STRATIFICATION HIERARCHY AND ETHNICITY IN NORTH–EAST INDIA

Eds.
R. K. BHADRA
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PREFACE

The Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology of University of North Bengal has its objectives, among others, to do research among the societies of North-East India. With this view in mind the department offers a course on "Regional Study of North-East India" at the Post-Graduate level, and time to time, organizes seminars on various sociological perspectives of this region. The present volume is an outcome of such a seminar where scholars of various disciplines of social sciences contributed in-depth research papers on various aspects of stratification and ethnicity among the societies of North-East India. Ethnicity is, now-a-days, a burning problem and thereby an important subject matter of sociological studies. As a matter of fact the study of ethnic groups, ethnicity and their reflections in social structure is an emerging field of social science research. Scholars from various disciplines who have examined in-depth the factors of social stratification and ethnicity from different perspectives have given an inter-disciplinary orientation to this volume. Altogether nineteen research papers on different aspects of social stratification and ethnicity are included in this volume of which theoretical issues have been discussed in two articles, six articles have dealt with societies of Assam, other six with societies of the northern districts of West Bengal, two each with societies of North-East India in general and Sikkim, and one each with societies of Meghalaya and Manipur. Most of these articles are concerned with various ethnic groups or tribals while others have devoted to Hindu castes and Muslims of North-East India.

The social structure of North-East India is characterised by various ethnic groups having different religious affiliation. The complex social structure of the societies of North-East India possess a unique type of social stratification which is greatly influenced by the factors of ethnicity. Understanding of these unique features of social stratification is very important to understand the nature and trends of social dynamics of the region. The focus of this book is on stratification and ethnicity of North-East India. The authors discuss the features which are generally associated

with the social stratification and analyse their association with caste and ethnicity.

Grateful thanks are due to the scholars who have contributed valuable research papers for this volume. The merit of this volume owes a great deal to them. Thanks are also due to Dr. Mita Bhadra for her enthusiasm and cooperation to organize the seminar and to make this volume ready for publication. Shri Prasenjit Debbarman has helped very much of this endeavour and thanks are also due to him. Shri Mridul Goswami with his secretarial skill has made this academic effort a success and therefore he is extended cordial thanks.

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INTRODUCTION

The scholars, who are engaged in sociological research in north-eastern part of India, are struck by a totally different nature of stratification prevailing in the region which other parts of India have never experienced. The region of north-eastern India lies at the periphery of the Hindu civilization where primarily three kinds of ethnic groups are found, such as, Hindu castes, partially Hinduised or Christianised tribes and animistic tribal communities who still adhere to their traditional tribal traditions. The majority of the population of the plains of Assam, Manipur and Tripura are Hindus. The tribes of Assam and Manipur have been greatly influenced by Vaisnabism. The traditional tribal social organization, which was dominant in the region, has considerably changed. In Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya approximately 85 per cent, 60 per cent and 40 per cent of the tribes respectively have been converted to Christianity. The Christian missions functioned actively in this part of India alongwith the consolidation of the British power in the 19th century. The rest of the tribal communities of north-eastern parts of India still cling to their traditional religion and culture.

The dominant culture of the north-eastern region is characterised by tribalism. One of the important features of social stratification of this region is the role of various Hindu and non-Hindu tribal groups who contribute to a greater extent some important elements in the stratification system. This has generally been neglected in most of the studies which have predominantly focused on the hierarchy, interdependence and exclusiveness—the major fundamental parameters of the caste system. The mode of absorption of the various ethnic groups, their emerging identity crisis and changing status in the system of stratification have some important consequences in modification of some of the principles of stratification. The evaluation of this aspect perhaps can give us a new dimension to the study of social stratification of the societies in north-eastern parts of India. However, ethnicity which appears as an important

aspect of the stratification system in this region has not yet been studied properly. The contribution of ethnicity in determining the stratification system should be considered as one of the various dimensions of the system. Stratification should be studied in terms of ethnicity and possession of wealth and power. There are a number of encysted communities particularly in Assam, Manipur, Tripura, northern districts of West Bengal, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh who maintain their socio-cultural identities rather distinctly, though they are subsumed under the general Hinduised tradition. This is very often true in the rural society where both castes and tribal groups live together constituting the system of stratification within the Hindu civilization. The collection of papers emphasises all these dimensions of the stratification system, i.e., caste, class and ethnicity. It focuses on determining the parameters of stratification, interethnic relationships and relation between caste or ethnic organization and hierarchy. It also explores the new bases of stratification which could have been the dominating factors in the societies of North-East India.

The book is an outcome of the UGC sponsored national seminar held in the Department of Sociology & Social Anthropology, University of North Bengal. A good number of scholars from various disciplines, such as, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Political Science and History, who have been working in the field, have contributed papers based on in-depth study. Their contributions will certainly provide a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary view of the stratification system in north-eastern region of India. Since most of the papers are concerned with the dimension of ethnicity they could not be arranged under different sections. However, the papers are arranged in a systematic way to have a clear sociological perspective.

