

Rural Society, Agrarian Structures, and Social Stratification: Reassessing Inequality and Transformation in Contemporary Contexts

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Abstract- Rural societies remain central to agrarian economies, yet they are increasingly shaped by urbanization, technological change, and structural inequalities. This study critically examines the interlinked concepts of rural society, agrarian social structure, and social stratification, with particular attention to how land distribution, caste, and class relations configure rural life. Drawing on sociological and historical perspectives, the analysis highlights the persistence of unequal land tenure systems, the transformation of agrarian relations under colonial and post-colonial policies, and the continuing impact of modernization on rural livelihoods. Social stratification is explored through the division of communities into upper, middle, and lower classes, as well as caste-based hierarchies that reinforce economic disparities. The findings underscore that rural society is not a static entity but a dynamic field where migration, unemployment, and poverty intersect with cultural traditions and institutional frameworks. By reassessing agrarian structures and stratification, this study contributes to global debates on inequality, rural development, and the future of agrarian communities in an era of rapid socio-economic change.

Keywords- Rural Society, Agrarian Social Structure, Social Stratification, Land Tenure Systems, Rural Development, Caste and Class Inequality, Urbanization and Migration, Agrarian Change in India. Rural Sociology, Agricultural Economy

I. INTRODUCTION

The people in the rural areas have their main occupation as agriculture. But due to some reasons like urbanization people are shifting to the urban areas and an increase in technology replaced the people with machines in fieldwork. Due to this many people

became unemployed and migrated to urban areas for jobs. Urbanization has some effect on rural society. The rural society includes facets of villages, the way the villages function, problems faced by the people who are living in the villages, and many more things. The agrarian social structure describes mainly land distribution, agriculture agrarian relations, people, class, and the relation between land and people. Social stratification includes the division of people based on their socioeconomic status of the people. The characteristics of social stratification can be known. The structure for social stratification comes from the inequalities in the status of people in society. We should study this topic because it helps to know about the concepts of rural societies, agrarian social structure, and the concept of social stratification. The area I wanted to study is how the people in the society are divided according to the concept of social stratification, the concepts of rural society, and the agrarian social structure. The reason why I am exploring this topic is that it helps to know about the concepts related to rural society and the present conditions of rural societies. It also helps to know about the agrarian social structure and the concept of social stratification and opinions of people related to social stratification can be known from this topic.

II. HYPOTHESIS

The concept of urbanization affected the rural societies as the migration of people to urban areas has led to the unemployment and poverty in rural areas. The people are divided on both social and economic aspects in the process of social stratification.

III.LITERATURE REVIEW

1.Rural Management - Rural society and polity: - this book helps to understand the rural society, characteristics of the rural society like population, employment, the structure of the rural society, and change in the rural society all these aspects can be known from this book.

2.Agrarian Social Structure - a case study of some villages of cooch Behar West Bengal: - this article helps to understand the agrarian social structure. We can know many aspects relating to agrarian social structure like the relation between land and people, agriculture relations, etc.

3.Social stratification: - this paper helps to understand the concept of social stratification and it explains on what basis the people are divided in the society and types of social stratification are also discussed in this article.

4. Social Stratification: A Modular Approach, Cultural Anthropology: - this book helps to understand the concept of social stratification.

5.Agrarian social structure rural power and dynamics of rural development: - this book helps to know about the agrarian social structure and what this concept of agrarian social structure is based on can be known from this book. It also explains the dynamics of rural development.

6.Land system and rural society in early India: - this book helps to know about the rural society and how the lands are divided among the people. It helps to know about the land system present in early India and this helps to know about the condition of people in early India.

7.Rural sociology: - this paper helps to understand rural society. Rural sociology studies each part of rural society.

8.Rural society: - this article helps to understand the aspects involved in the rural society and the concepts of the rural society can be understood from this article.

9.Rural sociology: its need in India: - this article from jester helps to know about the need for rural sociology in India.

10.Agrarian Social Structure and Land-People Relationship: A Study on the Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh [article]:- this article from Hein Online helps to understand the concept of agrarian social structure and relation between land- people.

