

CHAPTER-II

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AMONG THE TRIBALS OF INDIA

CHAPTER- II

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AMONG TRIBALS IN INDIA

There have been many misconceptions and misconstructions regarding the interpretation of tribal societies. Most of the classical theories or studies on tribal societies all over the world undertaken by various historians and scholars maintain that tribal societies are more or less egalitarian in nature, characterised by collective conscience and communal ownership of land and the questions of differentiation and inequality do not arise. S.L. Sharma argues that:

Several studies of social stratification, ranking systems and class formation among the tribes all over the world have reported absence of social differentiation in tribal societies. For centuries tribal people were seen as undifferentiated.”¹

Nevertheless, contemporary empirical studies conducted by some scholars such as K.L. Sharma², R.K. Prasad,³ Ghanshyam Shah,⁴ A.R. Desai,⁵ P.K. Bose,⁶ S.L. Doshi,⁷ S.D. Badgaiyan⁸ amongst others reveal that

¹ Sharma S.L., *Ethnicity And Stratification Among Tribals in Urban Setting*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1996,p.4.

² Sharma K.L., *The Changing Rural Stratification System*, New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd., 1974,p 15.

³ Prasad R.K., 'Some Aspects of Stratification and Interaction Among the Parahiya of Palamau,' *Journal of Social Science Research*, 1975,(18), pp. 59-65.

⁴ Shah, Ghanshyam, *Stratification among the Scheduled tribes in the Bharuch and Panchmahals Districts of Gujarat*, Surat: Centre of Regional Development Studies, 1976.

⁵ Desai A.R., *Tribes in Transition*, in Romesh Thapar (ed.) *Tribe, Caste and Religion in India*, The Macmillan Co. of India, 1977, p. 26.

⁶ Bose P.K., 'Stratification among Tribals in Gujarat', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.XVI, No. 6, February 7, 1981, pp. 191-6.

⁷ Doshi S.L., *Tribal Ethnicity, Class and Integration*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1990, pp. 130-145.

⁸ Badgaiyan S.D., *Class and Ethnicity: Chota Nagpur in the Nineteenth Century*, in K.L. Sharma (ed), *Social Stratification in India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1992 (reprint), pp. 30-7.

Indian tribes are not egalitarian and undifferentiated as claimed by the earlier writers. Some forms of differentiation and social ranking have always existed among the tribals even in the past. Ranked position or distinction on the basis of age, sex, family and kinship was very much present among the tribals. To quote K.L.Sharma "For a long time tribal people were seen as undifferentiated lot. However they have/had gradations based on age-sets, sex and kinship which did not form the basis of social stratification as found among the non-tribal like property, wealth, power and authority."⁹

Rao vehemently repudiates the postulation that tribal society is characterised by social equality. He argues that " Tribal society like any other society is not homogeneous. The view that tribals have been an egalitarian society is only a myth. This has perhaps been formed and propagated by the classical colonial anthropologists. They described our tribal groups as small, self-contained, self-sufficient communities practicing subsistence economy in which exploitation and social conflict did not have any place. Such a depiction of the tribal led our social anthropologists to say that there are no classes among the tribals."¹⁰ He maintains that rank differentiation or inequality has been a significant characteristic attribute of the tribal community in India,

Accordingly, the tribes are not homogeneous communities as it was conceptualised earlier. Social stratification on the basis of status and power is very much present in tribal societies just as it is in non-tribal societies. Nonetheless, social stratification among the tribes is distinct from the non-tribals.

⁹ Sharma K.L., *Social Stratification and Mobility*, New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 1997, p. 164.

¹⁰ Rao, Adityendra, *Tribal Social Stratification*, Udaipur: Himanshu Publications, 1988, p. 1.