The first two papers deal with the concepts of caste and class in general and mechanism of survival of ethnic groups within the caste society. In the paper "Some Consideration towards a definition of caste and class" K.L. Sharma has projected theoretical questions to the study of caste and class in India. He briefly discusses the main issues in Sociology of social stratification, nature of social formation in terms of its dominant causality, ideology and change, and sources of distortions of social reality. While studying social stratification in India in multidimensional perspectives a heuristic distinction between caste and class serves only a limited purpose, and the effort

becomes futile when in reality - caste and class are found in inseparable form. Caste in both infrastructural and superstructural phenomenon. Cooperation and competition within a caste and with other castes are found simultaneously. A sort of class structure within a caste can be seen which in fact indicates the process of differentiation and mobility among its members. Thus caste and class are not polar opposites. They are inseparable parts of India's social formation, continuity and change. This change is not from caste to class. There is a caste basis of class and a class basis of caste.

The very notion that caste and class are polar opposites had obstructed from thinking caste and class in terms of historicity of India's social formation. Studies of downward social mobility and proletarianization, upward social mobility and embourgeoisement, etc. explain that caste and class have imhered each other as an inseparable mix.

P.K. Bhowmick, in his paper "Ethnicity, ethnic groups and survival strategy", has explained the process of survival strategy of ethnic groups. In a multi-racial society where the spirit of homogeneity faces confrontation with many groups having vested interest over power and resources, some feeling of group identity crop up and nucleate in a concept of ethnicity. The interacting groups or powers in question try to prove their uniqueness in socio-cultural and linguistic issues and ultimately solidifies the group identity which is expressed in various ways. Sometimes a fear of extinction is projected where the question of survival becomes uppermost. In course of time various steps are taken by the group as survival strategy and the spirit of ethnicity gets impetus in this field.

S.K. Chauhan's departure from the conventional researches on caste stratification in India provides a new light for understanding social stratification in Assam. In "Caste, status and ethnicity: a non-hierarchical view of the stratification system" he says that in the conventional studies caste and class have attracted attention of the scholars whereas the ethnic aspect has remained neglected. The historical development of the Assamese society in terms of compressions and depressions has tended to juxtapose the various communities in the network of cooperation as well as of conflict per force necessitated the redefinition of the communities in terms of the ethic groups and the consequent development of the ethnic stratification. Since the ethnicity becomes salient in the process of politicization and the social mobilization the ethnic stratification is

by nature horizontal than hierarchical in nature.

R.K. Bhadra has argued that mobility in the caste system was widespread in the traditional society in India. From the case study of the Assamese society he has shown the occurrence of both individual and corporate mobility in the medieval society. In the past social mobility at the individual as well as family level was possible due to the Vaisnabite movement which opened various new channels of such social mobility. The Vaisnaba *gosains* belonging to Kayastha and tribal groups and their families enjoyed socio-religious position equal to that of the Brahmin priests. The Sudras, as respected and integrated members of the society, occupied an important place; even today they successfully retained their status as before. The corporate mobility was also found among some castes and tribes where an entire jati or ethnic group successfully moved up in the social hierarchy and enjoyed higher social status. Under the process of Vaisnabisation many tribes transformed themselves into castes. In Assam among the Ahoms, Chutiyas, Koches and Sonowal Kacharis corporate mobility was found. The Koch tribe and a section of the Chutiya tribe known as Hindu-Chutiyas are today recognised as higher Assamese castes. A section of the Kachari tribe—known as Sonowal-Kacharis became Hindu. The Ahom embraced Hinduism and was elevated from their tribal status. In this way process of Hinduization, fission and corporate mobility took place among the various communities in medieval Assam. The fixity of hereditary status in the caste society did not remain as an unchallengeable norm.

In "Movement and social structure : a case study of Udayachal movement in the Brahmaputra valley" M.C. Paul considers the Udayachal movements as an ethnic movement of Assam which has a long historical root of origin in the pre-colonial social structure. The tribals during the pre-colonial period gradually came within the fold of the peasant society and economy. The anti-feudal rebellions by peasants, oppressed tribals and artisans along with the unemployed soldiers rose against the Ahom rulers.

During the colonial period land tenure system gradually alienated and pauperised the vast majority of the tribals. In the post colonial period Indian government decided to follow the policy of mixed economy. By and large the tribal economy has remained at the low level of peasant economy without the benefit of industrialization. The planning for industrial development had

displaced thousands of tribals from their land. The deprived tribals became conscious of their unprivileged position and polarization of social groups in terms of religion, language, ethnic groups, etc. gradually took place. Such polarization was strengthened by politicization and emergence of Udayachal movement demanding for separate state.