IV.INTRODUCTION ABOUT RURAL SOCIETY - CONCEPTS, AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE, SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

A rural society can be defined as a society where there is a low ratio of inhabitants to open land and whose income mainly depends upon agricultural activities. Their economic activities are the production of food materials, raw materials, etc. The rural society is difficult to define precisely. In the past, rural societies were typified by their adherence to farming as a way of life such cultures were not the goal- or achievement-oriented; their members sought subsistence, not surplus.' The people living in the rural areas work with the people whom they know and this makes the relationship between the people more strong. Due to an increase in technology and employment opportunities in urban areas, people started to migrate to urban areas. Due to this, there was huge unemployment and poverty in rural areas. The people who live in the rural areas are mostly old and the income of the rural areas fell severely. The villages are different in terms of the size of population, social composition, spatial arrangement of houses, economic condition, proximity to cities or even in terms of their location within the cities.¹

Once the population in rural areas used to be very high and mainly there was a male population. People used to perform agriculture as the main source of income

¹ Dr W G Prasanna Kumar, *Rural Management Rural Society and Polity* (Dr W G Prasanna Kumar, Dr K N Rekha, 1st edn, 2020)1.

but today the villages which are used to be wealthy are becoming poor and many villages are in poverty. Not only this there are no proper facilities like medical facilities, legal facilities, services, etc. These can be regarded as another reason for the migration of people from rural areas to urban areas. We can see a high rate of infant deaths in rural areas due to a lack of proper facilities. Some are migrating to urban areas for educational purposes and employment opportunities. All these aspects are one of the main reasons for the transfer of people from rural to urban areas.

The concepts and characteristics of the rural society are the castes play an important role in the villages. People are divided based on caste, and economic status. In villages, we can find the close relations between the people unlike in urban areas. We can also find the diversity of people in the village. Like there was a mixture of castes in the villages and this causes the division in the society. Like this, there are many characteristics and concepts like agrarian social structure, and social stratification that can be known from this study.

V. RURAL SOCIETY

The concept of rural sociology can be understood as the sociology of rural society. Rural sociology explains the structure and functions of rural society. *Rural society*, society in which there is a low ratio of inhabitants to open land and in which the most important economic activities are the production of foodstuffs, fibres, and raw materials.²

The characteristics and concepts of the rural society help to understand the rural society and lifestyle of the people living in the rural areas more effectively.

Population

The rural population is considered the major essence of the rural society. We can know about the factors of the population, its evil effects, migration from rural to urban areas, and behavior patterns of the people. The size of the rural areas is smaller than the urban areas due to this the population density of rural areas is also

smaller than the population of the urban areas. The main factor of less population is having fewer facilities like educational facilities, legal services, medical services, transportation services, and other necessary services. Due to the lack of these services in the rural areas, many people are preferring to migrate to urban areas. The above mentioned are necessities required for the people but in many rural areas, the facilities are not available. Another factor is employment opportunities. In urban areas, people can find more employment opportunities than in rural areas. Also, due to the increase in technology, many of the people who are working in fields are replaced with machines and this forced the people to go to the urban areas in search of jobs.

We can see the evil effects of the factors of the population on rural areas. Due to the following factors, many people are migrating from rural to urban areas. This leads to a decrease in the population in the rural areas and many of the young people are migrating due to this the income from villages has been reduced as most of the people living in rural areas are old people. The health rate also decreasing and we can see the deaths of many infants due to a lack of facilities. The migration leads to rising unemployment and poverty in rural areas.

In this way, the population in rural areas is decreasing day by day and the facilities are also not increasing in all the areas. The people who are living in villages should be provided with the basic facilities like health and made aware of the legal services and provide some needs which are utilized for agriculture and should increase the agriculture production.