As K.L. Sharma observes "Social stratification, as an existential phenomenon among the tribes, is, however, different from that of the advanced agricultural and industrial societies. It is not unique as it is generally considered. The principle of social stratification such as ethnicity, class and power are the same everywhere. The differences lies in the operationalization and actual functioning of these principles due to structural differences in various tribal societies in regard to their history, level of economic development, nature of colonial impact and exposure to modern forces of social transformation. Thus to the extent the tribal people are different in terms of these criteria social stratification and class formation are also different among them in comparison to non-tribal societies."¹¹

The patterns and forms of social stratification among the tribes are distinct from the caste form of stratification. In the caste stratification one considers and examines the position of the group (jati) and ranks it in relation to other groups in the caste system, but in tribal social stratification one considers the position of the clan, families and individuals and ranks them in relation to others in the same tribal group. Rao notes that "The specialty about caste stratification is that we look for hierarchy among hundreds of castes in terms of purity and pollution of occupations, dietary, dress, house, rituals and every other things of the members of the caste. The hierarchy in the caste system is sought for or identified not within the caste but among the castes. In fact, in the caste stratification we inquire about the rank of a caste in terms of the castes found in a region. Ranking is never made within a caste and among the members of the caste. There is nothing like tribal system as we say caste system. Each tribal group is endogamous. It is a whole society. Thus, a tribal group is not related to other tribal groups in a region in terms of a system. One would not find a tribal related to other tribal group organically. It is never a part of a system.

¹¹ Sharma K.L., *op. cit.*, p 164.

Thus, one very differentiating feature of a tribal group is that nowhere a tribal constitutes a system. For all empirical considerations, a tribe is an autonomous, endogamous whole society, not forming any system within the tribal groups found in a particular region or a caste in a state or at the plane of inter-state level. Tribal stratification assumes a set of perspectives, which are different from caste stratification. In the tribal stratification, ranks are not differentiated at the level of two or more tribal groups. Contrariwise in the caste system rank differentiation is observed not at the level of one caste but at the level of caste system."¹²

Therefore, it is apparent that social stratification among tribes acquires specific aspects which, can be differentiated from the context of caste stratification. Unlike caste, a tribe is a whole society. Varied and diverse groups of tribals who live in different provinces do not constitute a system on the basis of functional relationship or a set of social hierarchy based on a specific ideology. Being endogamous, each tribal group can be regarded as a separate entity. There is no social ranking across various autonomous tribal groups in different parts of a region. Consequently, in such conditions, investigations and analysis of social differentiation, inequality and stratification among various endogamous tribal groups should be observed with standard criteria derived from within the independent and self-determining tribal group itself.

In contrast to caste stratification in which ranked distinction is formulated on the basis of inter-caste correlation, in tribal social stratification ranks and positions are not distinguished on the line of inter-tribal group interactions. The fundamental and underlying distinction between caste and tribal stratification is that in the former one looks for the properties of the group (jati) and rank it in relations to the caste system, and in the latter case, one make a shift from the system and instead rank the individual standing positions in relations to others. Therefore, in caste stratification, a hierarchy of jati groups within the system of caste can be seen, while in tribal

¹² Rao, Adityendra, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-3.

stratification there is no such system at all, but simply a hierarchy of positions attained by individual members. D'Souza resiliently upheld this argument when he succinctly asserts that "Groups (caste groups or jatis) 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 endogamy as the rule of marriage, is the hallmark of the caste system."¹³ Thus to D'Souza's perceptions, in caste analysis we rank the jatis or caste groups as an integral part of the caste system itself. Ranking accordingly is invariably concerning the caste system.

