

**DEVELOPMENT AND THE STRUCTURE OF
SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN RURAL INDIA :**

A Sociological Study Based on Three Villages of Rohtas District, Bihar

**A Thesis Submitted
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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**by
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**to the
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY KANPUR**

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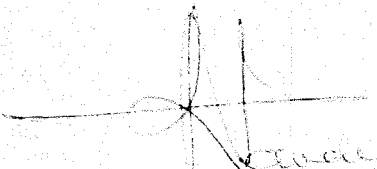
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My Parents

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Certified that the work presented in this thesis entitled 'DEVELOPMENT AND THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN RURAL INDIA: A Sociological Study Based on Three Villages of Rohtas, District, Bihar' by Sujit Kumar Dutta has been carried out under my supervision and that this has not been submitted elsewhere for a degree.

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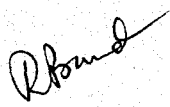
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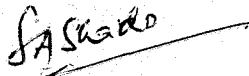
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This is to certify that Sujit Kumar Dutta has satisfactorily completed all the course requirements for the Ph.D. degree programme in Sociology. The courses include:

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SYNOPSIS

DEVELOPMENT AND THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN RURAL INDIA: A Sociological Study Based on Three Villages of Rohtas District, Bihar

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The Problem:

The present study aims at a sociological analysis of the relationship between rural development and social inequality. The focal point of the inquiry is to find out the relationship between the distribution of rural developmental benefits and social inequality. In other words, the purpose is to ascertain whether the distribution of developmental benefit is inequitable in rural areas, and, if so, how far the stratificational factors -- traditional and/or emerging -- are associated with it, and whether the traditional pattern of stratification still continues to have its impact.

Objectives:

The main purpose of this inquiry is to examine the pattern of distribution of the rural benefits -- social, economic and political, in terms of stratificational variables. In operational terms, it has a three-fold objective: (1) to ascertain whether the distribution of rural developmental benefits is inequitable, differential; (2) to determine whether the three dimensions of stratification -- class, status and power -- severally as well as conjointly, are associated with the distribution of rural

development benefits; and (3) to find out whether the traditional association between stratificational system and the distribution of developmental benefits continues as before or there has been alteration in it in the course of recent developments.

Hypotheses:

The major hypotheses of this study are that the distribution of rural development benefits is inequitous, differential; that those belonging to the higher class and caste, as well as those possessing more power and coming from high socio-economic strata have reaped more development benefits in contradistinction to those belonging to the lower levels with respect to all these dimensions of stratification.

Design of the Study:

The present study has exploratory-cum-descriptive research design. The study has been carried out in three villages of the Community Development Block, Dehri of district Rohtas, Bihar. The three project villages — Manikpur, Sujanpur, and Shankarpur, had in all 174, 141, and 112 households, respectively making a total of 427. Following the census method, all the heads of household of villages were taken for the study. However, two heads of household could not be interviewed. Hence the final sample remained 425. A reference period of nearly 10 years, i.e., from 1974 to 1983, was taken into account.

Looking at the subtle nature of the problem, three broad

categories of methodology were developed for the analysis of the relationship between rural development and social inequality: (1) quantitative (interview schedules and documentary facts) and qualitative (case studies and observations) techniques; (2) inductive techniques such as chi-square, to identify the dependency and causality; and (3) conflict perspective to understand the behaviour governing social inequality and rural development.

A socio-economic status scale was prepared on the basis of which relationship between independent and dependent variables was examined. This scale included different dimensions of class, status, and power. However, traditional primordial independent variable such as caste and economic variable such as land and income were also used separately to find out such relationship.

Conclusions:

The findings reveal that there is a glaring inequality in economic domain both in terms of the means of production and relations of production. The pattern of landownership is unequal. The farm power is concentrated in the hands of a few. The rich peasants use more modern agricultural technology and get higher production. Government subsidies have failed to benefit the poor. Whereas the rich peasants have more assets, the poor are prey to indebtedness. There is queer blend of capitalist and feudal agrarian relations in the project villages. In the economic domain, one can witness the distorted capitalist class relations

and, in the socio-economic domain, semi-feudal and patron-client relations. That is to say, both capitalist and feudal relations obtain in villages.

It has been found that the traditional forms of social inequality persists even today. Caste hierarchy seems to be almost intact in the villages. Interestingly, caste and class appear to be moving in a close company: the high castes are also the rich peasants and the backward and low castes are poor peasants. The economic factors determine one's status when combined with caste. The agriculture is considered as the most prestigious occupation and agricultural labour the least prestigious. The income and assets seem to be determining the status of peasants in the villages, independent of other social factors. The joint family appears to be the characteristic of the rich and high caste peasants. Education does add to the status of peasants. The life and living of peasants make a difference in the status of the peasants. The objective factors, when combined together, yield four different status groups in the villages: the rich, the middle, the poor, and the landless.

Our analysis of political inequality reveals that the power is inequally distributed in villages. The rich as compared to the poor peasants, dominate rural organizations, such as Gram Panchayats, Farmers' Association, and Co-operative Societies, etc. The rich peasants and high caste people evince more interest in politics and hold key positions in the political parties. A new

power dynamics is visible in the villages; now low castes combine themselves in order to defeat the high caste during the elections. The basis of voting is narrow; the peasants vote mainly on the basis of territorial affinity, pressure of the pressure group, and factions. However, the poor and landless peasants are compelled not to cast their votes against the wishes of mighty and powerful. Factions are there in the villages; their main issues being politics, property and petty matters. The major sources of power in the villages are landownership and caste status. A few powerful elites have major say in the decision-making process on vital issues. At times, the high caste elites align with the backward and low castes in order to capture power. The powerful men are more influential as they have their contact with government officials and other high-ups. Both traditional and modern bases of power seem to be operative in the villages.