R.K. Kar and J.L. Sharma in their article "Tea and Ex-tea Labourer in Assam : A preliminary appraisal of social stratification and ethnicity" highlighted the dynamics of social stratification and nature of ethnicity among the tea plantation labourers of Assam. The study reveals that the tea plantation labourers of Assam are maintaining a dual cultural identity. In one hand, they are very conscious about their ethnic identity, while on the other, they are also participating in the way of life of plantation system. The ethnic identity and group distinction are maintained by the labourers through endogamy, commensality and limited social interactions among them. The authors argued that, in spite of heterogeneity (ethnic differentiation), a sense of homogeneity in economic context is an emerging trend of life activities of the tea plantation labourers.

P.K. Dasgupta in his paper "Ethnicity, Boundary maintenance and Hierarchy in a polyethnic Situation" has highlighted the nature of social stratification among the tea plantation labourers of North Bengal. He has analysed the polyethnic situation of tea gardens on the basis of prevalent ethnic groups among the plantation labourers. In this study he has discussed about the inter-ethnic hierarchy as well as the organizational hierarchy of the tea plantation labourers. To find out the pattern of social stratification among the tea planatation labourers the issues of ethnic groups, ethnic crisis, ethnic identity and ethnicity are also highlighted by him. The author is of opinion that in the context of tea garden though the different ethnic groups are maintaining their respective boundaries, yet at the same time, they also signify an interethnic solidarity to give the shape of a viable society in polyethnic situation.

In the paper "Some Observations on the Dimasa Ethnic Identity" D. Ghosh-Danda has described the process of ethnic identity among the Dimasa Kacharis of Assam. In 1931 the major bulk of the population of North Cachar was formed by the Dimasas of Hill Kacharis and up to 1961 they were clubbed with the Kacharis. The North Cachar National front was formed in 1972 having reformistic welfare-oriented and politically motivated objectives.

Number of Dimasa organizations grew up to protect their culture and identity. These Dimasa National organizations in strengthening their solidarity movement tried to generate some kind of consciousness among their community members emphasising the heritage of tradition and language, values and other symbols of the culture to crystalise ethnic identity. The ethnic unity and solidarity are the basic forces of such demand. In north Cachar they demanded for a separate hill state consisting of two hill districts, viz., Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. However there is no basic contradiction between ethnic identity and the Indian Nationality.

M. Hussain in the paper "Caste among the Assamese Muslims: An essay in social stratification" has examined the nature of caste and social stratification among the Muslims of Assam. He has observed that among the Assamese Muslims, similar to their Hindu neighbours, there is existence of loose kind of caste-like elements. He has identified several caste-like groups among them and a system of social stratification on the basis of ethnicity, discent, occupations, etc. He concludes that the caste system has been operating as an institution of regularised exploitation in Muslim society. A section of Assamese Muslims who are placed in the higher position in the caste-like hierarchy dominates over the lower and weaker sections of both the Muslims and the Hindus.

In "Profile of Economic Disparity among ethnic groups in the Terai region of Darajeeling district" S. Sur has studied the profile of economic disparity among the Rajbansis, Nepalis and tribals of the Terai of Darjeeling district of West Bengal. He finds that while the tribals are least developed, the Nepalis are comparatively better in terms of economy. The Rajbansis in general are found to put more importance in their traditional enterprise and the Nepalis put emphasis on dairying. But the tribals are found to put little importance on any enterprise. Small size of holdings, much leasing-in and leasing-out among tribals and Rajbansis, less intensive agriculture, absence of enterprise among tribals, sometimes large family size, less man-days of employment of Rajbansi females in general, causes general prevalence of poverty among them. Man-days of employment are highest among the Nepalis and lowest among the Rajbansis.

P.C. Sarkar and S.C. Kar in their paper "The impact of anti-poverty programme on the structure of a regional rural economy" have shown that the anti-poverty programme has a decisive role in

the increase of productivity through the straight pumping of resources into the lower sector of Dinhata region of Jalpaiguri. When the flow of resources is stopped, the productivity goes down. There is no planned improvement in the economy either of the input markets or of the output markets. The goal of the anti-poverty programme for the poor is far away in the economy of Dinhata. They suggest that the theory as well as the techniques involved in the designing and execution of national plans have to be remodelled making the concomitant institutions and infrastructure consistent with the avowed goal of development with freedom.

In the paper "Emerging Inequality among the Lepchas: A study in a village of Kalimpong" P. Debburman has tried to explore the nature of inequality which exists among the Lepchas. From his empirical study among the Lepchas of Kalimpong he has observed that the Lepchas under study have been individualistic in contemporary situation owing to the impact of various factors. This individualistic attitude among them has helped in the emergence of inequality in Lepcha society. He concluded that in spite of emerging trend of inequality in Lepcha society a cooperative motive still persists among them.

