

Revisiting Social Stratification in Indian Society: A Review and Analysis with Focus on Kashmiri Society

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ABSTRACT : *This paper briefly reviews earlier as well as recent approaches of Indian Social Stratification System and their relevance in present era. Much of what is known about Social Stratification in India is based on studies conducted in early and middle part of the 20th century. There is a lot of literature available on the theme of social stratification in India. In fact, the most researched area in the Indian sociology deals, directly or indirectly with the social stratification or caste. In this regard, the Indian society has been studied both by the local sociologists as well as the alien sociologists. The focus of these studies has been on the origin, dynamics, implications and change in the Hindu caste system excluding Muslims from their studies. Hence there is a requirement of a study of Social Stratification among Muslims in India as well as in Kashmiri society.*

KEYWORDS: *Social Stratification, Caste, Class, Social Stratification among Muslims, Indian Society, Tribe, Kashmiri Society, Indian Sociologists.*

I. SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN INDIA

Enormous literature exists on caste and its various parameters. The origin and evolution of caste at international, national and regional levels have been studied in spatio-temporal perspectives. The ancient, medieval and modern literature on it, have been thoroughly received and analyzed. The caste system, its nature and structure, has also been elaborately studied by sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers. A great deal of survey on available literature has been done on the broader theme of caste in India, emphasizing on social stratification. In fact, social stratification is a topic dealt with both indigent and alien sociologists. This all has given rise to a harvest of literature on the issue of social stratification. The caste, class and power as major components of society, have also been studied by different scholars in a variety of ways at national, and regional levels (Beteille, 1974; Singh, 1974; Mencher 1978; Pandit 1979; Singh; 1982). The changing nature of caste and social system has also been studied in-depth by Srinivas (1966) and Singh (1968).

The early encounter of British/ western with varna-Jati system of India resulted in a study and research with two kinds of interests and research. A group of writers, made their research directly on sacred literature with an attempt to bring forth various elements of Varna-model of Hindu caste system in India. These scholars like Wilson, Monier Williams, Colebrook, Max Muller, and Zimmer constitute this group. Another group of scholars, mostly administrators with an academic bent of mind, have shown interest in the caste system with their focus on caste, emphasizing mainly distribution and the description of social and cultural features of the sub-castes.

This resulted in the abundant literature about various castes and tribes in India. A descriptive material on one or the other tribe was produced by every census- commissioner in his own way. An outcome of these writings was acceptance of generalizations on the matters as the origin and essences of the caste system, function of caste in the broader social system, relation between race and caste, difference between caste and tribe, the broader pattern of inter-caste relationship/ social precedence in different regions, patterns of social mobility, and trends of change in education and occupation and its impact on caste in different regions of India. These generalizations did not come up with a description about the functioning of caste in local communities.

It was district and village land revenue settlement report which contained detailed information on the relationship between local caste system and land tenure. The early reports were B.H. Badam powells. The land system of British India (1882), and Indian village community (1896), are worth mentioning in this regard. During the period of 1900-1930 along with census-type surveys and glossaries, a few ethnographic monographs published. Most of these were on various tribes, caste and sects. The prominent efforts in this regard are G.W. Briggs study about Chamars (1920) and N.A. Toth's study on vaishnavas of Gujarat (1935). Some academicians and social thinkers came-forth to understand caste system in their own ways when there was a development of systematic ideas among the census administrators going on. In this regard,

Karl Marx stands as a pioneer figure in the 19th and early 20th century. Karl Marx related the Asiatic mode of production to the stability of the caste system in India. H.J.S. Maine caste as an example of non-contractual status society. E- Senart caste as a system of stratification based on purity of descent and purity of occupation. Max Webber caste as a system of status stratification, Bogue, hereditary specialization Hierarchy and mutual repulsion as a basis of caste system, and A.M. Hocart caste as a system of social hierarchy developed their own ideas and these thinkers set their minds on understanding the caste system, based on the right that each caste has to perform certain rituals and services to the feudal lords. This development gave birth to a group of Indian scholars who followed British model in preparing general ethnography and regional glossaries of castes in India. In this regard, J.N. Batacharyas Hindu castes and sects (1896), L.A.K. Iyers the Cochin tribes and castes (1909-12), G.H. Desai, A glossary of castes, tribes, and races in the Baroda. State (1912) and G.S. Ghurys caste and race in India in 1932 etc stood as the pioneering work in this field. These works discussed the origin, and development of the caste system in India. Prof. M.N. Srinivas, an Indian sociologist, study on religion and society among the coorgs of south India was a pioneer work which attempted to study caste organization as a functioning system. According to him, caste system is based on the philosophy of Karma and Dharma which strengthens the idea of hierarchy which is inherent in the Hindu society. He further gives the concept of purity and pollution which governs relation between different castes. He further says, the caste status is mutable and upward mobility in the system is accompanied by sanskritisation of rituals. The first manifestation is found in the process of sanskritisation whereby the lower castes seeks to emulate the cultural styles, beliefs, rituals and give up some of their own older modes of living and cultural practices supposedly polluting to claim a higher status in the caste hierarchy. Following Srinivas, many sociologists in India carried out studies related to various aspects of the caste. Some of these studies were on the topics such as, village studies, caste and politics, caste and economic development, caste and land tenure, caste, class and social in equality, caste mobility, and caste in the urban setting.

