

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AMONG THE MIZOS.

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CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION

CONCEPT

The concept of social stratification refers to the division of people or groups of individuals into strata or layers, which may be conceived of as being vertically arranged in the same way that layers of the earth are arranged. Specifically, social stratification means a system of ranked statuses by which the members of a society are placed in a hierarchical order. Certain variables such as property, income, wealth, occupation, education and ethnicity determine the basis for social ranking. Parsons defines social stratification "as the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in certain socially important respects."¹ Hence, to Parsons social stratification is a generalised aspect of human society and accordingly is shaped and guided by its value system. Tumin expounds social stratification as "the arrangement of a social group or society into a hierarchy of positions that are unequal with regard to power, property, social evaluation and psychic gratification."² Thus social stratification reflects social hierarchy existent in the society and demarcates the rights and privileges of each stratum from one another. It ties members of a stratum in shared interests and mutual existence and excludes those members belonging to another strata from its enfold. It is explicit that every society is characterised by hierarchy of positions known as ranks which are

¹ Parsons, Talcott., *An Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification in Essays in Sociological Theory*, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1956, p.69.

² Tumin, Melvin M., *Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality*, New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1969, p.12.

differentiated from each other by the extent of honour, power, wealth, property and prestige they possess and command. It connotes that a society allocates its resources unequally amongst its members, as a result varied and distinct groups are constituted known as strata. These distinct strata are regarded as unequally and characteristically ranked in a graded manner hierarchically connected with certain social processes such as differentiation, evaluation, ranking, and rewarding.

Originally, the concept of stratification was first employed by the geologist who espoused that strata refer to the way in which the layers of the rocks are arranged. Nevertheless, the concept of stratification as applied in geology is not similar to the use of the concept in sociology. In contrast to its earth-science usage, the sociological usage of the concept of stratification often includes implicitly or explicitly some evaluation of the higher and lower layers, which are judged to be better or worse according to a scale of values. Such matter as relative moral worth, relative equality and inequality and degrees of justice and injustice are often involved in the concept of social stratification.³

The concept of stratification as used in sociology can be differentiated from geological usage in the following ways:

- (i) The relationship between varied strata in society is based upon the principle of *superiority and inferiority*. Individuals or groups are placed in different strata on the basis of superiority and inferiority which itself is determined by their control over various goods, commodities and services.
- (ii) In contrast to layers of the rocks members of social strata are groups of people who are very much conscious and apprehensive about their positions in the society. The awareness of their positions is determined by their

³ Barber, Bernard, *Social Stratification (Introduction)*, in David L.Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* vols.15, 16 & 17, New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1972, p.289.

positions in class, status and power. It certainly generates a feeling of superiority and inferiority and consequentially affects their role relationship.

(iii) Those members belonging to the same social strata share certain specific pattern of socio-cultural traits. They basically share similar values and ideals, which exclusively differentiate them from the other strata. Consciousness of superiority and inferiority is legitimised through the structured differentiation existent among them.

(iv) Contradistinction between varied strata is constituted and institutionalised by the society. Through its legal provisions society legitimises the distinctions between the members of the society and this considerably facilitates for the perpetuation of difference amongst them.

(v) Explication of social strata necessitates an understanding of the basis of social stratification and the correlation among different strata. The basis of social strata implies certain criteria in terms of which valued goods, services and skills are unequally allocated among the members. Secondly, how the people adhere to different types of symbolic and non-symbolic properties to maintain their specific identity should be described. The structure of social correlation between various strata should be analysed in the light of how unequal positions and attributes structurally influenced the life-styles and life-chances of the individuals belonging to diverse strata and how alteration in this position generates to the change in their social relationship.

Genesis and Origin of Social Stratification

No scholar really comprehends accurately how, when, or why stratification system has evolved and developed in almost every known society. However, one can argue that all societies are characterised by social inequality; every society whether simple or complex, archaic or modern has one form or another system of social stratification or *institutionalised inequality*.

Stratification systems are institutionalised in that they are legitimised, justified and rendered stable by the values, norms, ideals and beliefs of the society. In other words, inequalities occur in every type of human societies. Even in the simplest societies, where difference in wealth or properties are virtually non-existent there are inequalities between individuals based on age-sets, gender and so on.

To explain inequalities succinctly, sociologists talk of the existence of social stratification, which can be defined as “structured inequalities between different grouping of people.”⁴ Hence, we can argue that no society is unstratified in the real sense of the term. In fact, the process of stratification is at work in nearly every group and society. As Reece McGee states “All human societies, even the simplest, have levels (strata) of social rank as one of the mechanisms influencing how their members relate to one another... the many aggregates within a society are presumed to form in stable ordered layers.”⁵ According to Bernard Barber, as a relatively undifferentiated notion, the concept and idea of social stratification is found in the Judeo-Christian Bible, the social thought of the Greeks, and the basic social and religious texts of the Indian and the Chinese. The idea has persisted, right up to the present day.⁶ Perhaps the earliest written thoughts and judgments about social inequality were made by the Hebrew prophets who criticised and denounced the excess of the rich and mighty.⁷

Furthermore, we can also assume that the concept of social stratification is as old as Greek philosophy. In fact, one can trace the study of inequality to the Greek philosophers.⁸ Plato conceptualised society governed by a philosopher kings. His concept of society was class structured. Though Plato’s ethical apprehension for justice led him to favour equality of

⁴ Giddens, Anthony, *Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989, p. 206.

⁵ McGee, Reece, *Points of Departure: Basic Concepts in Sociology*, Hinsdale: Dryden Press, 1972, p.79.

⁶ Barber, Bernard, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

⁷ Heller, Celia S., *Structured Social Inequality: A Reader in Comparative Social Stratification*, London: The Macmillan Company, Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1969, p.2.

⁸ McGee, Reece, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

opportunity for those of equal ability, however, he acknowledged the inequality in ability and, therefore, suggested a stratified society of three levels: the guardians, the auxiliaries and the workers. He further subdivided the guardians into ruling and non-ruling groups.⁹ For each of these major strata, definite and separate functions were to be assigned.

Aristotle advances a three-class scheme in the society. He conceived that the large middle class oriented by an ethical rationalism would best govern societies. In his *Politics*, he states:

Now in all the states there are three elements: one class is very rich, another very poor, and a third is a mean. It is admitted that moderation and the mean are the best, and therefore, it will clearly be best to possess the gifts of the fortune in moderation; for in that condition of life men are most ready to follow rational principle. But he who greatly excels in beauty, strength, birth or wealth or on the other is very poor, or very weak, or very much disgrace, finds it difficult to follow rational principle. Of these two, the one sort grows into violent and great criminals, the other into rogues and petty rascals.¹⁰

Here we can glimpse that Aristotle was interested with the consequences of inequality in birth, and wealth for the administration of good, stable and decent government and with the composition of an intelligent and moderate population.

To sum up, Plato postulates a society divided into classes in which a person's place was determined by his natural abilities, such as intelligence, talent and physical strength. Aristotle presumes that men were by nature unequal and there was a natural rank-order amongst them. Nevertheless, if we lucidly review the argument put forward by Plato and Aristotle, we can assert that they were referring to natural inequalities rather than social inequalities.