Rural Social Organization

Social organization is defined as the pattern of relationships between and among individuals and social groups. The social organization plays an important role in maintaining the relationships among the people. It can be considered the backbone of social life. Social organization increases the interactions among people. Unlike the urban society, the rural society has more relations among the people. The frequency of social interaction is less in rural areas

² 'Rural society' (*Britannica*, 23 October 2017) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/rural-society>> accessed 27 May 2022.

than in urban areas. However, the relations between the people in rural areas are more stable and stronger. The family has control over the members. The family introduces them to the customs, and traditions of the family. Due to limited contracts, they do not develop individuality and are opposed to the changes in society. The rural social organization envelopes the religious activities, sacred relationships, spiritual lives, etc.

Rural social institutions

The rural social institutions imply the known number of processes that prevail in the relations of the people. The major five institutions in rural sociology are family, educational, economic, political, and religion. It is a system of social roles and social norms that satisfies the people in the society. The rural social institutions include family, kinship, caste, and religion. The Indian rural life provides a acute misery, social disintegration, cultural backwardness.³ The social institutions are limited due to the above factors.

Rural economy

The economy of the rural areas mainly depends upon agriculture. Agriculture is considered the backbone of the economy in rural areas. But the past few years people are changing their occupations and migrated to urban areas. The reasons are many for the migration of the people. The government should take possible measures to encourage agriculture by providing the tools like seeds, and fertilizers for growing agriculture. New methods should be encouraged which use the less water so that the farmers can be able to grow their crops. If there are situations like heavy rains then the government must provide compensation so that the farmers will not be thrown into poverty.

Rural social process

The rural social process is the different ways or forms of social interaction that take place among the people who are living in rural areas. These are some of the forms through which people will interact with each other. These social processes are divided into two

processes; they are conjunctive and disjunctive. In conjunctive we can find accommodation, cooperation, and assimilation. Disjunctive includes conflict and competition. From this, we can understand that people will have interactions from both conflicts and interactions.

Rural culture and rural religion

The culture describes the knowledge, beliefs, customs, law, morals, and other requirements of the man which are required for the man to be a member of the society. The rural culture includes old traditions, norms, values, etc. The rural culture is conservative and rigid. It is stagnant in culture. The population is also socially and culturally more homogenous and all these leads to common sentiment among the villagers and there exists a sense of solidarity.⁴ When we come to the rural religion, the people in rural areas give more importance to the religion and follow the religion with respect. They follow religious ideas and beliefs.

Rural social problems

The problems in rural areas are mainly based on economic, political, cultural, and social conditions. The main problems are unemployment, division of people based on castes, untouchability, illiteracy, etc. These problems can be solved by using different measures for different problems. The problem of unemployment can be solved by providing new techniques or revising the old methods so that the people will attract to agriculture and its allied occupations and who do not financial ability to buy the necessary tools the government should take necessary measures for them. The illiteracy problem can be solved by motivating and bringing awareness among people by explaining the importance of education and should provide facilities like schools, and books to educate the people. The awareness regarding untouchability and castes should also be brought among the people.

³ A.R. Desai, 'Rural Sociology: Its need in India' (1956) 5(1) Sociological Bulletin <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42874024>> accessed 27 May 2022.

⁴ Dr W G Prasanna Kumar, *Rural Management Rural Society and Polity* (Dr W G Prasanna Kumar K N Rekha, 1st edn, 2020) 5.

Social control and social change

Social control is the control of society over the individual. In rural areas, the groups like family and neighborhood play an important role in controlling the individual. The customs, religions, and norms also have control over the individual. The social change in rural areas can be seen in today's world. Due to modernization, many social changes can be seen in the rural areas. The social change is good to some extent but it should not derail the rural social life.

Reconstruction

The process of reconstruction is very important and it is very helpful to reconstruct the rural society. The rural areas need reconstruction in various forms. The people who are living in the rural areas must be provided with the necessary needs like services, transport services, medical and legal services. Agriculture should be encouraged and the government should into the welfare of the farmers and the people who are living in the rural areas. Necessary measures to increase education in rural areas must be taken.

Homogeneity

To reiterate, villages in India are not homogenous in nature, either in term of its physical structure, or in terms of its social composition.⁵ But we can find homogeneity in some aspects. The people living in the villages were mostly connected with agriculture and its allied occupations. However, we can find people who belong to different castes, religions, and classes.

