



SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE PEASANTRY IN INDIA

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Socio-economic otherwise called social financial matters is the sociology that concentrates on how monetary movement influences and is moulded by social cycles. Overall it examines how social orders progress, deteriorate. This chapter discusses with socio-economic conditions of peasants. Historical writings constantly undergo changes in their format, if not in content, with changing perspectives of people with changing socio-economic conditions of life. As such, it is not the dearth of historians but the historical perspective that is essentially required in research studies. From time immemorial agricultural sector has been constituted as the largest safety net in the Indian Economy. It has absorbed the largest workforce of India's economy in both farm and non farming occupations. Agriculture is the life line and the principal means of livelihood for one third population in India.

The land and the peasant class had been an object of consideration by the British authorities since the beginning of British rule. Land income was the main wellspring of government's revenue and the peasants were individuals who worked the land and infrequently rose up against the landowners and the public authority. The reliance of the provincial government ashore income required that the peasant class was held under critical examination. A few previous studies, thusly, emphasised around the land-income structures. Nonetheless, throughout of the time, scholastically arranged and unprejudiced examinations about the land settlement and the peasantry, both for the British and pre- British times, started to show up.

The sparkle of development has added little shimmer to the existences of numerous peasants and provincial labourers. Hardship, segregation, and drawback overwhelm the regular day to day existences of enormous segments in native Andhra Pradesh. A rural village investigation concentrates on feature highlights of society that are regularly ignored and eclipsed by large scale investigations of the economy. On this perspective regarding this situation, British rule in India delivered a progression of related reforms in agrarian culture: the production of landed property by regulation; constrained commercialisation of yields; land brought to the market as an item; the spread of peasant debt and land distance; the crumbling of the proletariat into rich peasants and poor peasants; depeasantisation, landlessness and the rise of a pauperised group of landless workers; the breakdown of the rural class of independent workers and an extensive course of social categorization in the open country.

That such countless provincial families keep on encountering extreme types of bad form in one of India's more wealthy states involves genuine worry for the growth and security of the nation. The majority mass of the populace actually lived off cultivation, and the leftist scholars of history were hence prompted to give some consideration to the peasant class. They thought of a worldview, or system of understanding, to figure out change in agrarian culture in the British period.

As a society develops to all the more profoundly coordinated stages, it turns out to be increasingly more challenging to make changes without shaking the entire establishment. However on the off chance that these changes were not made as they become fundamental, they collect. Their delay restrains social and financial change and creates hatred, political contact, and social elements. In the end such deferral of required changes prompts the major careful procedure on the body politic which we consider upheavals the most merciless,

ungainly, and expensive of all types of change. In concentrating on the historical backdrop of the world's bloodiest insurgencies up right to present day, I observed that as hindered, deferred, or in any case baffled changes of land-tenure framework were the most remarkable elements mindful.¹ Tara Chand mentioned that being a die-hard imperialist Lord Curzon eyes laid on the Indian public, the poor labourers, the unassuming patient quiet millions who read no daily news papers since they couldn't peruse by any means, and who had no legislative issues except for lived by 'sweat of their brow'. Subsequently they must be cared for so they could work on with persistence and guard the Empire.²

Agriculture was the main stay of colonial economy in India. State ownership of land was a decisive factor that influenced both colonial agrarian relations and the entire economic structure. The transitional character of rural economy had been subject to economic and political influence.³ Hence, British rule in India brought a lot of changes in the agrarian relations that varied from place to place. Like elsewhere in India, Andhra had different kinds of tenurial holdings having marked differences within a specific area.

With the geographical peculiarities of the land structure, the socio- economic conditions also base their features on land. Land formed the basis of relational patterns in the society and thus an agrarian structure soon started developing. Possession of land complemented ritual status and brought power.⁴ Various tenurial systems evolved for the efficient management and cultivation of land. In the agrarian structure there was a hierarchy based on caste system. Society was divided on the basis of the category of occupations in the system of production.⁵ The land owners, chief tenants, sub-tenants and agrestic workers were the different class groups in Andhra. A feudalistic structure was already making its way to the top. The societal division was greatly sanctioned by the caste based hierarchical patterns and customs and religious sanctions.