⁹ Tumin, Melvin M. *op.cit.*, (Second edition) 1999, p.8.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, New York: Modern Library, 1943, p.190.

The first sociological interpretation of the origin of inequality was put forward by J.J.Rousseau.¹¹ He refers to biological based inequality as "natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age, health, bodily strength and the qualities of the mind or the soul. By comparison, socially created inequality consists of the different privileges which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others, such as that of being more rich, more honoured, more powerful or even in a position to exact obedience."¹²

Rousseau regards the concepts of natural inequality and social inequality as distinct and espoused that social inequality legitimises the natural differences amongst the individuals in society. Furthermore, he assumes that biological based inequalities between men were minor and rather insignificant whereas socially devised inequalities determine the key basis for the constitution of system of social stratification. To him people availing various types of opportunities, rewards and benefits though have diverse physical attributes or biological characteristics, their natural distinctions do not actually obtain any congruity with their social status and social placement. Rejecting all the earlier presumptions, Rousseau argues that there is no justification to think that wisdom, strength and potentialities should consistently rest with the rulers than ruled. In reality the rulers by declaring that this superiority is being associated with them by virtue of these natural credentials entrenched their supremacy and domination over the subjects. To him, men are born free, however, difference amongst them come into being when they become the members of the society. Hence inequality is not natural but socially defined.

Propagating a new perspective to social thought, Rousseau postulates that the genesis of social inequality rests in the emergence of *private property*. It was the development of *individual property ownership*,

¹¹ Dahrendorf, R., *Essays in the Theory of Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968, pp. 23-27.

¹² Botomore, T. B., *Classes in Modern Society*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965, pp.15-6.

which gave rise to the development of class. In other words, the phenomenon of inequality came into being with the notion of the emergence of individual property ownership. This proposition advanced by Rousseau was so appealing that it was upheld and supported by a large number of scholars belonging to the 18th and the 19th centuries and remained unchallenged for a long time.

Features of Social Stratification

Though the concept and origin of social stratification is difficult to define and trace it explicitly, yet to understand more fully what social stratification is really about, it shall be desirable and imperative to study and analyse some of its important attributes as perceived by sociologists.

i) *Social stratification is an ancient phenomenon*: Archaeological and historical evidences demonstrate that social stratification was present in primitive societies. Particularly, distinctions based on status, power and wealth had an implicit existence in primitive communities. Most specifically in case of tribal societies, inequalities are illustrated in terms of age, sex, physical capabilities, and birth and descent group membership. According to social anthropologists 'age-set and age-grade system in primitive communities as well as hierarchy of offices substantially defined the nature and the form of stratification existent in them.

ii) *Social stratification is ubiquitous by nature*: Division of societies into various strata is found as a universal phenomenon. Stratification in one form or another was prevalent in all societies. Nevertheless, the nature and basis of stratification may be varied from one society to another but unquestionably, it is ubiquitous. Tumin observes: "the nation of the world constitute a worldwide system of stratification: the 'haves' versus the 'have-nots'. And within every nation, including all the so-called socialist countries, stratification is also to be found. Although it is important to differentiate

between systems where stratification is based primarily on age and sex and those who depend on other criteria, it is equally important to note universality of some form of socially structured and sanctioned inequality of power, property and prestige".¹³

iii) *The social patterning of stratification*: Social stratification being socially defined, it should not be analysed from biological context. Social stratification being an established form of social inequality explains how different social ranks are bestowed with varied types of skill, services and goods and how they are intrinsically existent in every society. Tumin argues that "The determination of who is the fittest and who is the most entitled to enjoy larger amounts of property and power is always part of a complex social and cultural pattern, often having little to do with biological traits per se".¹⁴

iv) *Stratification has diverse degrees and forms*: Regarding the degrees of stratification Tumin maintains that: " The theoretical possibilities stretch from one extreme, where all statuses would be considered entitled to equal amounts of power, property and prestige, to the extreme, where each and every status would be assigned unequal amounts. No society has existed at either of these theoretical extremes."¹⁵ In every society, one can find out the existence of social stratification or the combination of both equality and inequality. We can thus observe that no society is neither totally egalitarian nor totally inegalitarian. The diverse forms of stratification may be constituted by the criteria such as class, caste, ethnicity, gender and estate. These criteria are convenient to articulate the various ways in which strata can be determined, the degree of intensity of division amongst strata, the opportunities to shift or change one's stratum, and the degrees of legal recognition of strata as entities.

v) *Stratification has many consequences*: The results that emanate from inequalities in property, power and prestige can be systematised according

¹³ Tumin, Melvin, M., *op.cit.*, p.2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

to Tumin in the following four main captions:¹⁶ (a) Life chances;(b) Institutional patterns of conduct; (c) Life styles; and (d) Values, Attitudes and Ideologies. He further says that "to the extent that people in different stratified positions enjoy different life chances, engage in different forms of institution conduct, exhibit different life styles and affirm different values, attitudes and ideologies, the system of stratification is obviously the most consequential feature of a society. ¹⁷

System of Social Stratification

The type of stratification can differ considerably from one society to another. Generally, sociologists differentiate two main types of societies: *closed and open*. In a closed system, each and every individual member has an *ascribed* social status or position, which cannot be changed. In otherwords, a person remains and survives for life in the status that he or she was born into; theoretically, social mobility is not possible. On the other hand, in an open system social position is achieved rather than ascribed. The societies whose predominant mode of filling social status by achievement criteria have comparatively open system of stratification whereas those societies whose dominant process of filling social positions by ascription criteria are relatively regarded as closed system of stratification.

Therefore, systems of social stratification vary extensively in their counterbalance of ascription-achievement as the bases for filling or assigning social status. It is considered that modern complex industrial societies emphasise achievement, and hence represent an open system of stratification; whilst more traditional and simple societies stress ascription and, accordingly epitomise closed system of stratification. According to

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

Chinoy ¹⁸ analysis and evaluation of the system of stratification in any society require consideration of at least the following five conditions:

- (i) The number and size of classes and status groups;
- (ii) The amount of movement of individuals and families from one group to another (social mobility);
- (iii) The sharpness of the lines between groups, as evident in readily apparent differences in behaviour or style of life and in the extent of class-consciousness;
- (iv) The specific bases for division- the kind and amount of property men own, the occupation they follow, and the values from which status derives; and
- (vi) The distribution of power among the several classes and status groups.

Chinoy ¹⁹ further expounds that the real situations to which differentiation is applied do not present razor-sharp or rigid comparisons and contrasts. In open systems class and status positions are frequently influenced by family inheritance or links. For instance, sons of rich parents are more predictable to be wealthy than the children of poor parents although there are chances for the poor to prosper and rise or the wealthy to degenerate and sink in the social ladder. And in closed societies there is certain opportunity for individual achievement, specifically in new occupations, and the probability that an entire group may change its position. Although we identify societies as open or closed, each case ineluctably exemplifies some combination or mixture of the principles of ascription and achievement, of competition and heredity.

¹⁸ Chinoy, Ely, *Society: An Introduction to Sociology*, (Second edition), New York: Random House, 1967, p.177.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.178.