VI.AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The word agrarian means anything related to the land, its distribution, and management. The agrarian includes equitable division of land. In many countries, new movements have started regarding the equal rights of women on property. The agrarian system can

be explained by using land and its utilization and productive purposes. The concept " agrarian structure " is multidimensional; studied by political scientists, historians, sociologists and social anthropologists from different perspectives like productivity, development, technology, political movements, stratification, class structure and so on.⁶

The study of agrarian social structure mainly focuses on two major issues they are technological arrangement and social arrangement.⁷

The technological arrangement means the management of land. It includes the ownership of the land, control of the land, and use of the land. The technological arrangements include ecological conditions along with agriculture technology. The social arrangement includes land control and land ownership. It shows the close relationship between the system of stratification and division of work. For example, the census shows that the proportion of agricultural laborers in Haryana and Punjab is low in the total agricultural population. But the population is high in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu. In these states the sharecropping is high. But this fact is not recorded in the census.

The agrarian structures have been uneven. The uneven structures of landholdings have also resulted in 'diverse land tenure systems.' The sociologists who have studied the agrarian structure have mentioned that the change in land relations has affected the stratification in villages. The dominant classes in the society who have major portions of land have exploited the subordinate classes.

In simple words, agrarian societies are settlements of people who earn their livelihood by cultivating the land. Agriculture is an economic activity and like other activities, agriculture involves the framework of social relations. People involved in land cultivation must interact with people of different social communities. Some may self-cultivate their land and some involve

⁵ Dr W G Prasanna Kumar, *Rural Management Rural Society and Polity* (Dr W G Prasanna Kumar K N Rekha, 1st edn, 2020) 3.

⁶ BIJAYBIHARI SOM, 'AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE a case study of Some Villages of Coach Behar West Bengal' (15 March 2001) <<https://ir.nbu.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/159/15/146164>> accessed 27 May 2022.

⁷ Saha, Bhaswati, 'Agrarian Social Structure and Land-People Relationship: A Study on the Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh [article]' (2011) 2(1) Indian Journal of Law and Justice <<http://heinonline.org.elibrarydsnlu.remotexs.in>> accessed 27 May 2022.

people in cultivating the land. The people will interact with people who provide different types of services. Like when we take the example when a person lends the land for cultivation then he will interact with the people who came to cultivate the land and he should also interact with the people from whom he is borrowing the tools for agriculture.

Another example is "in the old system of jajmani relations in the Indian countryside, those who owned and cultivated land had to depend for various services required at different stages of cultivating on the members of different caste groups." The cultivators must pay the share of production to the people of different castes in exchange for labor. In the same way, the farmers are selling the product in the market to get their income. But these interactions were done mainly through middlemen. All these interactions will take by the institutional framework. The most important aspects of the framework are the land ownership and the relations between the owner of the land and the one who is cultivating the land.

The person who has a large amount of land has control and power in society. He was treated with utmost dignity. The relationship between the owner of the land and the people who the owner interacts with for different services is called agrarian class structure.

Notions of agrarian societies

Unlike modern societies, it is easy to identify various types of classes like upper class, working-class, lower class, and industrial class. The agrarian social structures are diversities of various kinds. The agrarian social structure is varying from region to region. In recent times the agrarian society has been undergoing various transformations. In most developed countries of the west, only a small portion of the population is involved in agriculture activities and whereas in third world countries the number is comparatively high. The single agrarian social structure cannot be applied to all societies.

The classical notion of undifferentiated peasant society

The concept of the classical notion of undifferentiated peasant society is introduced in the post-war period.

The peasant societies emerged after the disintegration of the tribal form of social and economic life and started to earn by cultivating the land. Peasant was an undifferentiated social formation. The peasant societies were formed more at the time of pre-industrial society. The peasants used to cultivate their land by themselves with the help of their family members and they used their services for cultivation for labour. They do not have significance in society. The occupational characteristic of household points out that 90 percent of where farmers and depends upon agriculture.⁸

The peasant family works as the basic multi-dimension unit of social organization. Though the peasants were dominated by the outsiders there is no difference between them. There are no internal class differences among the peasants.

