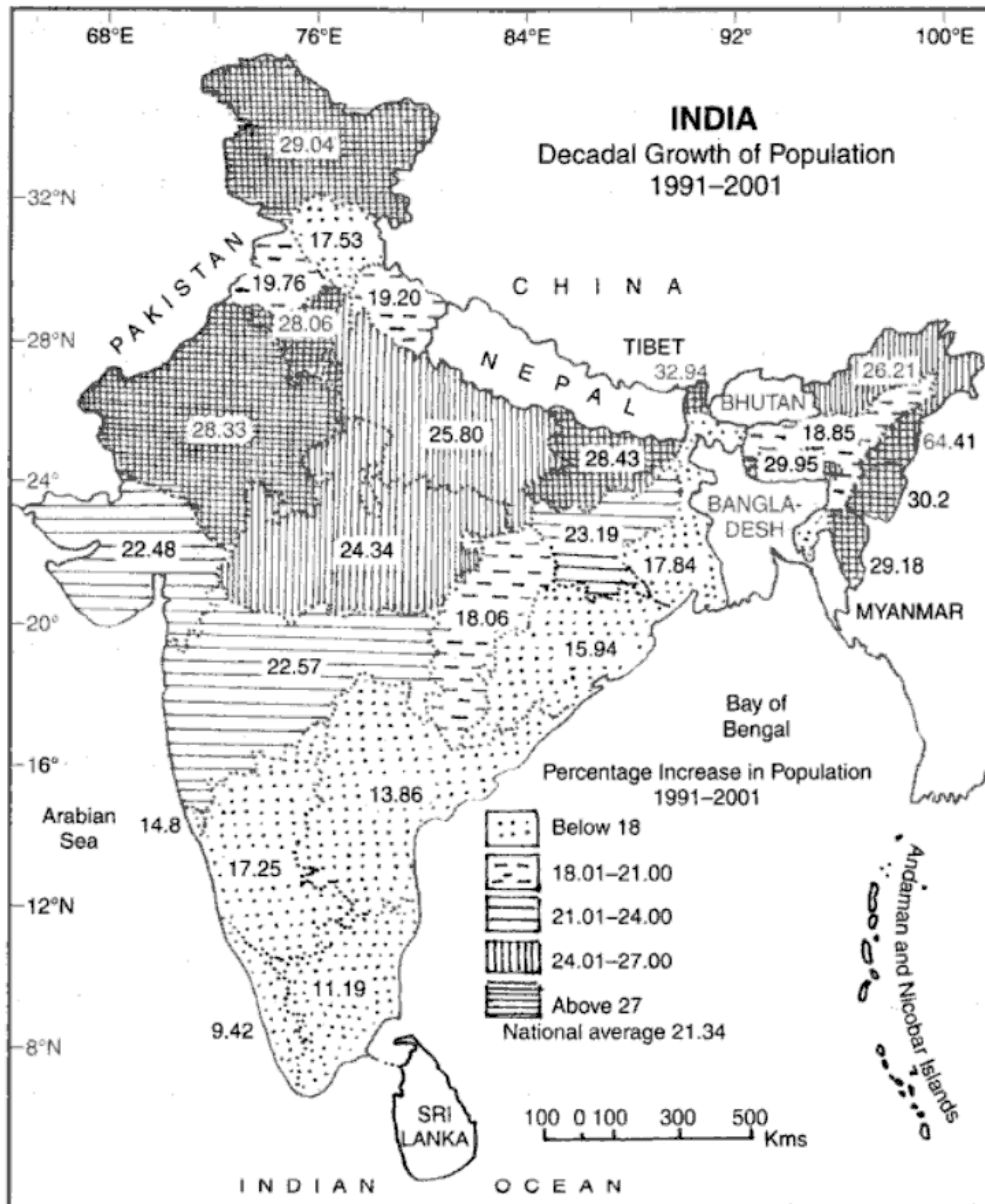


Fig. 13.22 Percentage Decadal Growth of Population 1991-2001

1. Period of Stagnant Population—1901-21
2. Period of Steady Growth—1921-51
3. Period of Rapid Growth—1951-81
4. Period of High Growth with Declining Trend—1981-2001

1. Period of Stagnant Population

The first two decades (from 1901 to 1921) was the period of stagnant population. During this period, the birth rate and the death rate were high. Consequently, the population showed a stagnant