Mita Bhadra in her article "Ethnicity, hierarchy and inequality among the workers of tea industry in West Bengal" examines the pattern of cultural boundary maintenance in the multi-ethnic plantation society of North Bengal emphasising the nature of emerging social stratification. The plantation society can be considered as a "plural society" due to its ethnic heterogeneity. The system of stratification of this 'plural society' can be explained in combination of economic, racial, cultural, ethnic and organizational criteria. This plural society, as a whole, is regarded as "Coolies" or labourers against the "babu" or managerial class of the plantation organizational hierarchy. In Multi-ethnic plantation society group boundaries may become wider or narrower, and this can be understood by the process of ethnic-fusion and-fission. Ethnic-fusion is a process of assimilation where Munda, Oraon, Kheria form a common status group superior to the other tribal groups of plantations. The ethnic-fission has occurred due to religious affiliation of Hindu, Christian and *Saosar*.

A sense of hierarchy has also been noticed among the tribals of tea plantations which is commonly based on the criteria of traditional occupation and diatary habits. Generally agriculture is

considered as superior to non-agricultural occupations and beef-eating is looked down upon. Therefore beef-eaters are considered as inferior to the beef non-eaters. These are some of the caste like principles gradually gaining importance among the tribals of tea plantations. Oraon, Munda, Santal and Kheria who form a superior status group are gradually restricting their commensal relations with other tribal groups. Living side by side with the Hindus the tribes try to follow the Hindu ways of life and system of hierarchy. But except in case of commensality the principle of hierarchy is not clear to them.

S. Rahim Mondal in his article "Segments of society and patterns of social stratification among the Muslims or rural North-Bengal : A case study" has highlighted the dynamics of social segmentation and the patterns of social stratification among the Muslims of West Bengal. He has analysed the Islamic great tradition with particular reference to the concept of ideal egalitarian society and the emergence of social segmentation among the Muslims. The patterns of social stratification has also been analysed on the basis of empirical findings. All these have been interpreted through ordering of social relations in the formations of groups and subgroups and the nature of interaction among them. The groups and subgroups found among the Muslims are sects, sub-sects, endogenous groups (jat) and status groups etc. This study reflects the nature of traditional social stratification among the Muslims and the changes that have taken place in the contemporary situation. In his view the Muslim social segments are not castes. He has termed these segments as endogamous groups of *jatis*. In this study author has concluded that the social stratification among the Muslims is a situational development which is open and flexible in character.

Anima Bhattacharya in her article "Ethnicity and resource competition, ethnic organization, ethnic movement Vs. Political role of ethnic groups, emerging sub-nationalism" has discussed the dynamics of ethnicity and socio-political system of north-east India. She has tried to find out the role of ethnic group in the emergence of various socio-political movements in the region. In dealing with these, the political role of various ethnic groups of north-east India and the growth of sub-nationalism have also been discussed. In spite of some political competition based on ethnicity the region is linked democratically with the Indian national tradition.

Ranju Dhamala has discussed ethnic dimension of social,

political and administrative development in Sikkim in the paper "Ethnicity and development in Sikkim". She has investigated the ethnicity and resource competition in multi-ethnic Sikkimese society. The interethnic relations have influenced the political and administrative structure of the state in the process of its development. There exists an ethnic balance in the political system of Sikkim and this was contributed to the process of smooth development of the state.

M. Dasgupta has discussed that agrarian structure of Sikkim is essentially feudal in character. His article "Agrarian structure of Sikkim: A study of the land revenue system" shows that the land laws, which have been passed in the state to abolish the feudal structure, have failed to bring necessary changes in the agrarian system. The old feudal lords are still maintaining their feudal estates. The land ceiling acts on the other hand indirectly forced the tenants to be evicted from the land by the feudal lords. This, as a result, will create migration of people to urban centres and consequent increase of unemployment.

B.K. Roy Burman in his paper "Ethnicity, Ethnohistory and stratification among the tribes of Manipur" has described the ethnic processes among the tribal communities of Manipur. In looking into the ethnic processes he has gone into the historical aspects of the tribal groups of the region. The Pakan and Mon movements had ethnic dimension. Besides there were several ethnic movements in Manipur. Ethnicity and stratification within the ethnic groups are important features of this process. This process helps in the understanding of dynamics of ethnic movement in Manipur.

Alokananda Nath and D.N. Majumdar have shown the problems of identity of the tribal communities of Meghalaya who have converted themselves to Hinduism. In their article "Problems of Identity among the Hinduised communities of Meghalaya" they have described how the identity is maintained among the Rabhas, Hajong, Koches, Dalus and Banias of Meghalaya.

S.B. Chakrabarti in his paper on "Agrarian situation and the emerging situation in North-East India: Preliminary note" discussed the social and agrarian structure of the region and their relations with the emerging socio-political situation. In course of his discussion he had highlighted the relations between ecology, mode of production and social situations of the north-east part of India.

1

SOME CONSIDERATIONS TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF CASTE AND CLASS

K.L. Sharma

The purpose of this paper is to discuss briefly the main issues in India's sociology of social stratification, nature of India's social formation in terms of its dominant causality, ideology and change, and sources of distortions of social reality. Multidimensionality is a basic feature of India's social stratification. Recently some attempts have been made to study social stratification from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Social stratification involves interplay of social, economic, political and cultural factors and forces. A heuristic distinction between caste and class serves only a limited purpose. Moreover, it becomes a futile exercise particularly when in reality caste and class are found in an inseparable form.