Feudalism as a type of agrarian society

The term feudalism conveys a different notion of class structure. Cultivators in feudal societies are subordinate classes. The distinctive feature of the agrarian class structure in feudalism is the relationship of "dependency" and "patronage" that exists between the cultivators and the "overlords". The cultivating peasants should show loyalty towards their landlords by working overloads.

Agriculture and Market

The mechanism of agriculture and its integration into the market economy has turned the social relation into the agrarian sector. The development of capitalism has transformed the relations into instrumental ones. This process leads to the differentiation in the peasants. The peasants were divided into different strata. Not all have benefited from this due to pressure some have survived and some became landless. Similarly, who has worked as tenants has become the laborer for wages. Some became rich and some became landless. The attitude of peasants changed once they used to cultivate their land with their families. But now due to the capitalistic economy, most of the peasants have turned into farmers. The agrarian structure has undergone major changes with the development of capitalism in the market.

⁸ G.P. Mishra, *Agrarian Social Structure Rural Power and Dynamics of Rural Development* (2015) 10.

The concept of classes and their application

The concept of classes was developed to describe the prevailing structures of social relations in industrial societies. During the 20th century, Lenin developed a theory that explains the process of differentiation among peasants. The peasants were divided into five categories landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and landless laborers. He mentioned that the countries will experience polarization where only capitalist farmers and landless will remain. But there is no such evidence to prove the same. Agriculture has integrated into the market's economy. The small cultivators in third-world countries not only survived but also got up.

Agrarian social structure and change in India

The traditional rural communities and agrarian social structures were organized in the form of the Jajmani system. The different groups of castes were divided into jajmani's and Kamins. The Jajmanis are those who have their land and who cultivate their land. Whereas the Kamins are those who would provide different kinds of services to the Jajmanis. The Kamins was obliged to work under the Jajmanis and in return, they should give a share in the farm produce the Kamins. The relation was based on a system of reciprocal exchange. However, the reciprocal exchange was not based on equal footing and obviously, the people who own the land have more power in the society and the division of people based on the caste system has paved a way for inequalities. The caste system has provided an unequal land system. However, the development of capitalism or modernization in agriculture helped not only to increase the productivity but also changed the social relations of production.⁹

Agrarian changes

The agrarian policies of the British rulers have been one of the important factors to introduce the changes in the agrarian system. To increase the income which was collected in the form of land revenue, they made

the changes in property relations in India. In the areas like Bengal, Bihar, and Chennai the full power is conferred over the zamindars, who are collecting only intermediaries. The peasants who have been cultivating on their own now became tenants to the landlords. They were ordered to pay the share in the form of cash rather than the crop. This forced the tenants to pay the money even if there is a crop failure. These situations led to indebtedness in the tenants and to pay the revenue they started to mortgage their land eventually all their lands has transferred to landlords. The landlords became the dominant power in the society and the peasants suffered. The peasants were the worst sufferers of the British policies mainly by their policy of land revenue and industry.¹⁰

Many leaders at the time of fighting for independence promised to introduce changes in land relations once they got freedom from colonial rule. After independence, this process was initiated immediately. The central government has ordered the state government to pass laws on land reforms and abolish the ownership of the landlords, zamindars over the lands, and give the lands to the actual owner. Some legislation was passed to protect the rights of the peasants and the government also fixed the limit for owning land for one household. The surplus should go under the control of the government and it will be redistributed among the landless. However, this legislation has produced desirable effects in only some areas. The peasants who are politically mobilized had claimed their rights. These changes have transformed agriculture. The old structure has been abolished and new arrangements can be observed in today's agriculture.

Agrarian class structure

The society in past was divided based on the caste system and the agrarian relations were governed by the Jajmani system. The Jajmani system started to disintegrate under the colonial rule of the British. The process of modernization has developed in the post-independence era. While the caste continues to be a

⁹ BIJAYBIHARI SOM, 'AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE a case study of Some Villages of Coach Behar West Bengal' (15 March 2001) <<https://ir.nbu.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/159/15/146164>> accessed 27 May 2022.