Between 1951 and 1954, some British and American scholars found the Economic weekly as one of the important platforms for getting across their perceptions and observations on the Indian villages and its social structure. They studied the changing realities of village India. M.N. Srinivas, M. Marriot, S.C. Dube, and others were prominent among these scholars; there emphasis was on the integration of a number of castes which form a functioning local community, rather than on the ethnography of a single caste. Furthermore, they focused their attention on topics such as, inter-caste hierarchy, factionalism, Jajmani relationship, relationship between caste and class relationship between village and the large societies and trends of social change. Among the important sociologists and other social scientists who carried studies in caste and caste related areas at that time are; F.G. Bailey (1957, 1960), G.D. Berreman (1960), A. Beteille- (1965), B.R. Chauhan (1967), S.C Dube (1958), D.N. Majumdar (1958), T.N Madan (1965), K.S. Mathur (1165), R.K. Mukherjee (1957), and H. Orenstein (1965).

The role of caste in politics and the vice-versa was the second important theme discussed by the social scientists, and sociologists. It is believed that between the year 1954-57, Maureen Patterson 1954, S. Harrison (1954) and M.N. Srinivas (1959), discussed, in a series of Articles, how caste consciousness was being strengthened at the state level in the context of parliamentary politics based on adult franchise and constitutional safeguards to the backwards sections of the population N.K. Bose (1958), pointed out that differential rate of social change among the castes in a region is the main cause of strengthened of the caste as a mode of group identification. It may be due to a slow expansion of the structure of opportunity in an economy of scarcity. R.W. Retzlaffs village Government in India (1962) made a detailed analysis of the operation of caste based village politics under panchayati Raj in Rajasthan.

Towards the end of 1950s structuralism and Marxism made their entry, the former lead by Louis Dumont and D.F. Pocock and latter by A.R. Desai, Daniel Thorner and Charles Dettellheim. The decades of 1960s and 70s saw a few studies in which differentiation, evolution, and change in caste and class over a period of time have been focused. Besides, sociologists and social Anthropologists, Historians, and Economists have taken up studies from structural- historical perspective particularly of Agrarian and industrial stratification, prominent among these are / were – E.R. Leach (1960), B. Ansari (1960), Louis Dumont (1961), S.H. Risley (1961), S.C Dube (1961), Zarin Ahmad (1962), Victor D'Souza (1962), Andre Beteille 1962, I.G. Bailey (1965), and Makin Marriott, (1968). The contribution of Louis Dumont (1961) is clearly seen in his assertion / theory of Homo-Hierarchies explain the whole structure of caste as arising from, certain ideological predilections, which are religious in nature. It is clearly seen in Dumont's assertion, that it is hierarchy which is pervasive principle of Hindu society and the caste system is only one expression of it. According to him, caste is based on the principle of opposition between the pure and impure is a single true principle signifying hierarchy in terms of the superiority and inferiority of the pure over impure, and it is this principle of pure and impure that determines hierarchy.

He contrasts the caste system as containing hierarchical view of man with the class system of the west. He analyzed caste system in terms of purity and pollution dichotomy and in terms of status and power dichotomy. In Hinduism, hierarchy is based upon ritual ideas of purity and pollution and this is quite different from the western with equality of opportunity. He further says that caste status is always determined by ritual ideas irrespective of power and wealth of the individual, e.g., in the traditional India society the priest (Brahmin), whose position is derived from hierarchy, had a higher status than the more powerful king (Kshatriya). He presumes that hierarchy and inequality are natural to man, and Indian consciously accepted the hierarchy based on status differences. In Hindu society, the primacy is given to the whole, and this whole is structured hierarchically.

The problem with Dumont's work is that it does not explain the change in caste status which has taken place owing to change in power of a group. Nor does it explain the disputes about ranking that are there in the caste system. The disagreement with Dumont understands of Indian society as being completely determined by ritual ideas of purity and pollution and he asserts that caste is merely a type of stratification different in degrees but not in kind from other types of stratification as class. Thus, Dumont did not comprehend the situation that exists today, in terms of resilience of the caste system. Victor D Souza's study (1967) of caste and class in Chandigarh highlights significance of the continuum of the rigidity- fluidity dimensions. He clearly demonstrates a dividing line between caste and class. He maintains that caste and class systems stand for different patterns of distribution of properties of individuals in hereditary groups. He asserts that caste is not an exclusively cultural system. He finds caste and class are different forms of stratification. He observes groups (jati's) are ranked in the caste system, whereas positions are ranked in social stratification (particularly with reference to class stratification). The ranking of endogamous groups and not the endogamy as the rule of marriage is the hallmark of caste system in Chandigarh. He further says that changes in the caste system have brought about changes in the properties of individual members. A hereditary group might continue in the caste system as a class. This explains similarity between caste and class. D'Souza decisively concludes that class is replacing caste, and the individual is replacing the group. D Souza's basic assumption of formulation is that, a certain place for the individual as a unit of social status and a certain level of social mobility are that level.