Many approaches such as structural-functional, dialectical and psychological have been applied to study of social stratification. These approaches imply certain ideological, methodological and empirical assumptions, and unscrupulous acceptance and application of these approaches independent of India's social reality has caused concerns and raised the question of their relevance. The emphasis on "usefulness" or "futility" of either of the approaches and consideration of "caste" or "class" as a "functional" and "inevitable" system have demanded a serious scrutiny. Thus, one of the main issues in the study of social stratification is to explicate the impact of functional approach, particularly to the study of caste system in India. The "caste model" of Indian society has emanated from this theoretic and ideological standpoint, hence studies of social relations, group dynamics, power-politics, social change and mobility have been conducted from the perspective of caste (Beteille, 1969). According to this view, caste refers to "determinancy", it over-

determines social relations compared to other determinants. Such dogmatist advocacy is found in regard to the application of the Marxian approach too. More than Marx's "method" of study, the "model" of class and class-conflict has been adopted for studying social stratification (Desai, 1948, 1978).

Another main issue in the study of social stratification is the relation between theory, structure and process. It has been suggested that a sociology of knowledge perspective could throw light on theoretical assumptions, selection of problems, major structural foci and units, studies of specific societies and their relevance and the processes of social stratification, their causes, consequences and impact upon the overall social order and change (Sharma, 1985). Recent analyses of social stratification in India indicate "drifts" from the sociological positivism of the West and the tilt towards indigenisation of concepts, frameworks and theoretical constructs (Singh, 1986 : 325-328; Sharma, 1986a : 29-61). The question of 'relevance' is being posed forcefully. There is more emphasis on knowing India's historicity and specific structrual and cultural dimensions alongwith their contradictions and dialecticd (Sharma, 1986a : 50-59; 1986b). Elsewhere I have stated that such a drift in theory or ideology of social stratification does not necessarily imply the use of nativistic concepts and categories (Sharma, 1986a; 1986b). The question which I am raising is : How far the studies of social stratification are based on the theoretic formulations - experiential input of which is not drawn from our own society? Despite this drift structural-functional, structuralist, structural-historical and Marxist orientations continue to overshadow the studies of social stratification in India (Singh, 1986).

Studies of caste, class and power have drawn heavily from Max Weber's triology of "class, status and party" (Beteille, 1965). The studies conducted by the British ethnographers and some others, particularly Hocart, Bougle and Dumont have provided the "caste model" for studying Indian society (Hocart, 1950; Bougle, 1971; Dumont, 1970). The use of participant observation or of survey techniques has come in vogue due to the impact of British social anthropology and American sociology, respectively. Some very significant and sociologically relevant foci, issues and objects of study have either remained unstudied or only partially touched. "The question is not of caste or class or of caste and class, but it is of a composite social reality in which social and ritual aspects do not

seem to be independent of economic and power relations" (Sharma, 1986).

There are distortions of India's social reality both at ideological and substantive levels. To say that caste is a "functional" system, or the notion of *homo hierarchicus* is synonym of India's caste system, and that there are no elements of *homo equalis* in Indian society - are some of the expressions of ideologically distorted perspective and motivated approach. Hierarchy entails inequality, but rigidity based on apartheid, estatehood and feudalism is not less "rigid" than the rigidity of the caste system. The questions are : Has Indian society been static? What is meant by staticness? Who have made such observations? Caste has been witnessing discontinuities, breakdowns, changes and contradictions.

The notion of *homo equalis* about the western society is a "group myth", and therefore, it is not a suitable model for analysing caste stratification. In fact, inequality and equality are in-built in the caste system, but inequality is obviously more conspicuous than equality both in theory and practice. The notion and practice of "contra-priest" and jajmani system explain the elements of equality in India's social formation.

Some scholars have observed that India's pre-capitalist economic formation was classless and static. For them class in India is generally seen as a consequence of change in the caste system rather than a concomitant and coexistent system. There are two views about India's class structure : (1) A class analysis alone can provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of social inequality in India; and (2) class is not a social reality, hence analytical abstractions in the form of statistical-mathematical indicators or analytical typologies about class. According to the first view caste is just class. The Indian State has a class character. Entire Indian society can be divided in terms of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the state guards and promotes the interests of the propertied class (Desai, 1976). According to the second view class is a conceptually abstracted category. Class is not a community like caste or ethnic group. Class is defined in terms of certain indices (D'Souza, 1967 : 192-211).