Indian culture had forever been founded on rural economy and agrarian exercises of the rustic regions, in which peasant is the focal and significant component. Furthermore this agrarian construction on Indian peasant class had been abused all of the time by inconsistent removals of the land masters and experienced high leases, illicit taxes, and free of cost or neglected work in zamindari region. The impoverishment of the Indian Peasantry was an immediate after effect of the change of the agrarian construction because of British financial policies, ruin of the crafted works prompting congestion of land, the new land income structure, British authoritative and legal framework.

The peasants dreading loss of his main wellspring of vocation regularly moved toward the nearby moneylender who utilized the peasant's troubles by removing high prices of interests on the cash lease. The fundamental reason of the peasant's exploitation was the absence of distinct land income framework since ages. Most of the farmers were exposed to high leases, illicit taxes, reestablishment expenses. However there were continuous battles among peasants and the land rulers yet the proletariat had no specific association to give stage to their requests. Zamindari tenure was those wherein the whole rural land is either possessed by a solitary land ruler or an assemblage of tenants, who might address a gathering of ancestrally associated families.

Congress Party had driven the nation towards the political independence and had gotten a handle on the confidence of individuals in each niche and corner. It was not anticipating any battle while workers were in extraordinary trouble number of landless works were expanding step by step. Thus, the agrarian inquiry was a predominant subject of the period of patriot battle and its belief system. It turned out to be exceptionally critical during the 1920s and 30s and the issue of land reform and related contemporary legislative issues got the extensive consideration of the time. The nature and content of the peasant issue changed now and again relying upon administered by the socio-economic impulses created by movements intended for redistribution of political power and social power.

The consistent setting for declaring the principle was the Indian National Congress, the main significant party organized political association in India which was heavily influenced by local pioneers. Anyway the Indian National Congress, while having appeared in 1885, had in this manner for neglected to advance a belief system and hierarchical design adequately inescapable to produce a genuinely mass-based political movement

of the extents that would be expected to cut across the immense collection of societies, nationalities, caste, classes and religious into which India was partitioned. This was mostly effected the peasants in the form caste splits even in their mobilizations particularly in Andhra.

Social Stratification in Indian Society:

Social stratification is the state of being organized in a social layers or classes inside a gathering. As such it is a framework by which a general public partitions individuals and positions them in classes. These classes are then positioned in a progressive system. This is shown by a pyramid where most lucky ones are set at the highest level. Separation is the characteristic of each general public in all aspects of the world. It's anything but an issue of today however has endured over the ages. Definition in an Indian culture depends on credit. It implies it is a kind of culture where not based on accomplishment. It could include imbalance based on gender, economical condition and caste system. Accordingly here, in an Indian culture, individuals are put in the definition framework by their attributed status and the philosophy is to keep the caste guidelines without scrutinizing its validity.

Such a system is an exemplary illustration of shut Social Mobility. While the caste framework portrays Closed Social Mobility, the Class system reflects Open Social Mobility. In a class framework, even close family members might have different economic wellbeing where one can go moving around the progressive system in view of individual legitimacy and accomplishments. Whenever delineation is done based on riches or income, a great deal of portability and smoothness is noticed. No caste or class distinction is noticed. As indicated by Davis Moore, separation has useful ramifications for the activity of a general public. Whenever certain occupation can be performed by anybody, some other work requests the uncommon ability of individuals with broad preparation. In this way, the more noteworthy the interest of a task, the more significance it is given and subsequently more award is connected with it.