Another sociologist Andre Beteille (1969) has contributed immensely in this field. Andre Beteille's study of village Sripurum in Tamil Nadu is based on the assumption of a rational distinction between caste, class and power, changing relation of stratification in Tanjore District, brought to light the traditional caste structure as well as the forces of change that were making way into it. According to Beteille, Sripurum village is an agrarian village. The whole village is dominated by the king of the Brahmin to look after the temples and other building of the village. In Tanjore he finds caste system of the village to be more rigid and complex. The caste system, apart from determining the unequal ritual status of villagers, also dominates their political and economic life. The social life of the village has also structured on caste lines. The settlement pattern of the village has also evolved on caste lines. The people of sripurum divide the many castes of Hindu into three subdivisions- Brahmins, Non- Brahmins and the Adi-Dravidas are clearly segregated from one another in the village. The settlement pattern of the village continues to reflect the basic division of the traditional caste structure. The study finds that in Tanjore, the ownership of land is not only a source of wealth; it is also a source of prestige and power. The study also finds the class structure, which is largely vertical. The class system comprises of three economic units in the society, (1) Brahmins Landowner, (2) Non- Brahmins, (tenants of Brahmins) (3) and Adi-Dravidas, or original Dravidas (Sub-tenants or Agriculturalists or labour) and their mutual relations. In the social stratification system, Brahmins were at the top stratum of the society, Non-Brahmins were next to them, and Adi-dravidian was at the bottom of the social stratification. They were treated as untouchables. Caste, class and power, relate in different ways to the broader phenomenon of social stratification.

In the political sphere, or say in the village panchayat's, Brahmins were occupying the power. They decided the dispute within the village. Before 1920, the Brahmin group was enjoying the political power. Non-Brahmins and Adi-Dravidians were having no say in the village panchayat. Andre Beteille calls it cumulative inequality. The study finds that in comparison to the rigidity of the institution of caste as well as stability of the traditional economic structure of the village, the distribution of political power has witnessed a radical change. The study found that caste, class and power were closely interwoven in the village. They could be treated separately only by a process of abstraction, caste and power in sripurum village referred in different ways to the same phenomenon of social stratification. Yogendra Singh's name as well as his contribution stands at the top rung with regard to the study of social stratification in general and in India particular. Yogendra Singh argued that the theoretical position of caste constituted both a structural unit of social stratification as well as a system. Sociologists who looked across the cultural view of caste associated it with an autonomous principle of stratification,

which are, institutionalized inequality, social system of social mobility, an elementary level of division of labor legitimized on ritual bases of reciprocity, and emphasis on quality, (ritual purity or racial purity) rather than performance in other words, caste is associated with an autonomous form of cultural system or world view. In this regard, he quotes, A. Nesfield (1885), Max Webber (1952), A.L. Kroeber, (1930) and A Dubois, 1960 etc. Moreover, in the writings of Kingsley Davis, (1951) A.R. Desai, (1966) and N.K. Bose (1968) and others, caste was considered a structural reality which would disappear when the society in India reaches to a higher level. He made a distinction between sociologists who treat caste as a cultural phenomenon and those who define it as a structural phenomenon. So far as, the Indian system of social stratification was concerned, the structural particularistic treatment of caste stratification is considered the most dominant feature of stratification studies in India.

In this framework, caste is treated as an institutionalized system of interaction among hierarchically ranked hereditary groups for marriage, occupation, economic division of labour, enforcement of cultural norms and values by caste bodies and performance of rituals based on principles of purity and pollution. The major cultural norm of caste is described as that of mutual repulsion by Bougle. These attributes assume relevance as their operation sets a limit to the forms of allocation and evaluation of roles and status attributes of caste and perpetuate an institutionalized form of social inequality. Structurally, the relevant issues that have been raised in caste stratification relate firstly to the unit components in caste ranking such as Varna's, caste and sub-castes. Secondly, formation of new- castes by caste-dominance, and finally, to the extent of social mobility in the caste system. Structural properties of caste in the process of social stratification in India lies at two levels; firstly, the extent to which new forces such as democratization, industrialization, land reforms, other social legislations etc affect the traditional structure of caste stratification and create cleavages in the summation of social statuses based on ritual prestige, economic rank and political power; and secondly the degree to which castes that undergo the process of new structural differentiation, and creates condition for the processes of social mobility and change in this system. The notions of social mobility advanced by M.N. Srinivas, which was explained in the concept of downward mobility, proletarianization and bourgeoisification as a process of structural change.