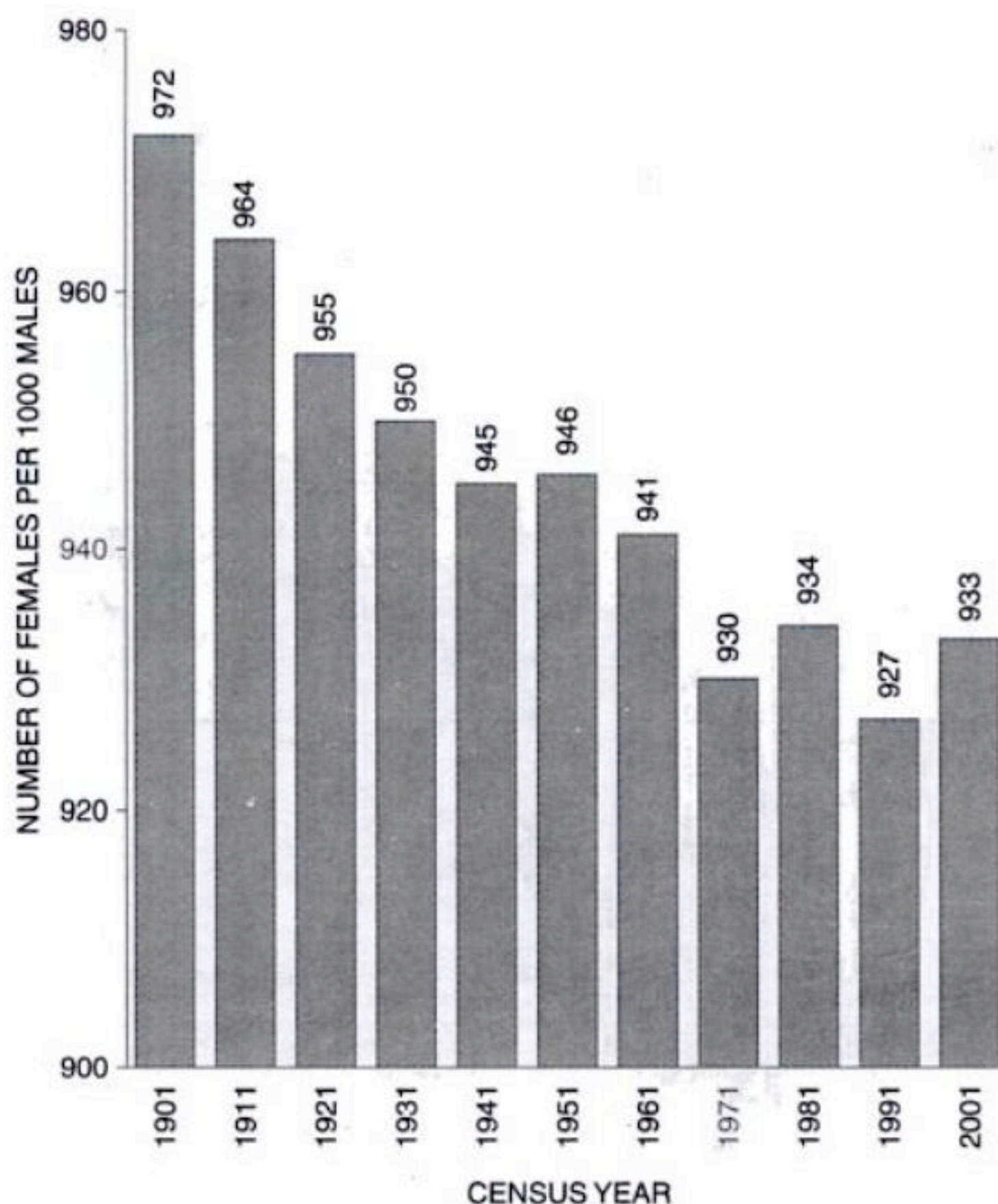


Fig. 13.26 India Sex Ratio (1901–2001)

It may be observed from **Table 13.10** that the sex ratio was 972 at the beginning of the 20th century (1901) and thereafter showed a continuous decline until 1941. The post Independence period, however, recorded a sharp declining trend in the sex ratio, the lowest being in 1991 when it was only 927 females per 1000 of males. The socio-cultural factors and the pre-birth sex determination seem to be responsible for the low sex ratio in the country. Interestingly enough, the higher sex ratio is found in the Scheduled Tribes, Christian and Muslim dominated areas of the country. The state-wise sex ratio has been given in **Table 13.11**.

It may be seen from the **Table 13.11** that there are great variations in the sex ratio at the state level. Kerala with a sex ratio of 1058 females per thousand of males is the only major state which has excess of females. The high sex ratio is an indicator of less discrimination against the females and low rate of female infanticides. As opposed to this, the sex ratio in Haryana and Punjab is only 861 and 874 respectively which may be because of the socio-cultural factors. In the opinion of some of the demographers, the pre-birth determination of sex is mainly responsible for the significantly low sex ratio in these relatively more developed states of the country.