Dimensions of Social Stratification

Some of the main important dimensions of social stratification commonly accepted by sociologists are analysed below:

i). *Power*: The first significant dimension of stratification is the concept of power. It is regarded as the basis of almost all other dimensions and of the forms and types of social stratification. In fact, it is observed that without reference to power, clear-cut comprehension of social stratification is not possible. Hence, power is an essential and important dimension of stratification system. It affects and influences all other forms of social stratification.

According to Tumin's perception, the most general meaning of power is the ability to secure one's ends or desires, even against the opposition of others. He further argues that there are five sources of power,²⁰ that can be obtained from the ownership and control of goods and services, talents, skills and coercive constraint as well as from role-specific authority. Weber defines power as "The probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance regardless of the basis on which this probability rests."²¹ On the other hand, Parsons conceptualised power as a positive social capacity for achieving the betterment of the community, i.e., power is the universalised capacity of social system and it is exercised to achieve collective goals.²²

Thus, we can maintain that power is the capability for accomplishing goals in social systems. Almost in all social systems, certain roles possess

²⁰ Tumin, Melvin M., *op.cit.*, pp. 71-2.

²¹ Weber, Max, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parson, Trans) New York: Free Press, 1947, p.152.

²² Parsons, Talcott, *On the concept of Political Power* in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds.), *Class, Status, and Power* (second edition), New York: Free Press, 1966, pp. 240-65.

more power than others do and the consequence of this allocation is a stratified construction of power. To quote Barber thus:

When power is exercised against the moral feelings of the relevant other actors in a social system, it is perceived by those others as illegitimate, or as it is usually called authoritative. Power, legitimate and illegitimate, has a number of different social sources in all societies. Therefore, it does not stand in any simple one to one relations with any other dimensions of social stratification.²³

ii). *Status*: Status refers to a process of ranking people according to the prestige elicited by the roles they fulfil in a society. It is a ranked position-high, middle or low-and the rank is determined by the role attached or connected to the status. In other words, social status is an evaluation of prestige and honour. Status in terms of stratification implies the arrangement of people in high and low positions on the basis of specific institutionalised criteria. Indeed, almost all societies have an inclination norms and values and, based on them distribute positions and roles to its individual members. Inequality of status may be generated by various factors, such as power, property, income, family background and so on. These factors are the maxims of social evaluation of status. For instance, the poor Brahmin may be regarded as ritually superior to those people who are politically and economically superior to him. People following the same occupation may have distinct statuses based on their differential accomplishment. Status distinction may also be seen on the basis of differences pertaining to style of life, personality traits and education notwithstanding economic and occupational equality. The principles by which status is determined and specified can differ from society to society.

²³ Barber, Bernard, *Social Stratification, A Comparative Analysis of Structure and Process*, New York: Harcourt, 1957 Chapter 4.

An individual can acquire social status in two contrasting ways: through achievement and through ascription. Societies vary in the comparative importance they give to ascriptive and achievement criteria of status. For instance, Indian caste system entailed a hierarchy based almost wholly upon ascription whilst most industrial societies assign remarkable significance upon achievement.

Besides the above-discussed dimensions, some other important dimensions of social stratification are: Income or wealth, occupational prestige, education, religious and ritual purity, family and ethnic group's position and local community status.

Types of Social Stratification

Sociologists have generally differentiated between four main types of social stratification. These are *slavery*, *estate*, *caste* and *social class*. These have been distinguished from one another in three ways: Firstly, they may be distinguished by the nature of the main criterion, which is responsible for the stratification, i.e., whether the main criterion is economic, power or prestige. Secondly, they may be distinguished by how much or how often movement and activity between social groupings is sanctioned or favoured, i.e., how open or closed the types of stratification is. Lastly, they may be distinguished by the extent or degree to which positions are assigned by ascription or achievement criteria.

i). *Slavery*: The first and earliest type of social stratification is slavery. A slave is a person whom custom and legal law considered as the asset and property of another man in the society. The master (owner) possesses the sole and absolute rights over his slave; he could carry out any action with his slave just as he could with his property and belongings. A slave was socially, economically and politically despised. Since the slave was deprived of his

rights, the concept of slavery might be considered as an extreme form of social inequality. Furthermore, as slavery was more or less connected with compulsory and forced labour the main foundation of this stratum was essentially economic in nature.

In the words of Finley "Slavery is a system of stratification in which a man is in the eyes of the law and of public opinion and with respect to all other parties a possession of another man."²⁴ Therefore, it is not the attributes or work, but the economic fact of being actually possessed and owned, that compelled one to be a slave. The status of a slave ranked low by reason of he being owned by others legally, whereas the freeman ranked higher as another man did not possess him.

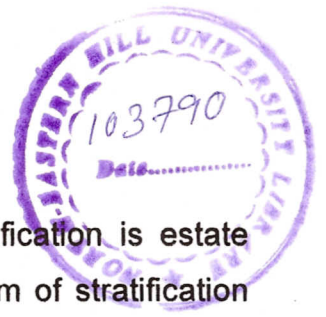
Consequently, the low rank of slave status was link to both the economic and power correlation immanent in it. Certainly, the prestige aspect in slave system was inalienable from the power and economic facets pertaining to the position. It was regarded as the most degenerated position to be in, yet it was not believed to evince on the inherent worth of individuals. This is connected to the means in which the positions of slave were filled. The slave system may rest on birth, however, its primary sources were usually prisoners and victims of warfare. Finley phrases it briefly thus: "... the condition of servitude was one which no man, woman or child, regardless of status or wealth, could be sure to escape in case of war or some other unpredictable and uncontrollable emergency."²⁵ The pre-eminent notion was that slavery was a man-made arrangement, a conventional institution, universally practised.²⁶ In the words of Florentius "Slavery is an institution of the *ius gentium* whereby someone is subject to the *dominium* of another, contrary to nature."²⁷

²⁴ Finley, M.J., *Slavery in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge, England: W. Heffer & Sons, 1960, p.145.

²⁵ Quoted by Heller, Celia S. *op.cit.*, p.53.

²⁶ Finley M.J., *op.cit.*, pp. 145-164.

²⁷ Quoted by Finley M.J., p. 153.



ii) .*Estates*: In medieval Europe, the main basis of stratification is estate system. Typically, sociologists perceive of estate as a form of stratification wherein the strata are explicitly differentiated and separated from one another by *legal law*. Mitchell states that: "The strata of a systems of estates are defined by the law of man in societies for whose ruler divine authority is commonly claimed. Hence, in the estate it is not necessary to know a man's place in a ritual order, but rather to know the man-made though divinely inspired law by which he lives. Complicated though these laws invariably were, their universal characteristic was that they defined not merely the rights but the duties of members of estates and this provided a clear system of social order based on responsibilities enforceable either in the courts or by military strength."²⁸

According to Bottomore, the estate of medieval Europe had three basic attributes. "In the first place, they were legally defined; each estate had a status, in the precise sense of a legal complex of rights and duties, of privileges and obligations... Secondly, the estates represented a broad division of labour, and were regarded in the contemporary literature as having definite functions. The nobility were ordained to defend all, the clergy to pray for all, and the commons to provide food for all. Thirdly, the feudal estates were *political groups*..."²⁹ The feudal estates comprised of strata with contrasting rights and obligations; some of these distinctions being constituted by law. Hence in medieval Europe, in order to know a person's actual position, it was imperative to comprehend the law by which he lived. The first and pre-eminent estate is consisted of the aristocracy and the gentry; the clergy, who have lower status yet having varied distinguishing privileges and prestige, formed the second estate. The commoners-serfs, merchants, artisans and free peasants constituted the third estate. The

²⁸ Mitchell, Duncan G. (ed.), *A new Dictionary of Sociology*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968, p.195.