Another approach to the study of caste stratification in India was suggested by Makim Marriot. He argues that in order to gain fuller understanding of the stratification in India at various levels, the rural stratification must be seen as different from metropolitan system of ranking. According to him, the rural stratification is closed and urban stratification relatively open. However, he opined that if the industrialization process proceeded rapidly, the caste system will have essentially disorganization effect by the end of century. On the same lines, Kingsley Davis- (1951), A.R. Desai- 1969 M.N. Srinivas (1962) and Andre Beteille (1969) foresaw the possibility of transformation of caste into class through adaptive changes under the impact of industrialization.

The decade 1970-1980 has contributed richly to emergence of few substantive and theoretical concerns in the study of social stratification. During this period many sociologists have contributed for the further understanding of social stratification in India. These were; R.K. Mukherjee (1970), A. Jha (1970), T.N. Madan (1971) Reddy (1973), Yogendra Singh (1978), Zarina Bhatta (1978), Dhanagare (1979), Kathleen Gough (1979), Nirmal Singh (1979) etc. India was a static society where not change but continuity of a primitive variety was the dominant feature. This view was also supported by the early writings of Karl Marx. So in analyzing India class stratification, it was not considered worthwhile to take into account the present day processes among the various social strata. Studies on the traditional Indian society revealed that the class structure was related to the mode of production, and ownership of property, growth of cities, markets and Banking institutions, and the institutions of power. This led to the emergence of various class categories. It was also analyzed how the forms/ structures of class changed in various historical stages of development. There are also a few studies in which differentiation, evolution and change in caste and class over a period of time have been focused. The emphasis in these studies could be seen in caste, caste and class, class alone, again caste and now caste and class, as parts of social formation. Another area of significant research, besides sociologists and social anthropologists, in which historians and economists have taken up studies from structural- historical stratification particularly of the industrial and agrarian stratification and modes of production in agriculture vis-à-vis rural class structure, and its changing patterns due to various aspects of change.

The agrarian system as it evolved during the British regime in India was based either on the Zamindari or the Ryotwari or mode of revenue assessment type of land settlement. All the three systems generated more or less a similar agrarian class structure in the villages. The Zamindari system had the Zamindar's, tenants, and agricultural laborers as the main agrarian classes. The Ryotwari system consisted of two types of peasants; the Ryot-landlords and the Ryot-peasants. The agrarian class structure everywhere in India had a feudal character.

The Zamindar's were tax gatherers and non-cultivating owners of land, the tenants were the real cultivators, often without security, of land tenure, and the agriculture laborers had the status of bonded- men and attached- laborers. In this regard, Kathleen Gough (1979) using the same approach to the study of Rural social stratification in the Tanjavur village. The colonial economics of this region, its kinship structure, and peasant movements. In a comparative study of kinship and modes of production on Tanjavur and Kerala, she referred with the Marxists model of the Asiatic, feudal and capitalist's mode of production in India within the overarching system of colonialism. She maintains that the Asiatic mode was formerly dominant in Tanjavur village and Kerala state was formerly dominant by feudal system because land was owned privately by gentry, noble, royal, and priestly households. She argued that both regions have become predominantly capitalist in their mode of production in the modern period because of their absorption into a world market. In her studies, the mode of production debate, she highlights the issues related to the nature of agrarian class structure, and differentiation of peasantry. These studies refer to the forces and factors of class polarization, exploitation, bourgeoisification of the peasantry and pauperization of the rural working class. Thus, the basic concern is the study of origin, structure and change in caste and class in India, caste and kinship are analyzed from a class point of view caste is not treated as culture- specific system, but a reflection of class relationships.

Another noteworthy trend from the 1970s onwards is revival of the themes of origin or evolution of the institutions of caste, occupational groups and classes. An associated new phenomenon is the increasing use of history and historiography in the analysis of social institutions. All these things have largely converged in India the realm of social science in general and sociology in particular during the 1970s-1980s. An important development in 1980s to 1990s have been the rich input into the study of stratification, both into its conceptual and methodological studies by many sociologists, these are Dipankar Gupta (1980) – Duncan B. Forester (1980)- K.L. Morton 1980, Pradeep Kumar Bose (1981), H.A. Iye (1985)- M. Husain (1985)- Nandu Ram (1986)- K.L. Sharma (1986) – A.F. I. Ali (1987) D.N. Dhanagar (1987) – A.M. Shah (1988) – Ehsanul Haq (1989). Caste is found as a persisting social reality by Dipankar Gupta (1980). He relates the Varna to Jati System of stratification of the India caste system, from the Asiatic to the feudal mode of production respectively. The four fold division of society into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishnu, and Shudra is a view from top of the hierarchy, but the view from the bottom is more varied and it may, in fact, appear less differentiated, because economic obligations were only directed vertically. Dipankar Gupta explains painstakingly, that Varna and jati are reflective of specific socio-economic formations and that the origins of the caste system should be sought in the material history of India and not in the empyrean recess of the Hindu mind. The caste system development in the feudal epoch and was characterized by localized exploitation, whereas the Varna is a system in the epoch of Asiatic mode of production.