¹⁰ BIJAYBIHARI SOM, 'AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE a case study of Some Villages of Coach Behar West Bengal' (15 March 2001) <<https://ir.nbu.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/159/15/146164>> accessed 27 May 2022.

social institution but its role in economics has declined. The agricultural land is still being owned by caste groups but the relationship between the laborer and owner was not based on caste.

A well-known economist Daniel Thorner has suggested that one could divide the population into three bases. Income earned from land, nature of rights, and the extent of fieldwork. Based on this division he had suggested the following agrarian structure.

Maliks are the people whose income primarily depends upon property rights and their interest to keep the rent levels high and wages low.

Kisan is a working peasant. They will cultivate their land with the help of their family members.

Mazdoors are the people who do not own land and work under the landlords as tenants and pay rent to them.

The classification that is more popular among the students is the division of the agrarian population into five classes. On the top, they are big landlords they used to have a large number of acres and they do not give their land to tenants but they organize the farms like modern industry, wage laborers, and production for markets. Their presence has come down significantly. As time changes their presence was also reduced.

After landlords we can see big farmers, they used to have land of around fifty acres and they supervise their land and also work with the wage labor. They use methods like using fertilizers and inputs to produce the crop. They belong to dominant castes and have influence and dominance over the lower caste people. The next category is middle farmers. They have a land of around 15 acres and unlike big farmers, they used to cultivate their land. They also belong to the dominant classes in the society and they used to go for wages during peak harvest season.

The next division is small and marginal farmers. They used to have less than 5 acres of land. They used to cultivate their land with the help of their family and they also used to go to work for wages. They also used the inputs for producing cash crops for their income. The last category was landless laborers. They often

belong to untouchable and Dalit castes. They do not have land for cultivation. Their population varies from state to state and they used to live in miserable conditions. They used to borrow money and mortgage their bonded labor for them. In this way, the people in the society have divided based on the division of land. The classification, preparation of fields and demarcation of village space suggests the increasing preoccupation with land and cultivation.¹¹

VII.SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The concept of differentiation is the central feature of human society. All individuals are different no one is similar. Diversity and inequality have been inherited by society and this society has been adopted by everyone. Societies have arranged and divided their members based on inferiority, superiority, and equality the placement of the people in each layer is called stratification. The process of stratification is nothing but dividing and categorizing the people based on their socioeconomic status like caste, wealth, economic status, religion, race, class, etc. We can see the division has to happen in both economic and social aspects. In that division, we can see that the people who are placed in the top place have more power and prestige in society. We can say that they are the dominant classes in society. Whereas the people who are placed at a lower level do not have any power in the society. Social stratification is omnipresent. Every society is divided and no society is unstratified. social stratification is a sociological term that applies to the ranking or grading of individuals and groups into hierarchical layers such that inequality exist in the allocation of rewards, privileges and resources.¹²

The process of stratification involves the division of unequal privileges in society. This process includes ranking status. This unequal ranking of status is one of the main features of social stratification. Social stratification restricts the interactions among people in society. We can see these restrictions mainly in friendship, selection of profession, and marriage alliances. "Melvin and Tumin define Social Stratification refer to the arrangement of any social

¹¹ Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, *Land System And Rural Society In Early India* (B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 1997) 12.

¹² Issac Oyekola, Oyeyipo Eytayo, *Introductory Sociology* (2020).

group or society into a hierarchy of positions that are unequal concerning power, property, social evaluation, and psychic gratification and Lundberg defines a stratified society as one marked by inequality by differences among people that are evaluated by them as being lower and higher.”