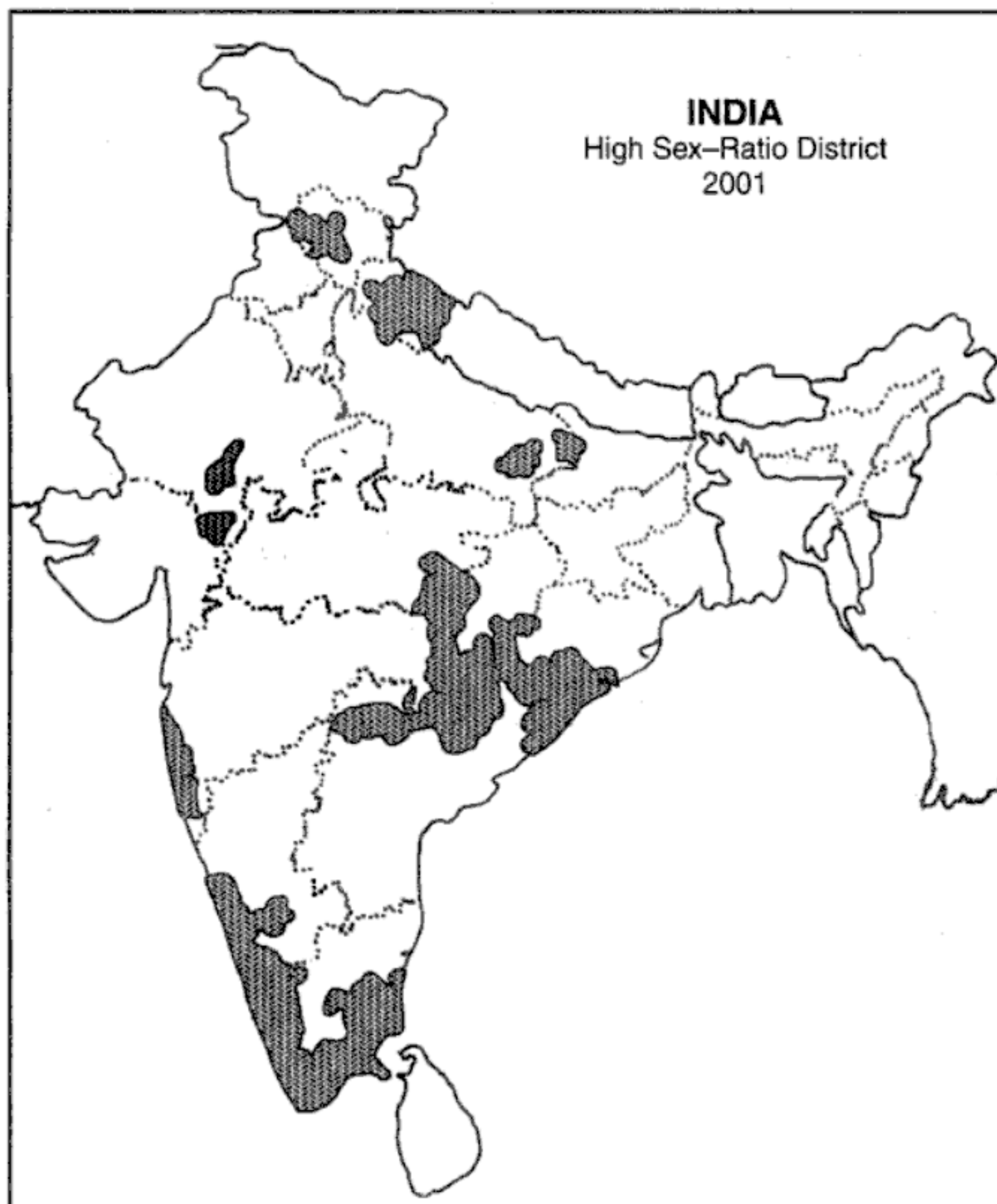


Fig. 13.31 Districts with High Sex-Ratio of 1000 and above (2001)

LITERACY

The concept of literacy, which varies from country to country, generally refers to the minimum level of literacy skills. It is an important indicator of socio-cultural development and political consciousness. In fact, it is the vehicle of socio-economic transformation as it facilitates the acquisition of specific skills, and occupational competence, and accelerates the process of social change.

According to the Census of 2001, literacy has been defined as *the ability to read and write with understanding*. Literacy reflects the socio-economic and cultural set-up of a nation, ethnic group or community. The main advantage of literacy is that it provides relatively more opportunity of