A.M. Shah (1988) in his study on the Vanais and Rajputs of Gujarat has treated each caste as a separate entity without making any statement on the nature of hierarchy that might pertain between them. D.N. Dhanagare (1987) in his study of Green Revolution and social inequalities in rural India poses the question? Has the Green revolution succeeded in reducing socio – economic inequalities in rural India? He concluded that in general the findings of different studies show that the green revolution has had a contradictory impact on the rural development and agricultural wages. Green revolution technology has not proved to be a measure of poverty alleviation. On the contrary, there is evidence to show that greater and greater immiseration and pauperization has surfaced with a steady growth of socio-economic inequalities in rural India due to green revolution. In the last decade of the 20th century we see sociologists talking about changes in class structure in the contemporary Indian society. prominent among them are Pradeep Kumar Bose (1990), Andre Beteille (1991), R.K. Shudra (1991), Vijay Kumar Vashista (1992), Suvira Jaiswal (1993), K.L. Sharma (2001) Andre Beteille (2002) etc probably these were the sociologists who has pointed towards changes taking place in social stratification in India society.

Pradeep Kumar Bose (1990) talks about the information of class structure in contemporary India. The main theme in his article is the capital- labour relation and conceptualizations of classes are basic problem in the understanding of the transformation of class structure. Any change in class structure involves class decomposition, class transformation, and class formation. He further says that there is a continuous dialectic between capitalism and the pre-existing social formation, class formation, class disintegration, and class conflict hence become important in the process of change in class structure. Bose identifies three approaches to the definition of agrarian classes (1) the indigenous (2) the distributional, and (3) The structural. On the basis of these approaches Bose identified, five classes, comprising of landlords, rich peasant, middle peasant, and agricultural laborers. A relationship between them is also made in terms of social status and mobility. Another sociologist, Vijay Kumar Vashistha (1992) in his article analyzes struggle of the chammar peasants in a jagir in the princely state of Jaipur.

He finds that all India state people Bairwa Mahasabha played an effective role in ameliorating the social conditions of the chammars of the area. He quoted that occupational and social mobility could be seen in discarding the unclean traditional callings and adoption of agriculture and animal husbandry. They have stopped rendering beggar, imitation of Brahminial style of life and dress pattern were some of the visible consequences of social and occupational mobility among the chammars of a feudal state. He reports several cases of protests against atrocities by the chammars and its impact on the people in the region. The distinction between two forms of inequality called Hierarchical and competitive inequality was introduced by Andre Beteille in this article Hierarchical and competitive inequality. This distinction according to him is conceptual and analytical rather than empirical. He argued that both kinds of inequalities are inseparable in a particular society. Moreover, this distinction is of great importance historically and comparatively because on the one hand, they are in separable in most societies and on the other, they are intermingling differently in different societies.

According to him, hierarchical inequalities are characteristic of a certain kind of society, based on castes or estates. Such a society has not only a distinctive morphology that is, but also distinctive laws, customs and practices. He further says, that persons belonging to different castes and different communities are assigning different and unequal positions in society persons at different ends of the social stratum are not expected to compete with each other, for social recognition and rewards. According to him, changes have taken place continuously in legal, political and economic institutions, and these have slowly eaten into the hierarchical conception of the word. Relation between man and women, between the high and the low-born, and even between the rich and the poor have altered. Finally, he says that although all modern societies are stratified, they are not all stratified in the same way or to the same extent. Firstly, societies differ in the distance between the top and the bottom ranks, and in the number of ranks in between. This is true not only of society as a whole but also its major associations, situations and organization. Secondly, societies differ to the extent in which individuals are able to move between inferior and superior positions, across generation and within the same generation. Although social mobility presupposes social stratification there is no simple one – to-one relationship between the two societies, or social situations that have many and widely separated ranks may also have high rates of individual mobility.