Consequent upon these views, studies on caste aimed at its legitimacy and justification as an all-encompassing functional system. "Pluralism" of caste was used for deepening the roots of British Raj. Class as a system was projected for establishing superiority of the

Western society and culture. Class was defined as an open system with freedom of movement and achievement as its essence. Caste and class were thus defined in terms of corporateness, hierarchy and ascription and individualism, equality and achievement respectively. The two systems were defined as polar opposites, caste representing an archaic society and class an industrially advanced achievement-oriented Western society (Sharma, 1986a; 1986b).

Let me comment on the formulations based on socio-historical accounts about Indian society. Internal contradictions have brought about change, but replacement/displacement of the system has not occurred, hence continuity and change have coexisted. A unilinear mode of change has also been observed. The Vedic period was characterised by pastoralism; the Maurian period had settled agrarian economy; and a commercial-urban economy was dominant in the Gupta period. Besides such a uni-directionality of change, foreign invasions and migrations brought about change at the level of elite groups. These changes were basically economic in nature and affected class relations. The migrations also affected the status relationships and rules of marriage. Two points can be noted in this context : (1) caste and class divide was not rigid, because the society itself was not rigidly structured; and (2) society was quite dynamic and change in one sphere affected relations in other spheres (Thaper, 1974 : 95-123).

Romila Thaper (1974) mentions that there were secular bases of Social stratification. There were "mixed castes". *Actual status* (economic and political power) was not necessarily dependent upon the *ritual status*. In fact, there was tension between ritual and actual statuses. Uma Chakraborti (1985 : 356-360) refers to "a division of society into the domains of power, ritual and the economy" based on her study of Buddhist sources. Power (Kshatriya) is rated above priesthood (Brahmin), hence the tension between the two. D.D. Kosambi (1975) finds that it is not kinship but production and mutual exchange of commodities and bonds of production which are the basis of social relations. Caste was related to economic hierarchy, hence emergence of feudalism.

Changes in the ruling class and the rural landed aristocracy are evident in the *iqta* system in 12th century A.D., and later on in the *mansabdari* and *jagirdari* systems. Below them were peasants who were also stratified. Nurul S. Hasan (1979) mentions about a hierarchy of zamindars which includes autonomous chieftains, the

intermediaries, and the primary zamindars. In the British period there were those who paid maximum taxes, and there were those who did not pay tax at all, and in-between these two categories of tax-payers, were several categories of people along the lines of caste hierarchy. Caste rank was also a basis for taxation. Higher the caste rank, lower was the tax imposed and vice-versa.

The land tenure systems introduced by the British in the form of land grants created new forms of relationships. Kinsmen, favourites, dancers, dhobis, nais and golas, etc. were given lands in view of the services rendered by them to the landlords. A new hierarchy of states, thikanas, jagirs, chhutbhaiyas, bhomias, peasants, tenants and servants emerged as a consequence of the British policy (Sharma, 1982). Thus we could see a situation of structural transformation throughout India's history and such a state of affairs would not warrant a notion of caste as a static system of social relations. There were socially structured land control relationships in terms of the landlord and the tenant. Various landed strata were linked to definite socio-cultural and economic and political roles. Each caste was differentially associated with other caste (Frykenberg, 1979). Harold A. Gould's (1967 : 26-55) concept of "contra-priest" also explains the element of equality in India's caste system and jajmani relations. The British brought about change in the institutions of property, government and law; and these three affected significantly land, labour and lord, both socially and economically (Frykenberg, 1979). These structural changes weakened the importance of caste in social hierarchy. But in certain respects caste has become today a strong basis of mobilization despite its weakening in the structural context. At the empirical level the structural changes today are visible in terms of downward mobility of the previously privileged and better off people, and in the form of upward mobility of the formerly disadvantaged and suppressed sections of Indian society.

Dumont's (1970) view that change is *in* and not *of* India's caste system betrays his belief that the principle of hierarchy is an overarching one. According to Dumont, "pure" and "impure" are complementary. But to say that pure is superior to impure negates the notion of complementarity of the two. Even his notion of "binary tension" is contradicted by his overemphasis on hierarchic nature of social relations. We are not sure of the fact that the pure encompasses the impure. The fact is that pure-impure syndrome,

commensality and untouchability as values have become substantially weak. J.R.D. Tata is a Parsi, and K.K. Birla is a Bania for Dumont, and they are monopoly capitalists for a Marxist scholar. But for a sociologist they are Parsi and Bania as well as monopolists.

Following Karl Marx regarding the notion of class we ask the following questions : What men are ? What they produce as they are ? How they produce ? These questions are related to *structure*. But the mode and existence of structure changes over a period of time, hence *process*. Change and differentiation are caused by antagonism and contradictions. Stages of change can be gauged in terms of the historicity of contradictions. Structuring of social inequality is a continuous process. Life determines consciousness, ideas and cognition and not vice-versa (Sharma, 1986). The following questions are pertinent here :

(i)   How social life is produced ?

(ii)   What is its mode of production ?

(iii) What units are produced as a result of certain social conditions ?

(iv)   What is the nature of social interaction between the groups produced through such an evolutionary process ?