Characteristics of social stratification

- The first characteristic of social stratification is it is social. The people will be divided through the process of social stratification based on their social status but not on physical features. If we take an example of a professor who is working in a university then the professor's status will be decided based on her skills, educational qualifications, etc.
- The second characteristic of social stratification is it is ancient. We can see the division of people in society based on their social-economic status. The caste system has been prevalent since ancient years. The division of people can be found even in hunting and wandering bands as age and gender have been major divisions. The people have started to divide themselves from a very ancient period. First, the differentiation was based on gender, and age, and then the division was made according to the social-economic factors like caste, class, religion, and economic status like rich people, middle class, lower class, etc. Hence we can conclude that the process of social stratification is prevalent since ancient times.
- The third characteristic of social stratification is it is universal. The process of social stratification is omnipresent. It is present in every society. This process is not confined to a single society or any country but it is present in every society. Hence it is universal. All organized societies are stratified. The people are used to dividing themselves based on economic and social factors. This can be seen universally.
- The fourth characteristic of social stratification is it is diverse. Social stratification can be found in different forms. Like in some societies we can observe the social stratification concerning social

factors like class, caste, religion, etc. This means the social stratification can be seen by dividing themselves through social factors. In other societies, the division can be done on color, gender, etc, and in some other societies, the division can be done based on economic factors. We may also see the division based on educational qualifications and experience. In this way the social stratification is diverse and we cannot say on what basis people are exactly dividing.

- The other characteristic of social stratification is consequential. The social stratification system has two major consequences they are lifestyle styles and life chances.

These are some of the characteristics of the social stratification which help to understand the concept of social stratification even better.

Types of social stratification

The process of social stratification is universal. We can find the division of people based on social and economic factors in the societies. Sociologists have divided the social stratification mainly into four types. They are slavery, caste, estates, social class, and status.

Slavery system

In the early stage of civilization, the classes did not exist because the people were not in the position to place superiority over others. After all, life was very tough at that time. In other words, we can say that equality has existed among the tribes. The discrimination regarding the wealth does not exist because the property was limited to create the differences among them. In this system, vertical social mobility is exclusively closed and social statuses are determined absolutely by ascription.¹³

Slavery is an extreme form of inequality in which one person has authority over another. The slave will be politically and socially despised. There are two types of slaves they are the slaves who are in societies of the ancient world, especially in Greece and Rome and the second type is in the southern states of the USA. Slavery has been the most inhuman form and the master used to have unlimited powers over the slave. The system is based on economic disparity. After

¹³ Issac Oyekola, Oyeyipo Eytayo, *Introductory Sociology* (2020).

some time the system has been abolished by adopting some reforms.

Estates system

This type of system existed in Europe in the Middle Ages. They were part of traditional civilization. This system is divided into three main divisions, clergy, the nobility, and the commoners.¹⁴ In England and France, these types of divisions can be found. These estates are similar to social classes in two aspects. The estate has different lifestyles and the estates are also arranged in order like placing the clergy at the top and nobles at an intermediate position. The commoners were placed at the bottom.

Caste system

The caste system is different from other types of social stratification. The caste system is based on cultures and Hindu beliefs. It is related to economic differences and we can see the division based on castes in the society. The major divisions are Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishyas, and Sudras. The salient features of the system are a segmental division of society the castes have different customs and we can see the people who belong to different castes were into different occupations. Hierarchy is another feature in which there are placed on the principles of purity, pollution, and occupation. There was a restriction on social interactions and dining together. They should dine with particular people only and there are strict rules on what type of food to be taken. There are present privileges for higher castes in the society and there are civil and religious disabilities. The people who belong to a particular caste have their own specific rules and occupations.

Class

A social class is radically different from other systems. Classes are economic. They are open and closed in nature. The classes are the people who have the same economic resources which influence their lifestyle. The major basis for the class difference is wealth and occupation. The classes are not established on a legal and religious basis. The system is not based on

heredity. The boundaries between the classes were not defined properly and there are no restrictions on interaction between the people of different classes. We can observe the social mobility in this system which is not possible in other systems. The different classes are based on economic possessions. Unlike other systems, the class system mainly operates through the large-scale connections of impersonal types.