²⁹ Bottomore, T.B., *Sociology: A guide to Problems and Literature* (Revised edition), Delhi: Blackie & Son (India) Ltd., 1975, p. 187.

estates had institutionalised restriction to social mobility, which is rest on legality.

iii). *Caste*: Caste system is a specific and peculiar type of social stratification. It connotes an element of birth and hereditary in social stratification. Though the caste system has some attributes similar with other system of stratification, it is distinct from all of them. The caste groups are organised and determined in a hierarchical order based on religion and rituals. In the words of Heller "Of all the principal types of stratification systems, the caste system is most highly institutionalised. In the caste system the inequality between the strata is guaranteed not only by laws-which is true of other stratification systems-but also by ritualism-which is not present elsewhere".³⁰

Even though indication of the existence of caste like formation are to be found almost in various regions of the world, the best example of it is found in India. Theoretically, the caste system is based on and interconnected with the *varna model* which distinguishes the Hindu society into four- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The *Varna model* not only established division of society into four classes but also determined a system of social stratification. Each Varna is located in the system at a specific position in the hierarchical order and is allocated certain duties.

M.N. Srinivas emphasises that in order to analyse caste as a form of stratification, it is imperative that the Varna model and caste scheme are to be differentiated and their relationship should be examined. According to Varna system there are only four caste groups, but according to the existing Jati system the potential unit of the Indian society are not just four, rather they are manifold.³¹ It is explicit that whilst Varna model is at the ideal typical level, the caste scheme is at the existential level. G.S.Ghurye in his book '*Caste and Race in India* describes that caste system is characterised by six distinct features such as *segmentary division of society, hierarchy,*

³¹ Srinivas, M.N., *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*, Bombay: Media Promoters and Publication Ltd., 1962,p.65.

restriction on foods, drinks and social intercourse, religious and civil disabilities and privilege, endogamy, and lack of unrestricted choices of occupation.³² The six attributes identified by Ghurye are existed in the system from the perspective of social stratification.

iv). *Social Class*: The last and final type of social stratification is called the class system. The term 'class' is derived from the Latin word '*classics*'- a group called to arm, a division of the people. It is one of the most important and significant bases of social stratification in modern complex societies. In most instances, an individual's position is determined by his class. Generally, we can assume that classes are groups of people into which a society is divided. These groups are ranked in terms of definite criteria. Hence, classes are social groups that occupy particular high and low positions in a given society. The determinants of social classes are income, wealth, occupation, education, achievement criteria, and ability of an individual. There may be several distinct classes in a given society. The classes are hierarchically ranked in terms of income and wealth.

In sociological usage the class system is generally interlinked with achievement criteria and open stratification. According to Bottomore, a social class system differs radically from other types of social stratification. He succinctly observes thus:

Social classes are *de-facto* (not legally or religiously defined and sanctioned) groups; they are relatively open, not closed. Their basis is indisputably economic, but they are more than economic groups. The class system is a characteristic group of the industrial societies, which have developed since the seventeenth century. Considerable difficulties arise when the attempt is made to specify the member of social classes, or to define their membership precisely. However, most sociologists would probably agree in recognizing the existence of an upper class (comprising the owners of the major part of the economic resources of a society), a working class (chiefly the industrial wage-earners) and a middle class (a more amorphous group,

³² Ghurye, G.S., *Caste and Race in India*, Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1950, p.50.

often treated as a residual category, but including most white-collar workers and most members of the liberal professions). In some societies, the existence of a fourth class, the peasantry, would be recognised.³³

To condense, class is defined in terms of economic grouping of people. It is affected by economic standing of an individual in the society. Accordingly, property, wealth, income, education, and occupation are the basic criteria of determination of a social class. Thus, classes may be specified as definite entities in terms of difference in wealth, income, property, occupation and education. It is relatively an open system of stratification in which social mobility is permitted.

THEORIES

There are different views and interpretations as to why and how social stratification exists in societies. The various theories that have been furnished by several sociologists share merely the recognition and acquiescence of the universality of the stratification system and its intimate and close relations to the values of society. They differ, nevertheless, and sharply so, in what they make out of these assumptions and postulations. Generally, these theories have been classified into three categories, namely the conflict theories, the functional theories, and the Weberian theory. The main tenets and perspective of the three theories are analysed and discussed below:

Conflict Theory:

The conflict approach to social stratification stresses the role and functions of class, class-conflict, class-consciousness, and class-solidarity.

³³ Bottomore, T.B., *op.cit.*, pp. 194-5.

According to them, stratification divided people and engendered antagonism rather than promoting harmony and integration among them in the society. They consider stratification as a device used and employed by some persons to exploit others instead of applying as an instrument of contributing and facilitating common purpose and goal. The conflict theorists approach the dilemma of social inequality from the point of view of the positions of various classes and groups within the society. The main advocate of this theory is Karl Marx, who brings about the most compelling and charismatic approach to the study of stratification.

Marxist Approach to Stratification:

Even though concern with social stratification is as old as social thought, it is Karl Marx (1818-83) who first analysed social stratification in a scientific manner. As Bernard noted:

In the history of the evolution of social stratification theory, Marx is the Copernican hero because his concept of social stratification, in contrast with all previous, common-sense notions in this area emphasizes the basic importance, as a criterion of stratification, of the individual's or group's location in the economic structure. This emphasis contributed one of the essential foundations for all subsequent stratification theory and indeed, for all other kinds of sociological analysis. In terms of their structural location in the social system, which is centered on the means of production, men in society are divided by Marx into two strata or 'classes' as he called them.³⁴

According to Marx's perspective classes form the basis of social stratification. "He made class the central aspect of his analysis of society and for his theory of social change. Though most latter day sociologists have disagreed with many, if not most, of Marx's assumption about stratification, many of the non-Marxist or anti-Marxist ideas on the subject have come

³⁴ Barber, Bernard, *op.cit.*, p. 289.

about in reaction to Marx's original formulation."³⁵ Marx classified society into two classes based on their position in the structure of society. Accordingly, he postulates that invariably there are two major classes in all stratified societies. These two classes are the '*haves*'- those who own the means of production, and the '*have nots*'- those who own nothing but their labour, and hence, do not have control over the means of production. The '*haves*' who are in minority are regarded as the ruling class, and the '*have nots*' who are in majority are look upon as the subject class.

Marx conceptualised that every society has its *sub-structure* and *super-structure*. He defined social relations in terms of material conditions which he designates sub-structure. The economic base of a society forms its infrastructure. Any changes and alterations in material conditions also involve corresponding changes in social relations. Forces and relations of production constitute the *economic infrastructure* ³⁶ whereas the *super-structure* ³⁷ is composed of legal, political, educational institutions as well as values, religion, ideologies, philosophies and cultural way of thinking.