We can thus infer that in the analysis of tribal stratification it is imperative to observe that endogamous and independent tribal community does not compose a separate distinct social system, in the sense that each tribal group can be regarded as a part of the whole. To be specific there is no exclusive and distinct tribal system as such where the component parts operates as an organic whole. Each tribal group devices its own system of functioning and hence is a self-contained and independent society in itself with its own specific cultural, political, social, economic, kinship and family systems. Correspondingly, respective tribal group may be distinguished in its own life-styles, nature, custom, conduct and practices. The Indian constitution compositely defined all the tribal groups in the country as scheduled tribes; however, their singleness remains in theory only. In existential level each tribal group (community) continues to be a distinct social entity. Because of this autonomous character of tribal societies, the empirical studies and analysis of the forms, types, systems and dimensions of social stratification among them are extremely complex and complicated. In order to study and interpret tribal stratification vividly one has to follow and maintain a set of perspectives and objectives that are distinct from those employed in the study of caste stratification.

¹³ D'Souza V.S., 'caste and Class: A Re-interpretation,' *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. II, No. 19, 1967.

Social Stratification among the tribals may function within the microcosm of a tribe or at the plane of two or more tribal groups. Tribal stratification is usually viewed in terms of internal distinction of the individual in accordance with their control over natural resources or the ranking of individuals based on their hereditary or material and divine capabilities. In India the questions and problems of inter-tribal groups did not occur. Perhaps, this may be because each tribal group settled in isolation from each other. However, empirical data show that contemporary system of tribal stratification has metamorphosed or transformed and comparatively different from those forms of stratification, which existed in earlier times. Recent investigations and literature on various tribes indicate and prove that the courses and patterns of tribal stratification have been transmuted over time. In the passage of time, several factors had appeared to perform in determining the paradigm of social stratification in their community.

Thus, the nature and pattern of tribal social stratification is rather intricate as each tribal group has its own distinct socio-economic, political and cultural systems, which are different from other tribal groups. Owing to this, the paradigm and dimensions of tribal stratification cannot be the same over the country. But it should be recognised that the tribal societies whether large or small have their own internal differentiation. K.L. Sharma observes "There is more or less unanimity among the students of tribal social life in India regarding the presence of social stratification... Tribes are highly differentiated lot ethnically and culturally. Some adhere to 'tribalism', others have converted to Christianity by rejecting tribal pantheon, and some have taken up Hinduism by adopting vegetarianism, teetotalism and other Brahminic ideals and practices. Tribes are also differentiated based on landholdings, rural-urban background, education, occupation, income and political power. Tribes have been granted special treatment under the constitution of India. They have also many attributes, practices and styles of life that distinguish them from the non-tribal people... Ethnic and cultural differentiation can be seen in terms of tribal identities and religious pursuits.

Thus, the nature of social stratification is also quite complex corresponding with the heterogeneity of their socio-cultural and economic structure... Social stratification among the tribal people is, therefore, neither simply based on criteria like age and kinship nor it can be characterised by property, education, occupation, income and power. A semblance of the two sets of criteria may distinguish the tribal people from the non-tribal population."¹⁴

Ghanshyam Shah in his "*Stratification among Schedule Tribes in the Bharuch and Panchmahals Districts of Gujarat*" (1986)¹⁵ strongly argues that because of the impact of modernization and various developmental programmes initiated by the government of India, tribal society is no longer homogeneous and egalitarian. At present, each tribal group is segmented on the basis of interests. He maintains that based on the size or extent and possession of land, tribal communities is divided into rich, middle and lower (peasants). The life-style and educational attainment too differ. Both the rich and middle peasants generate surplus resources and have become aware of the market economy. He claims that the rich as well as middle class peasants emerge as the new elite and by and large obtain advantage of the subsidies, grants, aids and assistance provided by the government. Consequently, the situation and living standard of the poor peasants has degenerated. Eventually most of them become landless labourers. According to Shah status differentiation on the basis of achievement in matters of property, wealth, income, occupation, education and power are appearing among the tribes. Furthermore, he contends that the status determination grounded on ethnicity aspect has been imperceptibly superseded by the new and novel criteria viz., power, occupation, education, wealth, and income. He asserts that the economic standing, educational

¹⁴ Sharma K.L., *op.cit.*, pp.167-8.