Theories of social stratification

The theories of social stratification are explained by Karl Marx and Max Webster. Karl Marx explained that social societies are divided into two types ruling class and a subject class. The ruling class has power over the lower-class people. The power of the ruling class is derived from production and ownership. There is a conflict between the two groups. In the feudal system, two classes were divided based on land relations. The feudal nobility owns the land and the landless serf works on the land. According to him, society has emerged through four stages. Primitive communism, this society is based on equality. No classes existed in this society. Men used to go hunting and women go to gather fruits. In ancient society, the people were classified as masters and slaves. In feudal society, agriculture has a major role and the society was divided into class lords and serfs. In a capitalistic society, there were bourgeoisie and proletariat. He argues that the social group becomes a class when it becomes a class for itself. The members should develop a common identity and shared interests can overthrow the ruling class. He mentioned the polarization of the two classes. The categories Marx created are still used as classifications, although some changes within status and role of four groups have occurred.¹⁵

Max Webster mentioned the social stratification he defines it as a *“group of individuals who share a similar position in a market economy and under that fact receive similar economic rewards”* he argues that the division has happened between the people who have the factors of production and the people who do not have. He distinguished the classes in the society like propertied upper class, property less white color

¹⁴ Amit Khawas, ‘Social Stratification’ <iilsindia.com/study-material/985681_1616386342> accessed 27 May 2022.

¹⁵ ERIC, *Social Stratification: A Modular Approach. Cultural Anthropology* (1984) 12.

workers, petty bourgeoisie, and manual working class. He refers to the class as unequal distribution of economic rewards. According to him, the property is not always recognized as a status qualification. In modern societies, party formation is an important aspect of power. A party defines a group that works together as they have common aims and interests. He does not support the idea of polarization of classes; he rejects that political power derives from economic power and he rejects Marx's view of revolution.

Functions of social stratification

This process determines the individual placement like the individual will be placed based on his or her social-economic status. It encourages hard work and competition. An average human being does not want to be at the lower level so this division encourages competition among the people. It regulates human relations. It performs the economic function; they are motivated to do their duties according to their status which increases the economic function. Social stratification serves as social control; the existence of different classes acts as social control. It performs integrative functions and it engenders different socialization. Members of one class tend to restrict their intimate association to those they share class with and rarely establish relationship with members of different class.¹⁶ These are some of the functions of social stratification.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The rural society includes the characteristics of the society, how the rural society can be studied, aspects related to the rural society like the reconstruction of the society, population factors, rural class, rural cultures, rural religion, social organization, and many other aspects which are related to the rural society. By studying this topic, we can understand the concepts relating to rural society. The agrarian social structure can be understood by this paper; this helps to understand how the agrarian structure is divided and on what basis it is divided. The concept of social stratification helps to understand that the people are divided in society based on their social and economic

status. The suggestions will the government should take the necessary measures to reconstruct the rural society which has been affected due to different aspects. The government should provide medical facilities, legal facilities and other basic facilities like education to develop the rural society and awareness must be created among the people in rural areas.

The study of rural society, agrarian social structures, and social stratification reveals that these domains are deeply interconnected and continue to shape the socio-economic realities of rural communities. Rural society, once defined by subsistence agriculture and close social bonds, is now undergoing profound transformations due to urbanization, technological change, and migration. Agrarian structures, historically rooted in unequal land distribution and caste hierarchies, remain central to understanding rural power dynamics and the persistence of inequality. Social stratification, expressed through divisions of class, caste, and occupation, reinforces these disparities while simultaneously adapting to new economic and political contexts.

This analysis underscores that rural society is not static but a dynamic arena where tradition and modernity intersect. The resilience of agrarian communities, coupled with the pressures of globalization and market integration, demands renewed scholarly attention. Addressing rural poverty, unemployment, and inequality requires policies that go beyond economic reforms to engage with the cultural and institutional frameworks that sustain stratification. By situating rural society within global debates on inequality and development, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how agrarian structures and social hierarchies continue to influence the trajectory of rural transformation in the contemporary world.

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¹⁶ Issac Oyekola, Oyeyipo Eyitayo, *Introductory Sociology* (2020).

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