Stratification on the Basis of Caste:

Under the caste framework condition is inherited. It depends on birth; it is absolutely an attributed position. When such positions are appointed, they can't progress and work on their economic wellbeing in any capacity. Henceforth, caste as a significant kind of friendly separation doesn't work with vertical social versatility. Effect of delineation because of caste: overly critical treatment to certain castes, just certain segments got an opportunity to advance, low confidence, and division in the public eye made it simpler for outsiders to assault, loss of human resources. There are fair indications that peasant society had a large section of Sudras in them. It goes without saying that a large section of the Vaisyas continued tilling the land as before and was part of the peasant society.

Thus peasant society had members from all the four castes, though their certainly was an inside stratification, some being landlords and having large landed estates, some being peasant proprietors, some being share-croppers and some working as tenants and labourers only. Thus the fact of Brahmans standing at the top of society was well established and naturally so because the whole social order was shaped as per Brahmanical texts. No wonder they had the leadership of the contemporary peasant society. Peasant society by its very nature was bound to be a traditional society. Hence it was all the easier for the literate and learned Brahman members to acquire eminence and influence the social behaviour of the peasants.

The most unmistakable, and the most obvious, area happens in Indian Hindu society, everywhere a regular village might consist upwards of 2,500 individuals. The expert claims to fame are pottery fabricating, stone working, barbering, exchanging, weaving, washing, and crowding. These works are carried on by isolated castes, to which ought to be included the two times conceived caste, the Brahman, or insightful man priest, and however this is to a greater extent a status rather than a profession. The specific administrations of the different castes frequently are delivered with no prompt payment or bring administration back. The occupational castes all have a commitment to offer their types of assistance. The full-time agriculturalist, for instance, anticipates a

new plow from the carpenter, a pot from the potter, hair styles from the hairdresser, etc. After the semi-annual reaps the peasant disseminates suitable portions of produce to the people who have served him.

The caste arrangement of professions generally decides the situation with people, yet there were ways of accomplishing upper position by obtaining riches or political office. A rich landowner of downtrodden caste will keep on seeing every one of the conventional mentalities of concession to those of upper class; yet his viewpoint might be significant and his influence extensive in other than direct relational contacts. Also, obviously, high and low position might be procured inside a given caste contingent upon individual ability and character. Numerous Indian peasant villages are exogamous (wedding outside), which brings about ties among a few villages as an outcome of giving and getting spouses. In such cases, each individual takes part in an informal community outside his village to a more prominent degree than he connects with people of different castes inside his own village.

These local connections are the means by which a typical culture is diffused over a broad region. Hindu peasant villages are less similar the farther they are from one another, yet immense regions of rural India are astoundingly homogeneous in culture. Hindu peasant inclined toward monetary independence in its neighbourhood particular occupations and several respects in village. One quality of the ryot wealth is that the creation unit is typically the family. Yet, this doesn't imply that families are generally a similar size. Basically, specialized and financial necessities will quite often administer the size of the family, which goes from enormous three-generational more distant families down to the atomic unit of one bunch of guardians and their unmarried kids. Legacy designs will more often than not mirror the prerequisites of the agricultural activity. Regardless of whether the land is parted similarly among the main beneficiaries or passed on as a solitary unit (generally through the oldest child) relies upon whether cultivating requires enormous property or whether a little, seriously cultivated region is adequate. In a few historical occurrences, the environmental determinant of the size of property has been negated by belief system or regulation.

Stratification on the Basis of Class:

Class is an open framework and this is a commonplace current sort of definition framework that will in general be all inclusive in nature. The class based delineation framework bunch individuals who hold similar financial circumstances, for example, occupation, income and responsibility for together. The individuals who are in an ideal situation are generally the people who appreciate more honours like higher educational level, status and way of life, relaxation exercises and power. The outline beneath addresses a regular class framework. Under this framework vertical portability is totally free. Movement starting with one position then onto the next has no boundary. Condition depends on accomplishment. Not entirely settled by the talents, wealth, cash, knowledge, power, education, income, and so on of an individual. There is no legacy of parental condition. Effect of stratification because of class isolates society into haves and those who lack wealth, could prompt crime, poor weakness, illiteracy, class battle, advantages of progress restricted to not many, low income. American economist analyst Galbraith contended that individuals are poor when their salaries fall amazingly underneath those of the local area, regardless of whether they are adequate for their endurance. Other than this large number of they face minimal living and have debased ways of life. In this sense, the poor are subsequently without all potential open doors and are supposed to be an underclass.

