

An Anthropological Study of the Social Structure of Indian Villages

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Abstract: In the social sciences, 'Social structure' is the patterned social arrangements in society that are both emergent from and determinant of the actions of the individuals. On the macro scale, social structure is the system of socioeconomic stratification (e.g., the class structure), social institutions, or, other patterned relations between large social groups. On the meso scale, it is the structure of social network ties between individuals or organizations. On the micro scale, it can be the way norms shape the behavior of actors within the social system. This article highlights the social structure of Villages in India.

Keywords: Anthropology, Villages, Indian Villages, Social Structure.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the social sciences, 'Social structure' is the patterned social arrangements in society that are both emergent from and determinant of the actions of the individuals. On the macro scale, social structure is the system of socioeconomic stratification (e.g., the class structure), social institutions, or, other patterned relations between large social groups. On the meso scale, it is the structure of social network ties between individuals or organizations. On the micro scale, it can be the way norms shape the behavior of actors within the social system.

These scales are not always kept separate. For example, recent scholarship by John Levi Martin has theorized that certain macro-scale structures are the emergent properties of micro-scale cultural institutions (this meaning of "structure" resembles that used by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss). Marxist sociology also has a history of mixing different meanings of social structure, though it has done so by simply treating the cultural aspects of social structure as epiphenomena of its economic ones.

Since the 1920s, the term has been in general use in social science, especially as a variable whose sub-components needed to be distinguished in relationship to other sociological variables.

II. HISTORY

The early study of social structures has informed the study of institutions, culture and agency, social interaction, and history. Alexis de Tocqueville was apparently the first to use the term social structure; later, Karl Marx, Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Émile Durkheim all contributed to structural concepts in sociology. Weber investigated and analyzed the institutions of modern society: market, bureaucracy (private enterprise and public administration), and politics (e.g. democracy).

One of the earliest and most comprehensive accounts of social structure was provided by Karl Marx, who related political, cultural, and religious life to the mode of production (an underlying economic structure). Marx argued that the economic base substantially determined the cultural and political superstructure of a society. Subsequent Marxist accounts, such as that by Louis Althusser, proposed a more complex relationship that asserted the relative autonomy of cultural and political institutions, and a general determination by economic factors only "in the last instance".

In 1905, the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies first published his study *The Present Problems of Social Structure* in the U.S.A, arguing that only the constitution of a multitude into a unity creates a "social structure" (basing this approach on his concept of social will).

Émile Durkheim (drawing on the analogies between biological and social systems popularized by Herbert Spencer and others) introduced the idea that diverse social institutions and practices played a role in assuring the functional integration of society through assimilation of diverse parts into a unified and self-reproducing whole. In this context, Durkheim distinguished two forms of structural relationship: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. The former describes structures that unite similar parts through a shared culture; the latter describes differentiated parts united through social exchange and material interdependence.

As did Marx and Weber, more generally, Georg Simmel developed a wide-ranging approach that provided observations and insights into domination and subordination, competition, division of labor, formation of parties, representation, inner solidarity coupled with exclusiveness toward the outside, and many similar features in the state, in a religious community, in an economic association, in an art school, and in family and kinship networks (however diverse the interests that give rise to these associations, the forms in which interests are realized may yet be identical (Crothers, 1996)).

The notion of social structure was extensively developed in the 20th century, with key contributions from structuralist perspectives drawing on the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Feminist or Marxist perspectives, from functionalist perspectives such as those developed by Talcott Parsons and his followers, or from a variety of analytic perspectives (see Blau 1975, Lopez and Scott 2000). Some follow Marx in trying to identify the basic dimensions of society that explain the other dimensions, most emphasizing either economic production or political power. Others follow Lévi-Strauss in seeking logical order in cultural structures. Still others, notably Peter Blau, follow Simmel in attempting to base a formal theory of social structure on numerical patterns in relationships—analyzing, for example, the ways in which factors like group size shape intergroup relations.