A common answer to these interrelated questions is : Each generation continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances, and also modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity (Marx and Engels, 1968 : 32-38). Thus, Marx visualises continuity of tradition and emergence of modernity side by side. Structure of social relations is determined by the direction of change.

The analysis of Asiatic mode does not deny the role of class contradictions and class structures. India's class structure was not static. Both caste and class-based exploitation existed side by side. Different forms of primitive communal societies, forms of slavery and bondage and feudal relations have existed simultaneously in different combinations in the same areas (Marx and Engels, 1968). Such a complex situation of social formation would pose the following questions : (i) How to analyse the class structure in India ? (ii) What is caste and class nexus ? (iii) What are its ramifications and interrelations in each region in India ?

One simple and straight answer to these questions is : "In every

form of society .... there is one definite production which determines the position and importance of all other productions, and its relations" (Chottopadhyaya, 1972). Thus, there are some who think of capitalist-determinism in regard to Indian society. A corollary of this view is that State in India has assumed property norms of capitalist society as the axis of developmental strategy (Desai, 1975). But for some other scholars such a view refers to a mechanical model. Several models of productions coexist in India. There has been a limited and distorted development of capitalism in India, hence no economic determinism (Dandekar, 1978 : 102-24). The purchase of labour power, production of surplus value and augmentation of the capital of the buyer of the labour power speak of crude economism (Sau, 1973 : A27-A30). There is a dual or multiple mode of production in the form of simultaneous coexistence of pre-capitalist and capitalist relations (Lin, 1980).

Large-scale industry and monopoly capitalism have not emerged fully in terms of their implications in India. Trade unions and collective bargaining power of workers have changed the character of capitalism. Marx himself refers to at least six classes, and therefore, there are no two antagonistic but several homogeneous undifferentiated classes. There are several groups (classes) between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In India itself, there are at least five broad classes : (i) pre-capitalist (cultivators, agricultural labourers and household industry workers), (ii) independent workers in capitalist society, (iii) employers, (iv) white-collar workers, and (v) blue-collar workers. Wages of workers range from Rs. 200 to 2000. Only one-sixth of total workforce are wage-earners. State is the largest employer today. About one million workers are there in small-scale industries, and they have much less conflict and strikes. Organised labourers are only one-ninth of the total workforce (Dandekar, 1978).

The situation today is as follows :

    (i) There is interpenetration and interdependence of one aspect over the other

    (ii) Exploitation and patronhood and consciousness, false consciousness and lack of consciousness coexist.

    (iii) There is also conflict among higher caste elites for extending patronage to the lower caste kamins and workers.

Besides such a conflict, there are pressure groups and factions which cut across caste and class lines.

(iv) In the post-independent India, middle classes are more pronounced than the higher and lower classes due to the policies of the Indian State.

(v) There are also "mixed classes" like "mixed castes".

(vi) Old forms of exploitation are being replaced by new ones.

(vii) Class-conflict has a caste dimension. Caste is an infrastructure as well as an ideology. Harijans are beaten up, tortured and exploited because they are poor.

There is nothing like exclusively a "caste society" or a "class society" or an "estate society", in India, the United States of America and Europe, respectively. To presume that caste are "non-antagonistic" strata; that they are groups acting as corporate groups, and that they do not compete with each other, is an oversimplification of intercaste relations. It is also believed that competition refers to a class situation and a caste is found in a non-contractual "status-society". Functions, pluralism and cultural aspects of caste have been exaggerated while dysfunctions, segmentation, hierarchy and structural dimensions have been undermined. Thus, caste has been used a double-edged weapon, namely, keeping it intact by declaring it as a "functional" system, and by pronouncing its inferiority to the class system of the West. I have stated elsewhere that two consequences followed from this situation :

1. The indoctrination of social scientists in terms of theorization, methodology and field studies; and

2. Legitimation of the western hegemony and the superiority of their understanding of Indian society (Sharma, 1986a : 34-35).

It is obvious that the concepts of the caste and class have originated from the experience of the Western society and therefore they ignore the historicity of Indian society. Some scholars have opined that indigenization of social science paradigms would ensure a proper input of historical substance in the making of the concepts and theoretic constructs related to Indian society. Use of native concepts and categories has also been suggested. One view is that Indian tradition may be accepted as the sole basis of analysing social change (Mukherji, 1958). However, some have opined against the

application of the non-Marxist approaches, whereas others have emphasised on the use of social anthropological framework and method of study.