In the recent time some attention is being paid to the study of social stratification and modes of social life prevailing among Muslims in India. But a comprehensive study of a Muslim community in India is still awaited. In this way the sociological study of Muslim has also come to the forefront in the development of sociological literature in India today. The important studies in this regard are those by- Ghaus Ansari (1960), S.C. Misra (1963), :M.K. Siddiqui (1976), Zeyauddin Ahmad Ali Ashraf (1959), S.M. Raza, Zairna Bhatti (1962), Hamza Alvi etc are worth mentioning. Most important is the collection of various papers, based on studies of social stratification among Muslims living in various parts/ regions of India, by Imtiyaz Ahmad in early 1970. It must be noted here that unlike Hinduism, Islam put forward an egalitarian ideology- equality of all men. It declares, there is no deity but God. This faith in oneness of God is meaningless without the belief in oneness of man (cited in Hashim – 1970-83) is the message of Quran. This statement of Quran indicates that God created all men. No doubt, theoretically, Islam preaches equality but in practice, the equalitarian doctrines of Islam have been neglected by its followers. The Muslims are classified in hierarchical orders, not only in Arabian society but in other countries also. They are divided into various ranks according to the nature of the adjustments which Islam made on coming into contact with regional traditions and other civilizations. It is generally believed that Islam emphasizes on egalitarian system. The holy Quran says. O mankind I we (God) created you from a single pair of male and female; and made you into peoples and tribes, that ye may know each other (not despise each other). Verily, the most honored in the sight of God is (he who is) the righteous among you.....

(The holy Quran, Surah al-hujuraat verse-13)

This verse makes it quite clear that though Islam accepts differentiation based on gender and tribe. It does not recognize social stratification. But in reality, the Muslim community remains diversified, fragmented and as caste ridden as any other community of India (Alam-2003). In fact, the levels of stratification witnessed within the Muslim community of India totally negate this Quranic edict. Imtiyaz Ahmads seminal work, caste and social stratification among Muslims in India (1978) and more recently Ali Anwar, Masawat Ki Jung, Pasmanzari Bihar Ka Pasmanda Musalman (2001) in Hindi have convincingly demonstrated the reality of caste among the Indian Muslims. Through P.C. Aggarwal cites that Islam explicitly rejects gradation of groups and individuals in terms of Birth and the ideology of pure and impure. It suggests that the only criterion of social evaluation recognized in Islam is religious piety. M.K.A. Siddiqui also notes that the existence of hierarchical order generally receives overt denial from the great traditional values of the Muslims. However, there are varying views about the caste system and social stratification among Muslim in India.

In the dynamics of rural society, R.K. Mukherjee (1957), obtained first hand information to provide a picture of both the Muslim and the Hindu societies of Bengal. He says caste system is the basic pattern of both the communities. In his attempt to give a picture of Muslim society he points out that although Islam strictly prohibits any distinction between its believers but in India ultimately caste differentiation began to take place in these communities. As a result, like the Hindus, the Muslims began to prohibit inter-marriage and in some places also inter-dining between the different categories. In south India D'Souza (1978) has shown caste like ranking among the Moplahs of Kerala. To him the Moplahs are divided into five ranked castes. The Malbaris, the thangals, the Arabis, the pursalas, and the ossana. These form a social hierarchy in which the thangals are the highest and the ossans are the lowest. He also quoted, that social distance among these castes is very great. They practise endogamy. In interaction the higher castes are given special treatment. The sections eat separately, have separate mosques separate religious organization, and separate burial grounds.

The first empirical and pioneering work on the Muslim community in India was conducted by Ghaus Ansari (1959). His study was aimed at analyzing Muslim castes in Uttar Pradesh. In his opinion, the concept of equality was a mere imagination or ideology, but in practice inequality in Uttar Pradesh was quite obvious in that society, on the basis of birth, heritage etc. In brief, Ghaus Ansari discovers the elements of caste among Muslims. The caste based society developed in Muslim society under the influence of Hindu culture. He concluded that the Muslim caste system is a result of Hindu influence. They acquired it from the Hindus through constant and continuous cultural contact.

Another important contribution of caste stratification among Muslims in India is by P.C. Aggarwal's study on Meos of Rajasthan and Haryana. In his study Aggarwal, analyzes the hierarchical arrangement and social stratification among the Muslims of Rajasthan. He finds that the entire village is divided into two broader categories of Unchi caste (high caste) and the Kamin (service caste). The third broader category is of Harijans (untouchables). Moreover, in each of these three different castes, they do not occupy the same status. Another significant study of a predominantly Muslim village in eastern Uttar Pradesh was conducted by Imtiaz Ahmad. Ahmad found evidences reflecting a trend of change in the traditional hierarchy and the conventional concepts of superiority and inferiority among Zats and Biradari. He also finds out that, in the village there were two categories of caste, Khanzadas and Julahas. In the past, as per Ahmad, Khanzadas were dominant over the Julahas. But when the Julahas improved their economic condition and performed Haj Pilgrimage they reacted against this traditional practice. But the Khanzadas stressed on discrimination. But gradually this gulf narrowed by Julahas, which shows a changing trend in the inter-caste relations.