Economic Conditions of Peasantry:

The economic life of Indian peoples in general, was conditioned by geographical, physical and climatic factors on the one hand and by social organisations, age old customs and religious faiths on the other. Through the ages the basic, ways of living were stabilised into fixed economic systems which, more or less, maintained continuity from ancient to medieval times. Economic conditions also have presented certain paradoxical features at almost all periods of history. India was proverbially a rich country, full of resources and wealth, yet famines and scarcities were not unusual phenomena. Within the vast dimensions of the land there could be a surplus of food at one place and extreme scarcity at another. Such contradictory features were not unnatural in

the days when modern means of transportation did not exist. The so-called medievalism or traditionalism in Indian economic ways may be said as due to the time factor itself. The transition from a medieval to modern economy was a worldwide phenomenon. Like other countries, Indian economy was also transformed. The colonial rule in India coincided with the general world economic transition. The general economic conditions of the Andhra caused acute distress among the poor sections of the population, fostered discontent among the middle classes, especially the educated and created political unrest among the people by and large.

Of the two main branches of Indian economy, i.e., agriculture and small industry, agriculture played a more vital role, which employed a greater number of people. Agriculture was the basis of India's rural economy as almost the entire rural population was associated with the land in some way or the other. Certain geographical and climatic conditions had made India predominantly an agricultural country. From time immemorial the agriculturists were the backbone of the economic life. Other economic groups like the weavers, carpenters, blacksmiths, etc. who rendered useful services to the entire population depended on the agriculture and possessed agricultural lands of their own. The function of the village community was so much like an integrated organism that all varieties of people tended to look at the ryot as the indispensable factor of community existence. Thus, agriculture and agriculturists represented the core of the Indian Economy.

That the Indian people especially the agriculturists were illiterate and were not open to learning new methods of agriculture was an impression that the foreigners had formed in their mind. They believed that the Indian agriculturists blindly followed their traditional methods of agriculture industry and business and were averse to new innovations. This feeling was not only common in India and outside among the foreigners but also among the English educated Indian elite. Therefore, it may be argued that the so-called traditional and unscientific attitude of Indian ryot had little difference with the progressive scientific English ryots (at least up to the 1920s).

In any measure of Land Reforms, the concept of personal cultivation was given much importance. The Reform Committees set up after independence advocated that if agricultural efficiency had to be increased with a view to stepping up food production the element of absentee landlordism had to be carefully eliminated. However during the colonial rule the government did not appear to be critical of the negative effects of absentee landlordism which was the root cause of many chaos and confusion in the estates among the tenantry and the sub-proprietary classes.

For an understanding of the difficulties of the peasantry it is essential to investigate the economic and social basis of the subsistence pattern that the peasantry had adopted in different situations. The peasants or any group constituting the organisational basis of a productive farming unit could attain a degree of economic security only through an integrative pattern of cultivation and animal husbandry. Much of the crop was valuable not simply for the grain that were harvested but also for the abundant fodder or chaff it provided for the year round raising a livestock.