Let me say that these confusions and distortions need rectification. Caste is both infrastructural and super-structural phenomenon. It is a normative system as well as a system of actual socio-structural relations (Malik, 1986 : 1-24). Cooperation and competition within a caste and with other castes are found simultaneously. A sort of class structure within a caste can be seen which in fact indicates the process of differentiation and mobility among its members. Thus, caste and class are not polar opposites. They are inseparable parts of India's social formation, hence study of their nexus, continuity and change. Change is not from caste to class in Indian society as the two have coexisted. There is a caste basis of class and a class basis of caste. Study of caste in terms of multiple criteria, levels of dominance, levels of mobility and structural processes of change and downward mobility would repudiate some of the fixed views regarding the caste system. Historic and experiential inputs are lacking in the prevalent analytic explanations of caste. A reformulated epistemology informed by "social ontology" can alone solve the problems of proper understanding of the structure and process of social stratification in India. Both caste and class are real and empiric phenomena, hence "caste alone" or "class alone" view is ruled out. Caste and class represent to a large extent the same structural reality. Both are "interactional" entities in concrete situations of social relations.

While discussing determinants of social status in India S.C. Malik (1986 : 1) refers to some problems and issues. In Indian society "... there exists a whole range of sub-societies, in each region, with their own long pattern of characteristic historical evolution of continuity and change, wherein a host of factors like invasions, migrations, external ideologies, apart from internal developments have played their role". Malik observes that in multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-class society like India, the changes have also been multi-directional. Malik (1986 : 2) poses the following questions about ancient Indian civilization :

(1) Were there no changes in the normative as well as ideological premises?
(2) Did the ascriptive criteria always hold good when we also

know that the criterion of achievement was workable and acceptable in certain situations ?

The criteria of status determination would be prescriptive normative evaluations, existential conditions, and conflict situations etc. Processes of transformation through social upheavals with a view to rectify social injustices and inequalities have been mentioned by Malik (Malik, 1986 : 2). A variety of social movements have resulted into readjustments of society to new situations. Wealth, power and prestige have been the bases of gradation within and between various caste and sub-caste groups. Invasions, migrations and techno-economic factors have played a decisive role throughout Indian history. A multi-dimensional model of analysis of status determinants and social mobility takes into account units of observation both horizontally and vertically, in terms of their regional and local placements, rural and urban settings and in terms of both attributional and interactional criteria (Malik, 1986 : 5).

Multi-dimensionality of caste, class and power and dynamics of interrelations between them can be seen more specifically if we study a given "social formation". Each one of these have had layers and levels associated with each other vertically and horizontally. The concept of "social formation" was originally given by Karl Marx, and it has been practised at the theoretical level by L. Althusser (Glucksmann, 1974 : 230-245). "The Marxist totality is conceived as a complex internally structured totality of various layers and levels related to each other in all sorts of relations of determination and inter-dependence" (Glucksmann, 1974 : 236). Thus, we intend to understand the phenomena of caste and class as a complex formation in terms of different layers, levels and elements. However, at one point of time there may be a "structure in domination", namely, economic, political, ideological and theoretical. Any of these may be "determinant" and "determined" in a specific social formation at a specific point of time. Thus each has its relative autonomy and interdependence. Multiplicity of contradictions in a given social formation can be seen in terms of its elements and relations between those elements. Althusser points out that "class contradictions" may be one of the several in the social formation. Educational system, structures of sexual relations, kinship, family composition etc. may generate other sorts of contradictions, and may be compatible with the class contradictions (Glucksmann, 1974).

Social formation, for us, refers to a system of hierarchical structural relationship with a particular mode of relations. In the pre-independence period in India colonial/feudal mode of production produced hierarchical relations among people who could be identified in terms of their socio-cultural existential contexts. Thus, specific cultural evolution of particular socio-cultural units could be understood as "social formations".

Finally, social formation of a society or explication of the concepts of caste and class can be studied in terms of structure, culture, history and dialectics. Structure refers to relations between social segments at a point of time, as a historical product and an existent reality. Structure is a product of dialectical contradictions, historical forces, and certain "formation" once it has emerged, and becomes a sort of force in determining the course of history, nature of contradictions and evaluational standards. Culture defines the rules of the game, the nature of relations between different sections of society in addition to practices, rituals, *rites de passage*, etc. History provides a substantial account of conditions of existence. Dialectics refers to contradictions and asymmetries between groups and men and women. It is not simply binary fision or opposition between pure and impure. Thus, structure, culture, history and dialectics refer to a combine of theory, structure and process about social formation (both caste and class) of Indian society. The perspective of social formation based on these four notions can answer the debate : whether changes in caste and class are "transformational" or are they "replacements"; whether caste is "closed" and class is "open"; whether caste is "organic" and class is "segmentary"; and whether caste is being replaced by class, etc.

The very notion that caste and class are polar opposites has obstructed us from thinking caste and class in terms of the historicity of India's social formation. Now we know that social mobility existed in ancient and medieval India. Jajmani system was never an "organic" system as it has been projected over the centuries. The notion of "contra-priest" explains the lack of rigidity in regard to caste hierarchy and pollution-purity syndrome. Studies of downward social mobility and proletarianization, upward mobility and embourgeoisement, urban incomes for rural people and migration of the rural people to the towns, and rural non-agricultural incomes and mobility etc. explain that caste and class have inhered each other as an inseparable mix.

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