¹⁵ Shah, Ghanshyam, "*Stratification Among the Schedule Tribes in the Bharuch and Panch Mahals Districts of Gujarat*" in S.C. Malik (ed.) *Determinants of Social Status in India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1986.

achievements, and the style of life are the main bases of the emerging stratification system.¹⁶

In his study of Chaudhri tribe Shah concludes that economic strata have been developed amongst the tribals based on occupation and ownership of land. Following are the main strata as perceived by Shah, (i) Agricultural labourers and poor cultivators, (ii) Middle cultivators, (iii) Rich cultivators, and (iv) White-collar employees. This kind of economic stratification in a tribal society is similar to socio-economic distinctions found in the non-tribal societies. He demonstrates that the first three strata comprised of 93 per cent of the entire total working population whereas the fourth strata constitutes 7 per cent of the population. Expounding the course of the development of tribe-class stratification, Shah argues that the labourers and poor cultivators are at the bottom rung of the occupational hierarchy.¹⁷

R.K. Prasad's study of the Parahiya of Palamau shows that they have evolved social stratification corresponding to the system of caste stratification. This may be due to their close proximity and acquaintance with the caste Hindus. He claims that the tribal groups have taken up the jajmani system of the caste Hindus. Thus, according to Prasad's observation, the Parahiyas have developed a kind of caste-like stratification because of their familiarity with the Hindus.¹⁸

Based on the studies of the tribals of West Bengal and Bihar, K.S. Singh expostulated the existence of social stratification among them. He holds that tribal stratification has emerged due to colonial transformation. His contention is that tribal society has been developing from its tribal status to caste status. At the times of feudal and colonial era, the tribal communities witnessed a razor-sharp social distinction. He comments thus "The colonial

¹⁶ Shah, Ghanshyam, 'Tribal Identity and Class Differentiation: A case study of the Chaudhri Tribe', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, Vol. XIV, Nos. 7 & 8, 1979, pp. 149-83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 459-69.

¹⁸ Prasad R.K., 'Some Aspects of Stratification and Interaction among the Parahiya of Palamau,' *Journal of Social Research*, 1975, 18(1), pp. 59-65.

system created and strengthened a three-fold division with the feudatory chiefs/ Zamindars at the top, the well-to-do headmen in the middle and the general masses at the bottom. A class of inside Diku and professional tribal money lenders also grew up as the unintended result of anti-land alienation laws which restricted transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals. A rich stratum of tribal buyers of land emerged as suggested by the data on transactions in land and money lending in the district settlement reports. There were also reports of conflicts between the secular and religious leaderships though these did not seem to have any enduring consequences.¹⁹ Thus the economic and political systems of tribal transmutation get exhibited in social stratification.²⁰ He advocates that tribal social stratification has been prevailed in diverse types and natures such as prestige and status, social and physical distance, concept of pollution-purity and so on. Moreover, he presumes that the process of tribal stratification had obviously begun before the forties. To quote him "A rigorous analysis of the census reports of the pre-1941 period at the district level, unfortunately most of them have perished, would show the extent of the success achieved by various communities seeking higher status and the reflection of it in the accretion of strength to higher castes."²¹

P.K. Bose in his evaluation of emerging pattern of social stratification among the tribals in Gujarat finds four different classes of peasant-tribals viz., (i) rich peasants, (ii) middle peasants, (iii) poor peasants and, (iv) agricultural labourers.²² Such kind of hierarchy can be seen in all spheres of existence encompassing economic, education and political power. According to him tribals are evenly impinged upon, like the non-tribals by the process of

¹⁹ Singh K.S., *Tribal Society in India: An Anthro-Historical Perspective*, Delhi: Manohar, 1985, p. 14.

²⁰ Singh K.S., 'Colonial Transformation of Tribal Society in Middle India,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. Xiii. No. 30, 1979, pp.21-32.

²¹ Singh K.S., *op.cit.*, p. 15.