Marx advocates that the forces and relations of production (or economic-infrastructure) form the fundamental structure of society on which are resting the super-structure of the society. According to Marx, the ruling classes, on accounts of its ownership of the means of production and control of the forces of production, have the power to exploit and oppress the subject classes for their own interests and profits. The super-structures are instruments of dominant class and, tend to serve the ends of only that class of people, who monopolise the economic-infrastructure by controlling the means and relations of production. The '*have-nots*' foolishly think that a super-structure is for their own good and advantage, though in reality, any

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.297.

³⁶ *Economic infrastructure* refer to express the basis theoretical priority of the mode of production in relation to the rest of society. It consists of the means of production and relations of production.

³⁷ *Super-structure* is the metaphor to exemplify the social conditions of the economic-infrastructure. Legal, political, state, schools religious, institutions, culture, values, arts, philosophy etc., constitute the super structure of the society.

super-structure merely belittle their actual awareness from true realities. To Marx, in order to put an end to this exploitation and oppression of the majority by a minority, the forces of production should be communally owned, which will ultimately do away the class structure in society.

Though, Marx used the term class throughout his work, he nevertheless, explained it only in a fragmented form. The most definite and clear explanation on the concept of class structure can be seen in his famous work *Capital* (1894). Under the title of 'Social Class', Marx distinguished three classes, related to the three sources of income:

- a) The owners of merely of labour power or labourers whose main resource is labour.
- b) Owners of capital or capitalists whose main source of income is profit or surplus value; and
- c) Landowners whose main source of income is ground rent.

In other words, Wage-laboures, Capitalists and Landowners constitute the then three big classes of society based upon the capitalist mode of production.³⁸ Hence, we can point out that class structure of modern capitalist society is composed of three major classes, viz., Salaried labourers, Capitalists, and Landowners.

The most accepted view of Marx's conception of class is that "Any aggregate of persons who perform the same function in the organization of production."³⁹ Thus, according to Marx, class is perceived as a group whose member shares the same relationship to the means of production. Moreover, we should note that mere occupation or income does not fix or decide a social class, rather the status and role one holds and the functions one accomplishes or fulfils in the process of production.

³⁸ Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. III.*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962, p. 862.

³⁹ Bendix, Reinhard and Martin, Seymour Lipset, *Class, Status, and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective*, New York: The Free Press, 1966, p. 7.

Marx presented the different stages of human history (society) on the basis of their economic establishment or modes of production.⁴⁰ He projected that all social progress would climax into a stage called *communism*.⁴¹

According to Marx's perspective except primitive communism and a futuristic communistic stage, all other societies are characterised by class system. Those who own the means of production form one class and those who do not own the means of production constitute the other class. Haralambos observes how different societies had developed from Marxian's perspective as:

Primitive communism is represented by the societies of pre-history and provides the only example of a classless society. From then on, all societies divided into two major classes: master and slaves in ancient society, lords and serfs in feudal society and capitalists and wage labourers in capitalist society. During each historical epoch, the labour power required for production was supplied by the subject class that is by slaves, serfs, and wage labourers respectively. The subject class is made up of the majority of the population whereas the ruling or dominant class forms a minority.⁴²

Therefore, in Marx's opinion the idea of classes did not occur at the time of primitive communism as, entire members of the society participated and shared the same relationship to the forces of production. In other words the idea of class did not occur as societies were based on communitarian mode of production. Marx argues that, only when society extends and

⁴⁰ These societies are *Asiatic mode of Production (Primitive Communism)*, *Ancient Society*, *Feudal Society* and *Capitalist Society*.

⁴¹ *Communism* refers to communal ownership of all property. Nevertheless, accurate definitions of communism are acutely disparate due to the ideological entanglements of the term. Typically, it refers to revolutionary socialism, based on Marx's writings. According to Marx, communism is a system in which properties and goods are owned in common and are accessible to all. To Marx communist society will be based upon the deliberate and cognisant realisation and appreciation of the reciprocal dependence of the social community and the individual. Marx first comprehensive confabulations of communism embody in the **Manuscripts**.

⁴² Haralambos M., *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1997, p.39.

multiplies its capability to produce above the level of requisite for existence that *classes* developed in the society. This is possible when *agriculture* emerges as the prevalent mode of production.

When agriculture progressed, *surplus wealth*, i.e. goods beyond the essential requisites for livelihood of the society are produced. This resulted in an exchange of goods and, which in turn led to the development of trading system in the society. Subsequently this was followed by the emergence of *private property* system in the community. Apparently, goods are considered as commodities to which the individual has the right of ownership rather than the community as a whole. Pertinently, a system of private property and multiplication (or hoarding) of surplus wealth constitute the fundamental base for the evolvment of societies characterised by class system. Consequently, this resulted in the emergence of private property as means of production, and alteration in the relations of production. This signals the end of primitive communal system of social equality and thus set in or began the far-reaching history of inequality, exploitation, class, and class-conflict. Marx specifically emphasises that the capitalist system of production signifies the most extreme form of inequality, exploitation and class-antagonism.

Marx argues that the history of all societies up to the present is the history of class struggle: This indicates that ever since social inequality and exploitation began in the history of human being, that is, starting from slavery system, society has been departmentalised into mutually warring classes of '*haves*' and '*have nots*'. The consecutive change in mode of production and class hostility has proceeded to changes in the stages of society from slavery to feudalistic to capitalistic system. Moreover, according to Marx, class-conflict between the contending classes will lead to violent revolution in course of time, which in turn will transform the capitalistic society into communistic system, wherein there will be no more classes, class-conflict, social inequality and social stratification.

Functional Theory:

According to the functional theory, social stratification emerges from the essential functional necessities of the society and is thus, a fundamentally requisite and inevitable attribute of human societies. The functional theorists argue that social stratification is functional, beneficial and constructive feature of society. It generates consensus, integration, and social solidarity in the society by accomplishing its fundamental needs in so far as it distributes roles and duties as per the intent and capability of the individual as a member of the society. Accordingly, social stratification emanates out of the society and not out of the requirements of some particular members of the society. The functional theorists therefore, justify social stratification asserting it as a '*functional prerequisite*' of the society.

Role allocation is constituted, according to functionalists, on the basis of individual ability and societal needs. Social rewards are disparately awarded to various persons according to their ability, services and position in the society. To quote Lipset thus:

In analyzing the function of stratification, functionalists see it as the mechanism through which society encourages men to seek to achieve the diverse positions necessary in a complex social system. The vast variety of positions that must be filled differ in their requirements for all skill, education, intelligence, commitment to work, willingness to exercise power resources against others, and the like. Functionalist theory posits that in an unstratified society-that is, one in which rewards are relatively equal for all tasks-those positions which require more work, postponement of gratification, greater anxiety, and the like will not be filled by the most able people. The stratification system is perceived, therefore, as a motivation system; it is society's mechanism for encouraging the most able people to perform the most demanding roles in order to have the society operate efficiently.⁴³

⁴³ Lipset, Seymour M., *Social Stratification: Social Class*, in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vols. 15, 16, & 17, New York: The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, 1927, p.305.

The main proponents of functional theory are Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore.

