



Rural Sociology and the Epic Age

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The word sociology is derived from the latin word 'societus' meaning society and the greek word 'logos' meaning study or science. Therefore meaning of sociology is science of society. In other words sociology is the study of man's behaviour in group or of the interaction among human beings in social relationships and the processes by which human group activities take place. Rural sociology is the science of rural society. The laws of the structure and development of rural society in general can help us in discovering the special laws governing a particular society. When the economists study rural life, they focus on the activities related to production, distribution, exchange and consumption. Similarly, when a historian studies about the village life, they may focus on the conditions which have developed the village. Therefore, each disciplines deals with it's own perspective. When a sociologist studies rural life, he is concerned with the human relationships taking place amongst the village people. According to A.R. Desai, "Rural Sociology is the study of sociological" life in rural settings to discover their conditions and tendencies and to formulate principles of progress.

The Rural community is marked by many features like small size agricultural unit, low density of population, homogeneous group, joint family, strong kinship bond and simplicity etc. The inhabitants of rural area had very little to do with outside people. All their essential needs were satisfied in the village itself. India is a country of villages. The village, caste and joint family are three crucial institutions of India's social life. In rural society, the patriarchal type of family tends to persist. The status of the individual

is likely to be the status of his family. Property is considered to be family possession. Similarly, the marriage of an individual is itself a duty of the family. It is often decided by the family, as whom an individual should marry. Therefore, family holds a strong influence on individual.

The Rural economy is agrarian economy. The primitive society is characterized by hunting, domesticating animals and shifting cultivation. When these tribal communities settled, the village communities emerged. These villages are economically self sufficient. Apart from agricultural, people are engaged in cattle breeding, weaving, pottery making etc. Society was divided into four-castes (Varnas). All these castes had their fixed occupation. All the occupation castes served higher castes. Jajmani system was prevalent in the rural areas. It refers to a system of social, cultural and economic ties amongst different caste groups. Under this system, some castes are patrons and other are service caste. The service castes used to offer their services to land owning upper caste and in turn were paid both in cash and kind.

The feudal system was prevalent in the village. The land belonged to lords and Kings. It was tilled by tenants who were the vassals of their feudal lords. Their relation with the feudal lords was that of slave and master. The Britishers also created a new pattern of social differentiation by introducing Zamindari and Royatwari System of land tenure. Zamindars were generally upper caste men who were assigned the task of collecting revenue from village people on behalf of British government.



During Ancient times, the village headmen were appointed by the King. According to Kautilya's Arthashastra, the office of headmen was hereditary, subject to conformity of the King.

Rural people used to amuse themselves at fair where animal fights, acrobatic and magical feels etc. were held for entertainment.

During the epic age, the society was divided in to four caste groups-Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Brahmans were collectively considered the uppermost among all the castes. The works of all the four castes were fixed. But there were few exceptions like Dronacharya being Brahman had performed the duties of Kshatriya and Vishwamitra being Kshatriya performed the duties of Brahman. Therefore caste system was prevalent during this age as shudras were referred as "dasa" or slave. They were under the compulsion to serve the three castes.

The most of the people lived in villages around the fort and in times of emergency, they took refuge in these forts. Justice was dispensed by the King but in other matters, the villages were autonomous. The agriculture was main source of livelihood of people in epic age. As described in Mahabharata, the lands of Kosala, Valsa, Matsya etc. were very productive. The cattle breeding was also another source of livelihood and the cow, horses and elephants were most accepted animals at that time. Among the primary occupation, the pottery, chariot making, basket making, gold smiting, ploughing, bow and arrow manufacturing etc. were in demand.

The education was free during epic age as teachers did not receive customary salary but accepted gifts. Besides schools in village, there were parishads in remote forests, comprising three or four teachers who imparted education on religion and philosophy. Similarly, marriageable age was fixed which was usually 25 years. Among Royal families, 'Swyamvara' was prevalent. Polygamy and polyandry were common in

epic age. There are reference of eight kinds of marriage like Brahma, Daiva form of marriage, Arsha, Prajapati, Gandharva, Asura, Rakshasa and Paishacha form of marriage.

The Indian villages have undergone significant changes particularly since independence. Land reforms, Panchayati Raj, Sanskritisation and other structural and cultural changes have brought significant changes within its social structure. The changing political and economic conditions have put an end to the isolation and self sufficiency of the Indian villages. The rapid development of the means of transport and communication has broken the barriers between the village and city. The economic scene today is different in villages due to education, migration, change in cropping pattern, electrification, irrigation facility and contact with towns and cities. Due to land Reforms & Green Revolution, the economic dominance of intermediate caste and class has increased. They have also become politically stronger due to their larger number. A larger number of people from these groups have migrated to cities and town for better employment. On political, front caste panchayat have become almost ineffective in the day to day affair of members of a caste due to application of uniform laws. However, on certain occasion caste councils come up to decide controversial issues. The government and the welfare agencies are now focusing their attention on the development of rural society. India has been described as a country of villages. In India,

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