The notion of social structure is intimately related to a variety of central topics in social science, including the relation of structure and agency. The most influential attempts to combine the concept of social structure with agency are Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration and Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory. Giddens emphasizes the duality of structure and agency, in the sense that structures and agency cannot be conceived apart from one another. This permits him to argue that structures are neither independent of actors nor determining of their behavior, but rather sets of rules and competencies on which actors draw, and which, in the aggregate, they reproduce. Giddens's analysis, in this respect, closely parallels Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the binaries that underlie classic sociological and anthropological reasoning (notably the universalizing tendencies of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism). Bourdieu's practice theory also seeks a more supple account of social structure as embedded in, rather than determinative of, individual behavior.

Other recent work by Margaret Archer (morphogenesis theory), Tom R. Burns and collaborators (actor-system dynamics theory and social rule system theory), and Immanuel Wallerstein (World Systems Theory) provided elaborations and applications of the sociological classics in structural sociology.

B. Definitions:

As noted above, social structure has been identified as the relationship of definite entities or groups to each other, enduring patterns of behaviour by participants in a social system in relation to each other, and institutionalized norms or cognitive frameworks that structure the actions of actors in the social system. Lopez and Scott (2000) distinguish between institutional structure and relational structure, where in the former:

“ ...social structure is seen as comprising those cultural or normative patterns that define the expectations of agents hold about each other's behaviour and that organize their enduring relations with each other. ”

Whereas in the latter:

“ ...social structure is seen as comprising the relationships themselves, understood as patterns of causal interconnection and interdependence among agents and their actions, as well as the positions that they occupy. ”

Social structure can also be divided into microstructure and macrostructure. Microstructure is the pattern of relations between most basic elements of social life, that cannot be further divided and have no social structure of their own (for example, pattern of relations between individuals in a group composed of individuals - where individuals have no social structure, or a structure of organizations as a pattern of relations between social positions or social roles, where those positions and roles have no structure by themselves). Macrostructure is thus a kind of 'second level' structure, a pattern of

relations between objects that have their own structure (for example, a political social structure between political parties, as political parties have their own social structure). Some types of social structures that modern sociologists differentiate are relation structures (in family or larger family-like clan structures), communication structures (how information is passed in organizations) and sociometric structures (structures of sympathy, antipathy and indifference in organisations - this was studied by Jacob L. Moreno).

Social rule system theory reduces the structures of (3) to particular rule system arrangements, that is, the types of basic structures of (1 and 2). It shares with role theory, organizational and institutional sociology, and network analysis the concern with structural properties and developments and at the same time provides detailed conceptual tools needed to generate interesting, fruitful propositions and models and analyses.

Sociologists also distinguish between:

- Normative structure — pattern of relations in given structure (organisation) between norms and modes of operations of people of varying social positions
- Ideal structure — pattern of relations between beliefs and views of people of varying social positions
- Interest structure — pattern of relations between goals and desires of people of varying social positions
- Interaction structure — forms of communications of people of

Origins and development:

Some believe that social structure is naturally developed. It may be caused by larger system needs, such as the need for labour, management, professional and military classes, or by conflicts between groups, such as competition among political parties or among elites and masses. Others believe that this structuring is not a result of natural processes, but is socially constructed. It may be created by the power of elites who seek to retain their power, or by economic systems that place emphasis upon competition or cooperation.

The most thorough account of the evolution of social structure is perhaps provided by structure and agency accounts that allow for a sophisticated analysis of the co-evolution of social structure and human agency, where socialised agents with a degree of autonomy take action in social systems where their action is on the one hand mediated by existing institutional structure and expectations but may, on the other hand, influence or transform that institutional structure.