The bullock required in cultivation for ploughing and irrigation was an essential increment to the peasant income when annually bought and resold as a commodity on the livestock market. Thus cattle rising played a significant part in the peasant economy of Andhra. Cattle fairs were organised weekly in almost every locality in rural areas in Andhra, for sale and purchase of cattle. The standard of living of the agriculturists was very poor in colonial Andhra. The periodic natural calamities like flood drought and cyclone that the coastal population of the state had been living with contributed to their poor economic standard. Due to lack of sufficient security or alternative source of income the small agriculturist rate of survival from the damage caused by the natural calamities was slow. As H.S. Jevons pointed out in the early 1920's, it was an overall monetary law that when the way of life was low, essentially at the resource level it was hard to raise it, and when it had been raised from this low level it was effectively oppressed again by antagonistic financial powers.⁶

The government measures like irrigation, supply or agricultural technology like improved tools, fertilisers, seeds etc and agricultural loans were insufficient and did not cater to the requirements of a large

section of the peasantry. Therefore, the standard of living could not be raised and their suffering from the natural calamities continued to put pressure on their economy. The higher density of rural population in coastal Andhra centred on the more abundant water supply regions like the riverside or canal irrigated land or where ground water was abundant. The proximity to water sources helped the peasantry to rely to certain extent upon a second harvest or on rabi crops.

But the amount of advance was very less and was disproportionate and interest was charged from the beneficiaries.⁷ The loans were also recovered immediately after the next good harvest, which had a discouraging effect on the agriculturists. At the time of agricultural distress the government allowed remission of land revenue but remission on the ground of fall in prices of food grains and due to economic depression was not considered. Except during the year of agrarian distress the government adopted a coercive process for collection of revenue, which was detrimental to peasant economy especially during the fall of prices of agricultural goods.⁸

The opening of roads and communication networks facilitated production of various export-oriented crops in many colonial countries and most parts of India. The cotton boom of the 1860's gave an impetus to public works development in India like improvement of rail and road links to facilitate production and export of raw cotton from India to Great Britain. This shows how public works were linked with commercial activity and commercial interest of the colonial state.⁹ Nevertheless, in the areas where crops like cotton and jute were cultivated the colonial government improved the communication infrastructure like construction of roads, railway lines, navigational routes and other such facilities for easy transport of these raw materials to the harbours for its onward transmission to the British home industry. As the Andhra peasantry did not produce sufficient quantity of these commercial crops for which the colonial state also did not take much interest to encourage such crops.

The policy makers in the British Government while formulating the principles of land revenue assessment in India made it clear that the revenue should be realised in the form of a fixed annual payment in cash, the amount of which should be subject to no alternation during a prescribed term of years. And this fixed assessment in cash was looked upon as the standard characteristic of the land revenue system in colonial India.¹⁰ But in Andhra Pradesh this standard principle of assessment and realisation of land revenue was violated by the colonial government. Instances of raising land taxes and land revenues were often found on the ground of improved agricultural production either due to good seasons, or good crops or due to irrigation facilities.

Periodic famines in India had always checked its growth of population. The failure of monsoon was characterised as an important and immediate cause of the famine. As most of the agricultural population almost wholly depended on sufficient and well-distributed rain any shortfall in the normal rainfall proved disastrous for the cultivating class. Prolongation of the dry season for a few weeks also affected the yield. The negative impact of famine on a predominantly agricultural economy included the reduction of human labour due to starvation deaths and cattle mortality due to shortage of fodder.¹¹ Temporary emigration of landless labourers to places outside the province in search of employment was quite general and more during agrarian distress.

Conclusion:

The caste tradition in India has it that the three upper castes are not to associate directly with cultivation, griming their hands as it would involve. With this kind of caste restrictions, they engaged people from lower castes and non-Hindu communities. The actual tillers of the land were from low castes and backward communities. The preceding survey of the colonial agrarian structure in Andhra Pradesh demolishes the colonial legacy of development in India. The Indian economic problem especially the rural problem has its roots in the agrarian structure inherited from the past. The contradictions of Indian rural society in the sphere of its land relations under the colonial rule provided insights into the rural underdevelopment and this became the basis of the rural awakening and anti-colonial mobilisation of the peasantry by the socialist and nationalist groups.

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