

Power Structure in India: Caste, Class and Patriarchy

Class

If the caste system is the unique feature of Hindu society in India, the class system is universal one, found in everywhere. Some time the word 'class' is used to denote a group of people having same profession – the doctors, engineers, advocates, teachers, artists, students etc. In material life the class is also used to denote the quality of goods as good, better and best. But class in social context is used to explain the social stratification of the people. Economy is the main criteria to determine the classes or class statuses in the society. Class system is based on wealth, occupation, education etc.

Meaning

Social class is a segment of society with all the members of all the ages and the sexes who share the same general status. MacIver said that social intercourses are limited by the consideration of social status by distinction between higher and lower, there exist a social class. A social class is a group of people of similar status, commonly sharing comparable levels of power and wealth. In sociology, social classes describe one form of social stratification. When a society is organized by social classes, as opposed to by castes, it is theoretically possible for people to attain a higher status than the status with which they started. This movement is possible because social classes are not based on birth but on factors such as education and professional success. For example, someone born into a low-income family can achieve a higher status through education, talent, and work, or perhaps through social connections. A society organized according to social classes, then, allows for some social mobility.

Definitions

- i. *"A social class is a category or group of persons having definite status in society which permanently determines their relation to other groups".* ---- P. Gisbert.\
- ii. *"A social is the aggregate of persons having essentially the same social status in a given society".*
----- Ogburn and Nimkoff.
- iii. *"A social class is any portion of the community marked off from the rest social status"* ----- MacIver and Page
- iv. *"Social classes are aggregates of individuals who have the same opportunities of acquiring goods, the exhibited standard of living".* ----- Max Weber

Thus, from the above mentioned definitions as quoted by the scholars we can say that class is a social stratification where people are classified on the basis of their property, skill and occupation.

Development (Evolution) of class

In primitive society there was no class in the society. In that period the people did not find any time and opportunity to establish their superiority over their neighbors. They were so much busy in the struggle with the opponents and due to that classes were not created in the society. Another reason for not the emerging of classes is that there was no any private property. The natural resources were used commonly. Therefore, no class distinctions were seen in primitive society. There was no of rich and poor. But, as society had progressed, new types social structure also evolved. The different stages of societies which contributed to the growth of class system among the individuals are explained as follows.

- a. **Slavery Society:** The slavery is the first stage of emergence of class system. First of all the savage tribes strengthened its military power and the conquered enemies were eaten, tortured or some time killed. But after a while the some softening attitude grew among them and instead of eating or killing, the captive particularly the children and women were spared and enslaved and gradually this attitude was also extended to the male. Resultantly two classes came into existence – one master and another is slave. Thus, class stratification in society was created by the people.

- b. **Feudal Society:** The trend of modern class system was started during the feudal system in middle age. In that society the owners of the land were the feudal who were also called the land lord, were in the top position of social hierarchical system and the tenets, which were known as the serf were kept to the bottom the hierarchy. The other classes like the servant, soldiers, fighters, or the artisans occupied the middle position of the hierarchical system and thus various types of classes emerged in feudal social system.
- c. **Bourgeoisie Society:** With the beginning of industrial revolution the class system of medieval period has completely changed. According to Marx, in industrial society, there are two types of class – the capitalist or bourgeoisie and proletariat. The capitalists use their amount to capture political power and thus occupy the highest position of social strata. On the other hand the proletariats are divorced from management as well as from the profit. They only sell their labor in cheap rates and get nothing except exploitation from the capitalist. Their socio-economic condition is become miserable and thus, they as a class occupy the lowest position of social strata. But, in this situation there is no any rigidity in mobilization of these two classes. The class system is not based on the heredity. Some time the members of low class can attain the position of high-class by his spirit of enterprises and imitative. There is no any restriction against his climbing up and rising to prominence.
- d. **Rise of middle class:** The division on of society into capitalist and the labor is not final division of society. There is another new class which has emerged and completely changed the structure of class system and this class is called middle class. The traditional middle class is different from that of modern one. The main occupation of traditional middle class was the trade and was mostly homogenous in nature. On the other hand, along with trader the members of the modern middle class are mostly serviceman – the teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, architects etc. and this class do not come from one group but from different sections of society and therefore, it is heterogeneous in it nature. The middle class by its nature occupy the middle position of capitalist and labor class in social strata. The middle class has been divided into three sub-classes in terms of their income and living standard. These sub-classes are upper middle class, middle middle class and lower middle class.