Talcott Parsons:

Talcott Parsons postulates that order, stability and co-operation in society arise from *value consensus*, i.e., common/collective or universal acceptance by individual members of a society pertaining what is good and worthwhile. In Parsons' perspective, the system of social stratification emanates from common values. To quote his words " Social stratification is a generalized aspect of the structure of all social systems, and that the system of stratification is intimately linked to the level and type of integration of the system as a system."⁴⁴ Here it is apparent that social stratification, according to Parsons is a generalised aspect of the structure of the society, and thus, is governed and shaped by its value system.

Parsons asserts that all the societies have certain definite norms and common values to which each and every individual members in societies are obliged to obey and conform. Individual members in the society typically evaluate themselves and other fellow members on the basis of whether they conform to the norms and values or not. To him the process of evaluation aids in differentiating individual members and groups in a *ranked-order* in the society. In otherwords, through conformity or nonconformity of common values that an individual or groups will be evaluated and, hence, graded in some ranked-orders. He then surmises that " Stratification in its valuational aspect, then is the ranking of units in a social system in accordance with the standards of the common value system."⁴⁵ Thus, those who perform efficiently and accomplish conscientiously in accordance with society's value system are ranked higher with complementary rewards and prestige in the

⁴⁴ Parsons, Talcott, *An Essay in Sociological Theory (Revised Edition): A Revised Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification*, New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1975, p. 386.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.388.

society. Parsons advocates that since various societies have diverse and contrasting systems, that the means of securing a high position can be differed from society to society. Hence, the way in which members of society are ranked varies along with rewards and honour greatly depends on the society's values and norms.

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore:

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore argue that every society is characterised by classes or system of stratification. In fact, in all human societies some forms of stratification is existent. Their main effort is to expound the universality of social stratification in a functional term. Social stratification according to them is a system of executing different tasks with unequal rewards. Since these diverse works and duties are inevitably found in all known societies then, social stratification is an indispensable and essential device for any society. The very fact that, it is universally found exhibits that social stratification is functional and inevitable for all societies without which it can not function efficiently and sustain itself. They maintain that social stratification is a mechanism through which society distributes different roles and duties to different individual according to their intent and ability. Accordingly, Davis and Moore contend that stratification is a "device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons."⁴⁶

Weberian Theory:

Another most influential and far-reaching approach to the subject of social stratification has been advanced by Max Weber (1864-1920).⁴⁷ His

⁴⁶ Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert E. Moore, *Some Principles of Stratification* in Reihard Bendix and Seymour, Martin, Lipset (eds.), *Class, Status, and Power: Stratification in Comparative Perspective*, New York: The Free Press, 1966, p. 48.

⁴⁷ Most of Max Weber ideas on social stratification can be seen in his *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York: The Free Press, 1957, and Hans Gerth and C.Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.

concept of stratification has had a wide and significant impact on the contemporary analysis and understanding of social stratification system.

Weber's approach to social stratification has been generally considered to be *multi-dimensional* as he is the first sociologist who explicitly and unequivocally pinpoints and classifies three analytically independent orders, viz., economic, social, and political to the study of stratification system. According to Weber, there were comparatively three distinct types of stratification and he propounds a three-fold conceptual scheme for their studies.

Thus to Weber, economic power is different from social and political powers. All the three may be closely correlated to each other, yet, they are analytically distinct categories or orders. Barber observes thus:

Weber's trinitarian model of social stratification - based on the concept of class, status and party-introduced a systematic, explicit, and necessary differentiation into stratification theory....Weber improved stratification theory by making both status and party (or power, as he also called this factor) as independent in principle as class, which for Marx was the sole independent factor. With this trinitarian view, Weber was able to show that any one of these factors could independently affect the other two and that any one of them could often be translated into, or exchanged for, either of the two.⁴⁸

Therefore, according to Weber's postulation, there are three dimensions of social stratification, such as *class*, *status*, and *party (or power)*. Tumin observes that "Weber saw property, power, and prestige as three separate though interacting bases on which hierarchies are created in any society. Property differences generate *classes*; power differences generate *political parties*; and prestige differences generate *status grouping* or strata."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Barber, Bernard, *op.cit.*, p. 290.

⁴⁹ Tumin, Melvin M., *op.cit.*, p. 13.

Here it is to be noted that Weber actually employs the term class, status, and party respectively to refer to the three dimensions - economic, social, and political. Hence, in order to grasp Weber's perspective on social stratification, it is imperative to understand and analyse the three concepts of class, status and party (or power), that he considers them as the three dimensions of social stratification. The following separate analysis of these three dimensions will explain the ideas of Weber on social stratification vividly.

i) *Class*: Weber perceives class in economic term. He restricted the concept of class for stratification determined solely by the economic factor. To him, economic stratification is a result of '*market situation*', which is characterised by competition between different individuals for gaining maximum benefits. Accordingly, class is engendered in market economies in which diverse people contest and strive for economic profit.

A class is conceived by Weber as category of people who have similar '*life chances*'. He regards it as being comprised of people or group of individuals, with common and similar life chances, as fixed and established by their power to dispose of goods and skills for the purpose of obtaining income. In other words, Weber defines a class as a group of people who share the same and equal placement in a market situation (economy) and by reasons of this, obtains congruous economic rewards. Hence, in Weber's perception an individual's class situation is intrinsically his '*market situation*'. Those persons who are in a common class position (situation) will necessarily share analogous life chances.

ii) *Status*: The second dimension of stratification according to Weber is based on the concept of status. He regards it as a distinct dimension of social stratification, which is different from economic stratification and equally based on power. Weber defines status as " the positive or negative estimation of honor, (sic) or prestige, received by individuals or positions of

people. Thus, it involves the felt perception of people. Those in a similar status tend to see themselves as located in a comparable position on the social hierarchy."⁵⁰

Thus, according to Weber social status is determined and affected by prestige, privileges and honour. Social prestige or honour is based on condition of livelihood, birth, family origin, ethnic, occupations, education, manner, etc., which in turn are associated to social status. Besides this, conventions and traditions are also connected with social status.

In Weber's perspective differences on the basis of prestige or honour creates status groups. He specifies status groups as groups of people whose members share similar life-styles and equal amounts of social prestige and honour. Status groups accordingly are ascertainable by specific or particular *styles of life*. Weber claims that the classic example of well established status group could be found in the *caste system* of traditional Indian society.

Weber expostulates that class and status distinction is intimately interconnected. To quote his words " Property as such is not always recognized as a status qualification, in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity".⁵¹ This shows that Weber acknowledged the basic importance of property distinctions in the constitution of status groups and in the eventual fixation of the lines of differentiation and privilege among themselves. He nevertheless, noted that people who share similar class situation would not essentially belong to common status group. Weber contends that status groups may or can generate demarcation within classes. He asserts that in some particular circumstances or condition status instead of class furnishes the groundwork for the constitution of social groups. Furthermore, the existence of varied status group in a specific social class can cause class

⁵⁰ Lipset, Seymour M., *op.cit.*, pp. 301-2.