²² Bose P.P., 'Stratification among Tribals in Gujarat,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XVI, No.6, February 7, 1981, pp. 191-96.

planned and unplanned changed and by the constant institutional and structural alterations in rural society.

Jaganath Pathy in his studies in five tribal villages in Gujarat employing Marxian perspectives classified five agrarian classes, (i) rich peasant, (ii) middle peasant, (iii) small peasant, (iv), landless and (v) farm worker.²³ Here Pathy considers tribals as a peasantry. To him the mode of production is the main basis of tribal differentiation and inequality. Regarding the constitution of class distinctions amongst the tribals Pathy remarks: "The so-called tribes of India are not homogeneous wholes. There are antagonistic classes and powerful reactionary forces which are allied with the capitalist classes in the hope of maintenance of their privileges."²⁴ He identified labour, income and land as the distinct criteria to appraise the consequences of development schemes among them. He insists that the tribal group or community is going in the direction of a class society.

S.P. Punalekar based on his research investigation on tribal social stratification among the Dhodias in Surat City points out that the process of social distinction, which is emerging among the Dhodias tribes, is from tribe to class. Tribal ethnicity is not of much significance in the City. He makes a distinction among the migrated Dhodias into two strata: (i) upper strata of white-collar employees and (ii) lower strata of factory workers, casual labourers and self-employed²⁵

According to Sachchidananda's observations, tribal social stratification had existed even in the pre-colonial and colonial India. It developed in the patterns of quasi-feudal agrarian set up. He classified the tribal people into two classes, namely, (i) the upper classes and (ii) the commoners. He argues that the upper class commanded comparatively more land, monopolised leadership positions by virtue of which they

²³ Pathy, Jaganath, *Tribal Peasantry: Dynamic of Development*, Delhi: Inter - India Publications, 1984, p. 143.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

²⁵ Punalekar S.P., *Migration and Social Stratification: A case study of Dhodias of Surat City*, Surat: Centre for Social Studies, 1980 (Mimeograph), p. 160.

possessed higher status. Since the advent of moneylenders in the tribal society, the process of social stratification accelerated and became more clear-cut and complex.²⁶

Adityendra Rao has conducted another in-depth study on tribal stratification among the Bhil tribes of Rajasthan. He asserts that social stratification among the tribe is based on class instead of caste. The emerging system of social stratification among the tribals according to him rests on a new form of values such as democracy, socialism and secularism. Rao observes that "Those who argue tribal transformation and the resulting social differentiation in terms of caste hierarchy are obsessed by caste ethno-centricism. Our hypothesis is that the increasing inequality among the Bhils shows their crossing the tribal line for the class hierarchy. It is prejudicial to say that the direction of tribal change is from tribe to caste. There is enough empirical evidence to lead us to generalise that the tribal social differentiation is towards class struggle."²⁷

Social stratification among tribes can as well be analysed in the following three phases: ancient, medieval and post-independence. During the ancient periods, R.S Sharma argues that tribal social stratification had progressed from chiefdom to state and class. He emphasises that ancient Indian tribals constituted a class society rather than a caste society. Class to him is a group of people who either owns the means of production or are deprived of it. In the initial stages of social development, dispossession from the fruits of production becomes a prelude to class formation.²⁸

Thapar and Siddique find that the trend regarding social stratification which had previously emerged with the Khut-Katti system (an arrangement for the management of land resources on a communal basis, mainly confined to the Munda tribe). The Khut-katti not only became acute under

²⁶ Sachchidananda, *Patterns of politico-Economics Changes among Tribals in Middle India*, in F.R. Frankel and MSA Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of Social Order*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 278-320.