In conclusion, it can be said that the class system does not suddenly came into existence. It has emerged gradually as the time passes. There are so many phases of growth and development of classes in society and among them economy is the main criteria which determines position of classes in social strata.

Class as Power Structure in India

In his book '*India's New Capitalist*' Harish Damodaran explained that the emergence of modern class system in India. According to him it was started since the last few decades of 20th century. Since, in India the industries were from a smaller proportion of economy in comparison to agriculture, the industrialist and working classes form smaller part of classes. After 20th century new ideas like, industrialization, liberalization and privatization change the world economy and Indian economy was also greatly influenced by these ideas. Resultantly, the society was divided into two classes – Capitalist or rich and laborer or poor. The rich or the capitalist class become a small and the poor or the laborer became the larger part of society.

In their book '*Persute of Laxmi*' Lyod Rudolph and Sussan Rudolph criticized the thinking of Harish Damodaran regarding the emergence of classes Indian. According to them it will be wrong to say that before 20th century i.e. the industrial revolution that there were no any classes in India. Indian Economy is fully dependable on agriculture and more than 70% people involve in agriculture. Therefore, the classes manifested itself in different forms in agricultural sector. Refuting the ideas of Harish Damodaran that the class system came in India in the 20th century Rudolph and Rudolph viewed that in India traditionally in agriculture sector there were different kinds of classes in every section of society.

Emergence of Class as Power Structure:

Though the modern class system started after industrialization it could not largely changed the Indian traditional class system based on agriculture. The agrarian class structure can be described as follows;

- a. **Zamindari system and tenants:** Zamindari system (landlord system) and tenants had existed before the implementation of land reforms in different of India. However, they have not completely disappeared from many states of India. The farmers who did not have any land worked in the land of zamidars with cheap rate of labour were called tenants.
- b. **Emergence of New Classes:** After land reforms through which the landlord system (Zamindari system) was abolished, many new classes emerged known as rich farmers, kulaks or self cultivation middle farmers, footloose labourer etc. In zamindari system there were also different classes of zamidars, the big zamidars or kulaks, the middle zamidars. The big zamidars leased their land to other. The person who took lease they did not have their own land. On the other hand the middle zamidars who had their land but was not sufficient to bear their family expenditure. These zamidars due to lack of capital also could not hire the labourer to work in their land. Therefore, they worked in their own as well as others.
- c. **Impact of Green Revolution:** After green revolution a new change occurred in agriculture sector. Here, no drastic change was come in the traditional zamindari system; just it changed its own shape. In traditional system the main goal was only to produce crops to fulfill the family needs of farmers. But, after green revolution the attitudes of farmers changed and that change was the industrialization of agriculture sector through which they wanted to make the agriculture sector more profitable besides fulfilling their family needs. Due to the impact of green revolution the traditional farmers produced crops which had more demands in markets and through which they earned more capital. Resultantly, different classes emerged in agriculture sector. In new system the classes like small land holding farmers, marginal farmers i.e. the very poor farmers, the footloose labourers i.e. the unskilled labourers who perform different kinds of jobs. In footloose labour there are both male and female labourers. Their works are not fixing, performed any work which they find in their day to day life.

Class in Indian perspective:

From sociological point of views it can be said that there is no any relation between class and religion. Economy is only one of the most important criteria through which classes like higher, middle, lower etc. are determined. Questions may arise in the minds of the people that what is the perspective of class in Indian context? The answer is very simple that there are no any basic differences between caste and class in India. On the other hand it can be said that there is close relationship between caste and class in Indian society. Most often the higher castes belong to the higher and lower castes belongs to the lower strata of social stratification. For Example, in Indian society the Dalits or the lower castes belongs to the lower classes of social stratification society. Their economic condition is not very good and mostly belongs to labour class. In the words of Karl Marx they can be said the 'have not' On the other hand the higher castes like Jats in Haryana and Delhi, Yadav in Bihar, in Maharashtra the Maratha, In Kerala the Reddy, Kamma Lingayat etc. belong to the upper castes. In India these upper caste are mostly big farmers or industrialists and therefore, they are also called the rich class or 'haves' as said by Marx. No labour, marginal, middle or footloose classes are found from these sections of society.