Demographic profile of Social strata in Rural Indian Context:

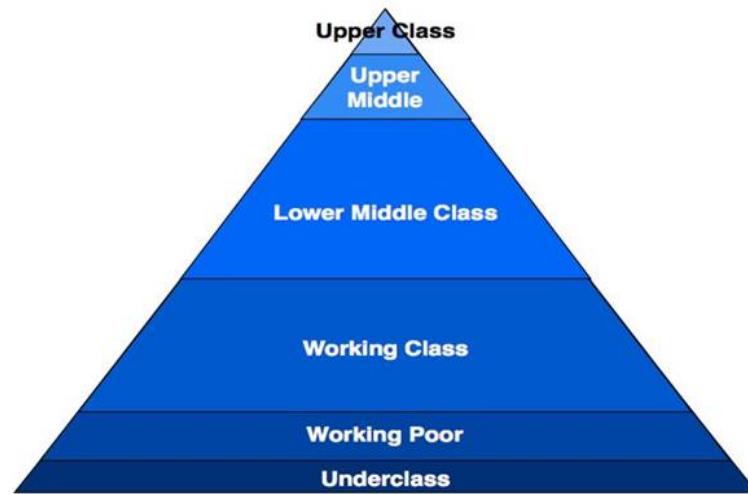
The social structure of a particular society can be represented based on different parameters. These parameters can be:

1. Caste and religious parameters
2. Economic parameters
3. Social status as a functional organization

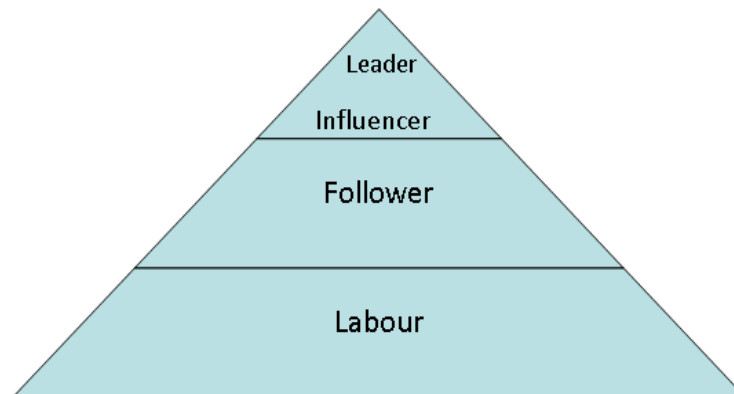
Caste and Religious Parameters:



Economic Parameters of explaining Social Structure:



Social status as a functional organization:



For the purpose of this study the researcher considered the Social Status as a functional organization approach as the objective of the study is to understand the rural society in context of economic and social activities as a cause-effect process.

Social Profile of the Leader/Influencer:

The position of a typical leader or the influencer is derived due to his social standing and due to particular traits they possess. Some of the main factors that determine the influencer status are:

- **Formal status of the leader/Influencer:** The Goudas or the rich segment of the village are normally looked up as leaders or influencers due to their social stature or the practice of looking up at them which has been practiced for generations. This form of leadership is normally attained by virtue of birth into a particular family or being elected or positioned for an office of authority (like Gram Panchayat etc..)
- **Previous achievements:** When a farmer is consistently able to achieve high yield or make right crop decisions (Like which crop to grow, when to hold, when to sell, what seeds/pesticides/fertilizers to use etc..), he automatically attains the leadership and influencer role.
- **Educational Qualifications:** Perhaps this is the least observed way of attaining the status of leader or influencer. A person can also attain this status if he has relevant and practical education using which he often arrives at right decision or guides people towards right decision.
- **Multi-Influencers:** A same society or a segment of society can have multiple influencers for certain decisions. For example there could be an elected village head who has good rapport with the all the members of the society while there could also be a person who, due to his historical achievements is also looked at for guidance and support.