²⁷ Rao, Adityendra, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

²⁸ Sharma R.S., *Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India*, Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd., 1983, p. xvi.

the state, but also became more complex and complicated with the introduction of various levels of intermediaries.²⁹ To Sharma, in medieval period, "the process of tribal integration in the wider society began with the introduction of tribals to the caste Hindus."³⁰ Sachchidananda views that social stratification in the pre-colonial time can be perceived on the basis of ranks, viz., the Khut-kattidars, the village headman and the masses. Subsequently some artisan castes like weavers, blacksmiths and potters furthermore differentiated the tribal society.³¹ Moreover, he states that from class perspective the village society was classified into two. i.e., the Khut-kattidars and the masses. The Khut-kattidars belongs to the real owners' class of the village land.

Rao while analysing the process of stratification amongst the Bhils in medieval periods points out that "The intervention made by the rulers of the princely state thus created a new stratification among the Bhils. Those people who got recognition at the hands of the Rajput rulers occupied higher status and rank in the society. The tribal social differentiation began to assign ranking to their claims because of the political differentiation made by the princely state. With the entry made by the government princely state officials, traders and Christian missions, the Bhil tribes still residing in the hills and forests got some economic differentiation also. The clan who provided shelter to these state representatives also got their status enhanced. The status differentiation which the tribal society received at the hands of princely rulers provided a new dimension to the tribal society... the social differentiation that we find among the Bhils during this period is conspicuous."³² On the other hand, K.S. Singh advocates that at the time of the colonial era, a three-fold distinction among the tribes can be witnessed. The Jagir occupied the top rung, Headman the middle and the general

²⁹Thapar, Romila and, Majid Hayat Siddique, *Tribals in History: The Case of Chhota Nagpur*, in Dipankar Gupta (ed.) *Social Stratification*, , Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 419-30.

³⁰Sharma S.L. *op.cit.*, p. 35.

³¹Sachchidananda, *op.cit.*, pp. 280-82.

³²Rao, Adityendra, *op.cit.*, pp. 21-2.

masses at the lower levels. He argues that tribal society is gradually moving closer to caste society.

The pattern of social stratification among the tribe has changed since independence. This is mainly because of the combination of various factors. Perhaps the most important and significant factor is the various programmes and policies undertaken by the government of India with a view to uplift and ameliorate the living conditions of the tribals. However, these policies have had a negative implication on the egalitarianism among the tribals. Rao maintains that after independence development programmes have accelerated the process of social differentiation. According to him "In the post-independence period, with the promulgation of constitution, the tribals received a new phase of development programmes, which improved their status. Besides being benefited by the programmes, they got exposed to the new forces of market economy, industrialisation and education. This set into motion the process of wide social differentiation. It is found that more the development of the tribals, the greater are the forces of social differentiation."³³ Likewise Sachchidananda views that "a significant impact of politico-economic change in independent India is the accentuation of social inequalities in tribal society...the outside moneylenders were a third notable class which has now been replaced by the inside 'dikus' after independence."³⁴

Thus, a class of professional tribal moneylender has emerged in the post independence period due to the anti-land alienation laws. A small section of the tribals has gone up in the socio-economic hierarchy; they are engaged in money lending. The Indian State has provisions in the constitution with regard to the upliftment of the tribal people living in different parts of India by reducing the age old socio-economic inequality. An anticipated consequence of these provisions can be seen in new forms of socio-economic and political inequality between different tribal communities.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

³⁴ Sachchidananda, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

Industrialisation has displaced the tribals as their land has been taken over by the state. The emergence of elites among the tribals is largely due to inequalities resulting from the planned development. The process of depeasantization has brought into operation new forces of class formation.³⁵

While interpreting the emerging pattern of social stratification among the tribals A.R. Desai maintains that the processes unleashed right from the British days to the aftermath of the independence have constituted two main classes such as (a) the privileged class and (b) the exploited class. A small section of the tribals who have gained from the privileges have occupied a higher status. Generally they are better educated and better placed in government service as well as in agriculture. On the other hand, the masses of the tribals who compose the exploited class occupy the lowest rank. Usually the social segments of the well-to-do tribals initiated different programmes and movements in the name of the whole tribal people, which in actuality provide only their interest and benefit.³⁶