⁵¹ Weber, Max, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

divisions, which may undermine class unity and thus lessen the possibility of class-awareness.

iii) *Party (or power)*: In Weber's postulation, party (or power) is the third dimension of social stratification. He expounds party as a political group or association whose members participate and share in the exercise of a definite amount of power. Particularly, party is concerned with affecting policies as well as framing decisions for the benefits and advantage of their own members. The foremost interests of every party are mainly to acquire social power. Weber argues that though related to stratification based on class and status, parties vary from both of them in diverse aspects. In Weber's words " whereas the genuine place of 'classes' is within the economic order, the place of 'status groups' is within the social order, that is, within the sphere of the distribution of 'honor' (sic)...But 'parties' live in a house of power."⁵²

Weber maintains that parties may or may not exhibit the interests of status groups or classes, however, compulsorily. He notes that there is a close link between classes, status groups and parties. To quote his words " Parties may represent interests determined through 'class situation' or 'status situation' and they may recruit their following, respectively, from one or the other. But they need be neither purely 'class' nor purely 'status' parties, and frequently they are neither."⁵³ Therefore, from Weber's treatment of parties it is apparent that the connection between political association and classes and status groups is not explicitly lucid. In as much as status groups have the capacity to break-up as well as cut across class barrier, so also parties can split and cut across both classes and status groups.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵³ Gerth H. and C.W. Mills, *From Max Weber*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 94.

To summarise, Weber posits three dimensions of social stratification, viz., class, status, and party (or power). They act and serve as a system of equals and correlates within which any problems and questions concerned with stratification can be studied and examined. Notwithstanding, the three aspects may be intimately related to each other yet they may function somewhat separately of one another. Therefore, Weber's exposition of classes, status groups and parties (or power) indicates that no particular assumption can identify and define their correlation clearly. In short, class, status and party (or powers) are three analytically distinct and definite forms or dimensions of social stratification according to Weber's perspective.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The subject of social stratification has a long historic background tracing back its genesis to the 18th century. It is explicit from their intellectual writings that 18th century scholars unequivocally perceived social inequality tantamount to natural inequality. In fact, one can trace the study of inequality to Greek philosophers- Plato and Aristotle. Plato visualised a society departmentalised into classes in which an individual's status, role and position are determined by his natural capabilities. Aristotle also presumes that men are by nature unequal and there was a natural ranked-order amongst them. His main concern is inequality in birth, strength, beauty etc., which were definitely the attributes of natural inequality. Other scholars like St. Thomas, St. Augustine, Machiavelli, Meiners and Dideort conceptualised inequality typically based on natural inequality rather than social inequality. An in depth study of their intellectual concepts reveal that they were expressing natural inequality instead of social inequality. Accordingly, they postulate that there is a logistic concurrence between natural inequality and social inequality.

J.J. Rousseau advances the first sociological explanation of the origin of social inequality. He argues that the concepts of both natural inequality and social inequality are distinct and espoused that social inequality justified and legitimised natural distinctions amongst the individuals in society. To him inequality is not natural but socially defined. He predicates that the genesis of social inequality lay in the growth and development of *private property*. It is the excrescence of *individual property ownership*, which engendered the accumulation of private wealth that finally gave rise to the emergence of class differentiation in the society. He maintains that natural inequality merely render a logistical basis to the constitution of and endurance to social inequality. Rousseau conjectures that naturally based inequalities between individuals are trivial and comparatively insignificant whilst socially devised inequalities furnished the vital basis for systems of social stratification in society.

This thesis of Rousseau was so compelling that it was accepted and supported by a large number of social thinkers belonging to the 18th and the 19th centuries and remained unchallenged for a long time. Scholars like James Millers in *The Origin and Ranks* (1771), A. Ferguson in *History of Civil Society* (1783), L. Von Stein in *Origin of Social Differences* (1851), Karl Marx in *Theory of Class Formation* (1870), and Friedrich Engels in *Marriage, Family, Private Property and State* (1882) partly or fully endorsed to the perspective of Rousseau.

Nineteenth century social thinkers specifically Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920) assumes that the study of inequality is essentially the study of class. Nonetheless both of them hypothesises two distinct theoretical paradigms to expound social inequality in society. Marx argues that inequality amongst the individuals in the society did not rest upon biological premise. Rather social inequality is created and justified by society itself. He advocates that *economic base* generated social inequality and the formation of class system in the society. To him social inequality is identical to economic inequality. Accordingly, the study of class is

synonymous to the study of social inequality. Marx's perception is generally regarded as *monodimensional* approach to social stratification.

Though Weber acquiesces with Marx's ideas on the crucial significance of the economic facets of stratification, nonetheless he expostulated that class is not the only means of social stratification. He adds two other dimensions – *status* and *party* as a means of social inequality. Thus he evince that class, status party are the three ideal forms of social stratification existent in every society. For him these three forms are distinct analytical categories. Accordingly, Weber's view is considered as *multidimensional* approach to the study of social stratification.

The central ideas of both Marx and Weber on the concepts of class, status and party have had a far-reaching and significant impact on the contemporary study, analysis and insight of social stratification.

Twentieth century scholars like Andre Beteille,⁵⁴ and Ralph Dahrendorf⁵⁵ have maintain that though social stratification, social inequality and class are interconnected the concepts are inherently different as per their applicability to societies are concerned.

Andre Beteille consider that social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. Ralph Dahrendorf advocates that social inequality is emanated from *power* distinctions amongst the people. Both of them assume that the study of social stratification is a specific branch of sociological sphere pertained to the study of a given form of social inequality.

⁵⁴ Beteille, Andre, *Social Inequality*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.

⁵⁵ Dahrendorf, R., *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959.

The protagonists of conflict approach to the study of social stratification such as Karl Marx,⁵⁶ G.E. Lenski⁵⁷ and C. Wright Mills⁵⁸ postulate that social inequality emerged in the society due to the monopolistic control over the means of production, goods and services by minority class in the society. However, their way of interpretations is not uniform. To Marx *economic inequality* is the crux of social stratification whereas Dahrendorf, Mills and Lenski perceive *power inequality* as the core basis of social inequality.

The proponents of functional approach of social stratification like Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore and W.Lloyd Warner have advocate that social stratification stems out of the need of the society rather than the needs of an individuals. They considered social stratification as a *functional necessity* of the society. Parsons view social stratification as ineluctable and functional for any society. To him stratification system is a generalised facet of the structure of society and thus is governed or directed by its value system. He asserts that social stratification system is just, fair, rational, ethical, ideal and legitimate since they are basically an expression of shared values. On the other hand, Davis and Moore consider system of stratification as a *mechanism* through which different positions are allocated by the society.

The literature on the system of stratification had been greatly influenced or affected by Marxian, Weberian and Functional approaches. In fact, almost all of the contemporary studies on stratification heavily relied upon any of these three approaches in understanding the empirical reality of social inequality.

At the outset, almost all the Indian sociologists and social anthropologists are deeply influenced by Marxian, Weberian and functional

⁵⁶ "A Note on Class", in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour M. Lipset, (eds.), *Class, Status, and Power*, New York: Free Press, 1966.

⁵⁷ Lenski, G. *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

⁵⁸ Mills, C. Wright, *The Power Elite*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.

approaches to the study of stratification system. The earlier studies on stratification system in Indian society are invariably on the lines of any of these three approaches. Literature on social stratification indicates that the structural-functional theory predominates in the 1950s, structuralism and Marxism in the 1960s, in the 1970s both Marxist and non-Marxist theories have been accepted.