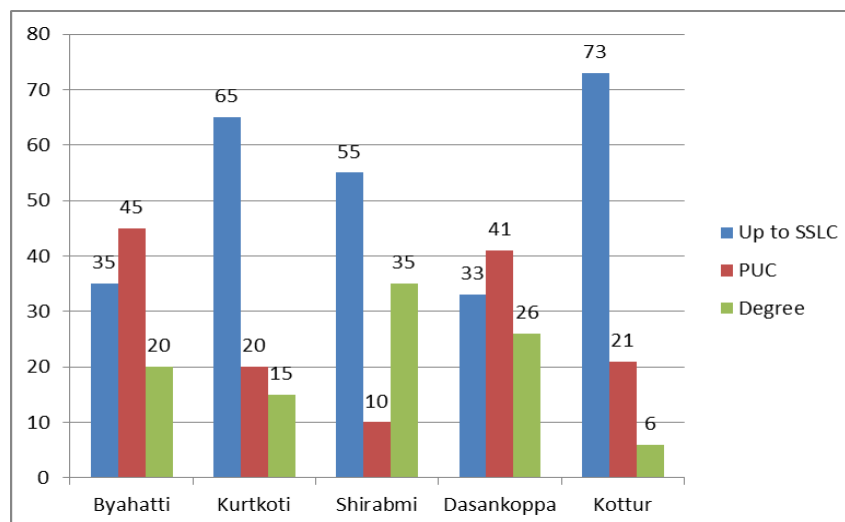
Profile of the Leaders/Influencers:

- They have significant part in the economic activities of the community.
- The leaders or influencers are relatively at a higher strata of that particular community due to better statuses in terms of
 - Economic status
 - Social status
 - Formal Status
 - Educational statuses.
- They also own significant farm land where the agricultural activities take place
- They also are the people who assume leadership role in social celebrations and functions within the community
- The suicidal tendency of this stratum is observed to be minimal due to their economic and social standings.

Social Profile of the Followers:

The followers are relatively smaller farmers/ people in other occupations who are influenced by leaders and their significant decisions are based on the guidance or the act of the leaders or influencers. The composition of the community is around 95% to 5% (95% followers and 5% leaders). The typical profile of the followers include:

- Their operations are marginal to mid-sized and they normally do not own significant part of the community's primary economic activities.
- The education level of this social strata greatly varies from one village/community to the other. Below is the comparative average educations qualification of 5 villages that were surveyed under this study:

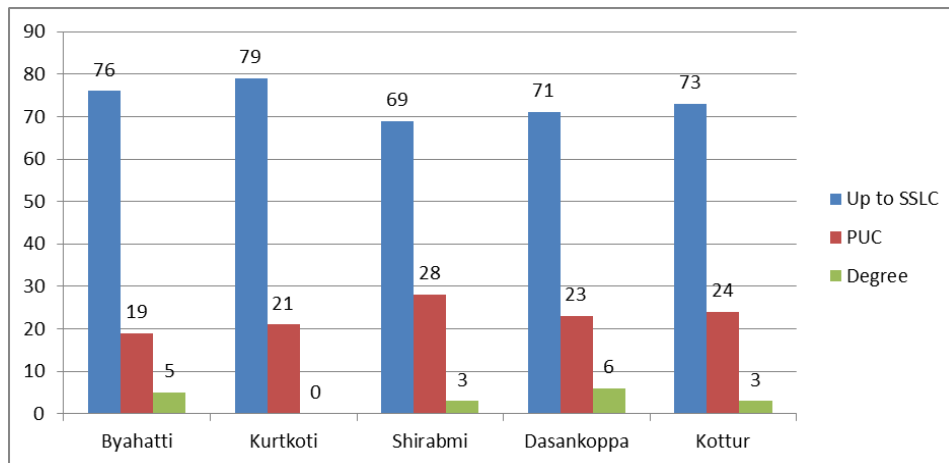


- This stratum is prone to highest suicidal tendency. They cannot absorb the loss due to price-fluctuations or crop losses very easily and due to the borrowings and pressure from the lenders and the suppliers of agricultural inputs (who normally give the inputs on credit till the crop is finally sold), they succumb to the pressure and often commit suicides.