It is clear that the *protective policy* has relatively contributed for the well being and interests of the better-off segment of the tribal society. To use Breman's words "The continuation of protective discrimination would invariably lead the tribal to differentiation. It is found that while the lower strata are compelled by the poverty to follow the traditional behaviour patterns, the upper strata model their life-styles according to those of the dominant non-Adivasi farmers of the plains. Everything points to an eventual structural hardening of this divergence in life styles within the tribal caste."³⁷

To recapitulate, like non-tribal people the tribals have had always some kind of social stratification. Nevertheless, social stratification among the tribes is distinct from that of the developed industrial complex societies. Social stratification in one form or another has invariably existed amongst

³⁵ Shama S.L. *op.cit.*, p. 40.

³⁶ Desai A.R., *Tribes in Transition* in Romesh Thapar (ed.), *Tribe, Caste and Religion in India*, The Macmillan Co., of India, 1977, p. 6.

³⁷ Breman, Jan, *Peasants, Migrants and Paupers*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 186.

the tribes of India. By and large tribal stratification is usually based on age, sex, family and kinship. Different strata among them are characterised by habits and customs, notion of pollution and purity, economic resources, political power, education, occupation and so on.

Though tribe and caste are two important facets of social stratification in India, yet the forms and types of tribal stratification are different from the caste system of stratification. In other words, tribal social stratification acquires a set of perspectives, which are distinct from that of caste stratification. In caste stratification various caste groups are assumed as a system functionally correlated. Accordingly, ranking amongst different castes is executed to assess caste stratification. On the other hand, tribal groups do not constitute a system on the basis of functional relationship. Each tribal group is autonomous. Consequently ranking in the tribal groups is done within the tribal group itself. Thus each tribal group in a region is a whole society in itself; one tribal group does not have any forms of relationship to other tribal groups in terms of a system. This connotes that it is not possible to study tribal stratification as a distinct and exclusive system. That is, social stratification among one tribal group can not be analysed in relations to other tribal groups. Due to this independent and autonomous character of a tribe, the study and analysis of social stratification in their society becomes acutely problematic and perplexing. Thus, one has to expound a number of perspectives.

Tribal social stratification can be traced or studied from the following three phases: ancient, medieval, and post-independent. Most of the empirical studies on tribal stratification reveal that after independence the implementation of various developmental schemes as part of protective discrimination policy has resulted in social differentiation amongst tribes. The consequences of this development programme could be observed in the emergence of new forms of political power, education, and socio-economic inequality within tribal communities. The provisions of protective discrimination have engendered a new class of tribal elite rather than

generating social mobility and thus uplifting socio-economic conditions among the tribals. Only a new elite class of tribal could avail the benefits and interests of protective measures. In this regard K.L.Sharma comments " After independence education, employment and political power, though these are in a certain way interrelated phenomena, have become the main bases of social stratification among the tribal people...a large number of tribals still remain unbenefited from these scarce resources like education, white-collar jobs and positions and offices of power. Class distinctions have crystallised among the tribals like the non-tribal people in terms of upper, middle and lower classes because all the people have not been benefited in equal measure, and it is hard to believe that a majority of the tribals have been harmed by the development process in the post independence period."³⁸

Therefore, social stratification among the tribe undergoes different phases. After independence, the realisation of developmental schemes as a part of reservation policy has hastened the process of social distinctions amongst the tribal groups. Subsequently the post-independence periods generates a new form of social stratification based on political power, socio-economic, education, new occupation and employment and a new structure of values - socialism, secularism, and democracy amongst the tribal in India. Thus, it is clear that the phenomenon of social stratification has existed in tribal society of India, even though in diverse forms and dimensions. This has been demonstrated and proved by several empirical studies on tribal society in India.

³⁸ Sharma K.L., *op.cit.*, p. 177.