Various sociologists view caste as a form of social stratification among Muslims. Hasan Ali study elements of caste among the Muslims on a district in southern Bihar saw endogamy as one of the major attributes of the caste system. He further mentions that though endogamy is contrary to spirit of Islam, it is strictly followed among the local Muslim ethnic groups both in rural and urban settings and tends to approximate to the norms of caste endogamy. This is most important factor upholding Beridari consciousness and maintaining the distinctiveness of groups among the various Muslim ethnic groups.

A.R. Momin (1978), talks of Ashrafization in which he tries to explain how the lower caste Muslim, whose status is low in the hierarchy, try to imitate the higher groups in their style of living, customs, manners and the like, so that they may be ranked with the top. According to A.R. Momin, the process of Ashrafization is clearly seen in the behavior of the Wazahs of Biwindi who imitated the higher groups in matters of their way of life. Women folk of these lower castes took to Purdah and some of them accumulated wealth and thereby succeeded in entering into marital alliances with the Kokni Muslim. It appears from the above mentioned facts that the life of the Muslim community is to be regulated on the basis of the principles of Sharia. But the time Muslims came to India the religious bonds had become more principle-oriented and less practice-oriented. After coming into contact with the Indian society and culture, a fresh wave of change started, mainly because of tolerance for other cultures.

Social Stratification in Kashmir

Kashmir was peopled wholly by the Hindus till the beginning of the 14th century. Majority of them were converted from Hinduism to Islam after fourteenth century. As a result, all the race and caste distinctions of the past were obliterated. Foreigners also ruled over Kashmir for some time. Consequently, the local population came to have a small sprinkling of the Tatar, the Tibetan, the Mughals, and the Afghan families. By the passage of time, however, promiscuous intermingling of these and other foreign elements in the population took place with the result that the people of Kashmir came to be spoken of either Kashmiri Muslims or the Kashmiri Brahmins, commonly known as Pandits.

The sub-divisions under both the Muslims and the Brahmans were however, numerous but most of these divisions were nothing more than family titles or personal epithets, lacking in the essential characteristics of a caste. Caste exists with religious sanction only among the Hindus and Sikhs, Buddhists (from Ladakh, to Japan and Korea) and Zoroastrians. Islam (like pristine Sikhism and Buddhism) is egalitarian. And yet, as Imtiyaz Ahmad and his team demonstrated, some social stratification and caste like features exist even in Muslim societies, not just in the Indian sub-continent but also outside it. Thus, the Kashmiri society can also be studied on the basis of two variables, i.e., caste and class. It is because of the structural similarities between these two units, i.e., India and Kashmir. Caste is prevalent in the Kashmiri society, as is prevalent in the rest of the Indian sub-continent. But, it has never taken so rigid and complex shape as it did in rest of the country. The Kashmiri society is the Muslim dominated society and the religion, which the vast majority follows, is Islam. Islam has no place for caste distinctions, but the Muslim population has remained divided into caste and Sub-caste from ancient times. It is mainly because the Kashmiri Muslims have retained some Pre-Islamic socio-cultural features despite the conversion. So, we presume that some features of Hindi caste are prevalent in the Kashmiri society. According to Majid Hussain, A Geographer, the villages of Kashmir in particular and the Kashmiri society in general can be divided in the following caste categories.

(1) Higher Castes (2) Medium Castes (3) Lower Castes.

The higher castes of Kashmir are Syeds who sat at the very top, followed by the Ulmas, Mughals and the Pathans (the correct word is Pushtuns) in that order. They usually justify their positions or they are exalted because they are the descendants of prophet Muhammad (PBUH), that they are the people who have brought Islam in the valley, and that they are the only people who were having good religious knowledge. The second higher caste namely the Sheikhs are mostly the descendants of the four Righteous caliphs (Siddiques, Faruquis, Usmanis, and Umavis and Alvis), and are also of Arab origin. The sheikhs comprised of Pirzadas, Babazadas, and Wani's among the respectable. And there are the two great Arab clans closest to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); the Ansaris, and the Qureshis. So, the masses in general and illiterate in particular giving good respect and treat them as superior human beings. This particular class of people made the religious monopoly as a tool for discrimination against others. The rest of the castes were dominated by these castes and have given them equal chance neither in education nor in administration. However, with the spread of education among masses, this superiority started to decline. But the restrictions on marriage were there from ancient times and are very much practising in the present day life. In Kashmir these upper castes are still endogamous and do not prefer to marry outside.

So, far as, the middle castes are concerned they are all exogamous and have no concept of purity and pollution. In rural set-up these castes were engaged in agricultural activities with most of people having land of their own and in urban setting they were the people who were engaged in handicraft, embroidery, tourism, and people working in government offices. Besides, the upper, and medium castes, there are, Doms, galawans, chaupans, Bhands, and Watils, treated as the inferior castes. So, there is a tacit division. On the one hand are the Syeds, the Afghans, the Mughals, and converts from the Hindu upper castes (Muslim Rajputs and the Sheikhs); on the other hand are converts from the former Hindu under class. Fauq called them the Adna-Aqwam (lower castes). Perhaps we can call them the underprivileged sections of society. The more cumbersome but also more politically correct expression castes associated with culture and specialized professions. II. Usually, there is some demarcation line between the haves and the have-nots. Broadly speaking, the Kashmiri society must be treated as the class- based society.