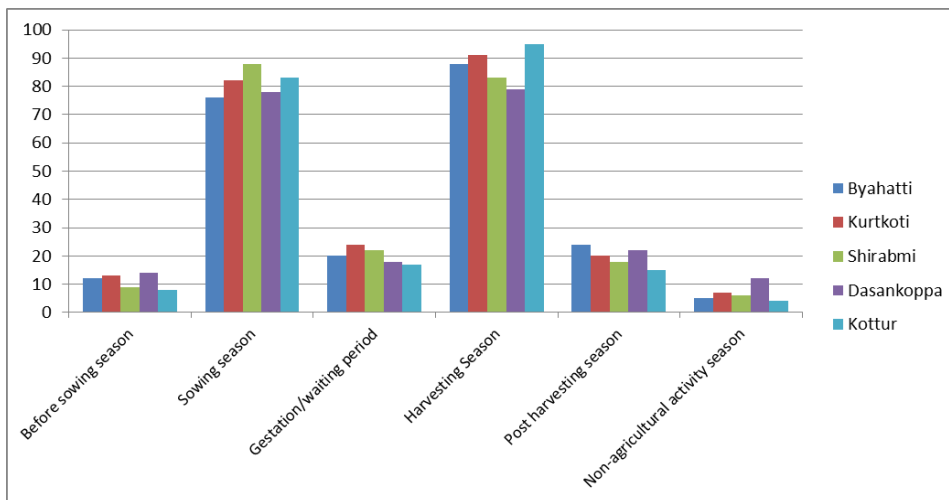
Social Profile of Labour:

The Labour strata of the communities are the strata with lowest education level. They normally work on the farm or household of the members of other social strata and most of the times their work is seasonal. Their economic condition is normally hostile and the social security is very less. Below are the key features of this stratum:

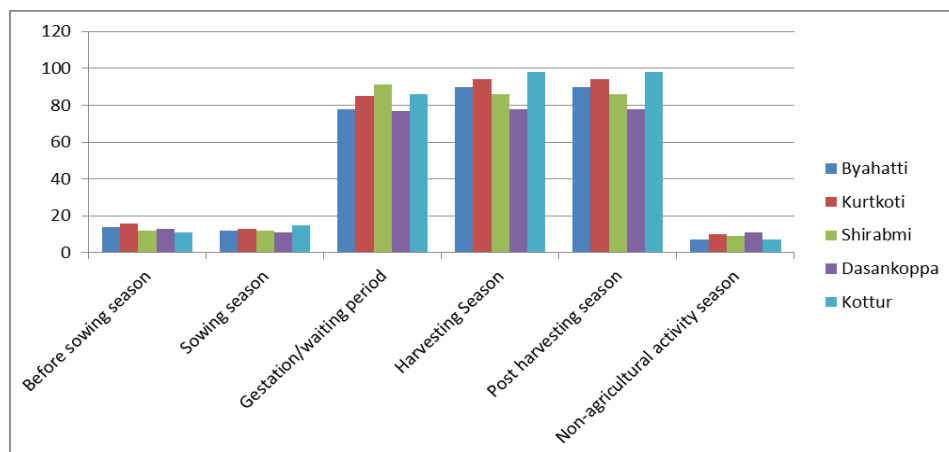
- The average education of this class is very low. Unlike the uneven pattern of the follower strata, the education level is consistently low across different communities. Below is the graphical representation of the same:



- Their wage earning activities is seasonal. They are in demand during Sowing and harvesting seasons while they are normally un or under employed for rest of the year. The below graph shows the employment percentage of the labour class during different seasons:



- This class of the community normally does not participate in the crop decisions however, they can indirectly influence the decisions by spreading information about the leader’s decision across the community including other leaders and followers.
- The economic behavior like buying capital assets (like TV, Fridge, jewelries) to organizing functions (like marriages, linga dharana, etc..) are directly dependent on the agricultural seasons as mentioned above. The tendency towards celebrations or buying during the different seasons can be shown via below graph:



III. CONCLUSION

This paper tries to explain the social structure in Southern part of India, especially in North Karnataka villages and how the social structure and the status of each of the social strata impact what to grow in their fields. This also highlights the revenue pattern and how the each class behaves during different phases of agricultural activities.

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