It goes back to the Mughals period in which large chunks of land were granted a jagirs with property rights to those who carried favours with the kings. Broadly, speaking before 1947 the Kashmiri society was divided into four classes. First, the Jagirdars, who were either from the royal class or close to royalty. This class comprised mainly of Pandits of Kashmiri origin or Dogras of Jammu. They were lords of large quantity of land, which consisted of even many villages. These jagirs were bestowed upon them by the kings for some deed of theirs in times of war or peace. Second, the government servants who were the real manipulators in political and social affairs. This class was also composed of Pandits and Dogras who were mostly educated. The members of this class were higher ranking officials very close to the kind as well as lower grade government employees. There was a small number of Muslims in government services, mostly holding lower ranks. This class also composed of Governmental functionaries, like Patwaris and non-governmental functionaries like Mugdams who were the rapport agents between the masses and the government. Third class was dominantly Muslim in composition like Kashkars (Agriculturists), or peasants. The land held by jajirdars was allotted in name to these peasants who were asked to cultivate it for the jajirdars. After a hard toil, they used to get a meager portion of the crop, with which they could not even make both ends meet. This class was altogether poor and their life conditions were miserable.

This category of people was also used to beggar to carry on foot the garrison to the far flung areas of: Tibet and Gilgat and not paid even a single penny. Fourth, petty artisans indulgent in Shawl making, gubba making and carpet making and number of them were carpenters, blacksmiths, tailors, and other craftsmen. This class was relatively better placed economically. After 1947, this scenario, changed altogether, the Jagirdari system was abolished, and the land reforms act was passed in 1948 and implemented in 1952. The land was provided to peasants consequently, the monopoly of Jagirdars diminished. It was partly also because the Muslim youth in Kashmir were getting higher education outside Kashmir and emerging as a socio-political force inside Kashmir. In the post – 1947 decades business flourished and attained new heights. As a result the artisans and business class conditions improved and latter on became prosperous. This trend continues till date.

II. CRITICISM:

The revelation is made by many studies on various trends and patterns of social stratification, that these studies were caste- oriented, and caste based. Caste being the sole basis of social stratification, but not the only dominating factor, as for classes like political elites, new capitalists, bureaucrats, technocrats and others were emerging as factors for social inequality in post 1947 scenario. It is very clear that the sociologists failed to address these factors and also the cause of their emergence. The result of it was that sociologists studied caste stratification devoid of above mentioned factors has distorted the reality and the actuality of the situation did not come into light. The sociologists thus, were not able to analyses the role of these factors. Sociologists did not attribute to highlight the nature of social stratification in urban areas. The study on social stratification in urban areas was not on large scale. With the result, the phenomenon of social stratification in urban areas remained far from total revelation. It is also worth mentioning that urban context does not allow caste- factor to dominate comparatively. So, the need was to look forward with existential realities related to caste in urban areas. The general framework for studies about caste was ideal typical. The realistic picture was not provided by these studies as the analyzation of caste in the industrializing, urbanizing and modernizing context of India.

From the above review of literature, it is clear that there is a harvest of sociological literature on caste stratification in India. But the great bulk of this literature is confined to the study and analysis of traditional caste, as it functions among the Hindus. A large number of Indian as well as western sociologists and social Anthropologists interested in understanding Indian society have paid specific attention to the analysis of traditional caste system and the changes taking place there in. But such studies are confined on Hindu society and culture, and throw insufficient light on different aspects of social life or particularly social stratification among Indian Muslims. The empirical realities demand that the caste stratification may also be studied among the non- Hindus in India. Though these studies are confined on Hindu communities in India, the Social Stratification among Kashmiri society has not been analysed so far. So the researcher hopes that the present study will fill the gap in the literature.

It has been already mentioned that there is a dearth of data/ material on social stratification among the Muslims in India as well as of sociologists and social anthropologists who have taken interest in their study. It is therefore, a matter of some satisfaction that the collection of some papers in a book by Imtiyaz Ahmad has succeeded in bringing together papers covering most of the areas significant Muslim concentration in India, excluding Kashmiri society from coverage in these papers because this field is completely unexplored so far. So, there is a need to study Social Stratification among Kashmiri Muslims to explore this cruel social reality. The main objective of this study is to contribute to the neglected field of Research on Kashmiri society. The review of literature shows that there is has not been any study relate to Kashmiri society. There is also a lack of Comparative, Comprehensive and inter-disciplinary study of Social Stratification in Kashmiri society. This problem has been kept in mind during the selection of this issue.

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