Yogendra Singh in "*Sociology of Social Stratification in India- II*" (1981) ⁵⁹ used the sociology of knowledge framework for studying social stratification in India. He notes four theoretical methods, which concerned study of stratification system in Indian society viz. (i) structural- functional, (ii) structuralist, (iii) structural-historical and (iv) historical materialist or Marxist. Most of the early studies on caste stratification such as G.S. Ghurye's *Caste and Class in India* (1950) ⁶⁰, J.H. Hutton's *Caste in India: Its nature, function and origin* (1951) ⁶¹ etc., have relied on structural- functional approach. The work of Louis Dumont *Homo-Hierarchicus* (1970) ⁶² is the classic explication of structuralist perspective on social stratification. F.G.Bailey in his "*Closed Social Stratification in India*"(1963) ⁶³ regarded caste as a system of closed organic stratification. The Marxian orientation is espoused by a large number of scholars like D.P.Mukherji in his book *Diversities* (1958) ⁶⁴, A.R. Desai in his *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (1948) ⁶⁵, V.I. Pavlov in his *The Indian Capitalist Class* (1964) ⁶⁶, Charles Bettelheim in his *India Independent* (1968) ⁶⁷, Kathleen Gough in her article "*Modes of Production in Southern*

⁵⁹ Singh, Yogendra, ' Sociology of Social Stratification in India-II' (Draft). Prepared for Second Survey of Research in Sociology and Social Anthropology, New Delhi: ICSSR, 1981.

⁶⁰ Ghurye G.S., *Caste and Class in India*, Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1950.

⁶¹ Hutton J.H., *Caste in India: Its nature, function and origin*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1951.

⁶² Dumont Louis, *Homo-Hierarchicus*, London: Paladin, Granda Publishing Ltd., 1970.

⁶⁴ Mukherji D.P., *Diversities*, Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1958.

⁶⁵ Desai A.R., *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1948.

⁶⁶ Pavlov V.I. *The Indian Capitalist Class*, Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1964.

⁶⁷ Bettelheim, Charles, *India Independent*, London: Mac Gibbon and Kee, 1968.

India" (1980)⁶⁸, and Gail Omvedt in *Land, Caste and Politics in India* (1982)⁶⁹. In the book *The Agrarian Prospects in India* (1976)⁷⁰ Daniel Thorner apply the historical-dialectical approach to the study of class stratification. He furnish a threefold classification of rural populace – Malik (landlord), Kisan (peasant) and Mazdoor (agriculture workers)

Andre Beteille has applied Weber's trinitarian model of social stratification in his book *Caste, Class and power* (1966)⁷¹ He states that the hierarchies of caste, class and power overlap to some extent, yet also cut across. P.C. Aggarwal's *Caste, Religion and Power* (1971)⁷² is also considered as adopting Weberian paradigm of social stratification.

Structural-functional-Positivistic approach has been applied by Victor S.D'Souza to the study of system of stratification in his works *Social Structure of Planned City- Chandigard* (1967)⁷³ and " *Caste and Class: A reinterpretation*" (1967).⁷⁴ In Rajni Kothari's *Politics in India* (1970)⁷⁵ references to structural functionalism were found.

Structural- historical approach had been taken up by M.S.A. Rao in his book *Social movements and Transformation* (1979)⁷⁶, K.L. Sharma in his work " *Caste and class in India: some conceptual problems*" (1982)⁷⁷ and Satish Saberwal in his book " *Sociologists and inequality in India: The Historical context*" (1979)⁷⁸. This approach underlined the factor of time and

⁶⁸ Gough, Kathleen, ' Modes of Production in Southern India' *Economic and Political weekly*, 11 (5,6,7), 1980.

⁶⁹ Omvedt, Gail (ed.), *Land, Caste and Politics in India*, Delhi: Authors Guild Publications, 1982.

⁷⁰ Thorner, Daniel, *The Agrarian Prospects in India*, Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1976.

⁷¹ Beteille, Andre, *Caste, Class and Power*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1966.

⁷² Aggarwal P.C., *Caste, Religion and Power*, New Delhi: Sri Ram Centre for Industrial relation, 1971.

⁷³ D'Souza, Victor S., *Social Structure of Planned City- Chandigard*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1967.

⁷⁴ _____, ' Caste and Class: A reinterpretation', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 2(3,4), 1967.

⁷⁵ Kothari, Rajni, *Politics in India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970.

⁷⁶ Rao M.S.A., *Social movements and Transformation*, Delhi: Macmillan Co., 1979.

⁷⁷ Sharma K.L., *Caste and Class in India: Some Conceptual Problems in Social Stratification and Mobility*, (Reprint), New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1997.

⁷⁸ Saberwal, Satish, ' Sociologists and inequality in India: The Historical context', *Economic and Political weekly*, Vol. 14, Nos. 7&8, 1979.

the effects, which the economic, political and ideological forces had upon caste and class.

K.L. Sharma in his work *The changing Rural Stratification System* (1974)⁷⁹ classified the studies on system of stratification in India into two distinct orders: (i) the studies on caste stratification and, (ii) the multidimensional studies. The first studies converge on caste as the exclusive institution of social ranking. This approach is found in the works of Max Weber, A.L. Kroeber, Gunnar Myrdal, J.H. Hutton, A.M. Hocart, Louis Dumont, G.S.Ghurye, E.R. Leach, F.G. Bailey, MacKim Marriot, M.N. Srinivas and S.C. Dube. The second order does not regard caste as an all-inclusive basis of social stratification. It emphasise that style of life, education, occupation and economic position are computed for determining a person's rank in his community or caste. Andre Beteille's analysis of *Caste, Class and Power* (1966)⁸⁰, Anil Bhatt's study of *Caste, Class and Politics* (1975)⁸¹ and P.C. Aggarwal critique's of *Caste, Religion and Power* (1971)⁸² endorsed the multidimensional facets of social stratification.

The sociology of social stratification in India covers also the study of tribal social stratification. Important works on tribal social stratification are K.L. Sharma's "A Trend on Social Stratification and Class Formation Among Tribes in Middle India"(1992)⁸³, *Social Stratification and Mobility* (1997)⁸⁴, P.K. Bose's "Stratification Among Tribals of Gujarat" (1981)⁸⁵ and *Classes and Class Relations Among Tribes of Bengal* (1985),⁸⁶ N.K. Bose's *Tribal Life in India* (1971)⁸⁷, Surrajit Sinha's "Tribe-Caste and Tribe-Peasant

⁷⁹ Sharma K.L., *The Changing Rural stratification system*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1974.

⁸⁰ Beteille, Andre, *Caste, Class and Power*, Bombay Oxford University Press, 1966.

⁸¹ Bhatt, Anil, *Caste, Class and Politics*, Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1975.

⁸² Aggarwal P.C., *op. cit.*

⁸³ Sharma K.L. 'A Trend on Social Stratification and Class Formation Among Tribes in Middle India' (Mimeographed, unpublished), 1992,

⁸⁴ _____, *Social Stratification and Mobility*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1997.

⁸⁵ Bose P.K. 'Stratification Among Tribals of Gujarat', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XVI, No. 6, February 7, 1981.

⁸⁶ _____, *Classes and Class Relations Among Tribes of Bengal*, New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1985.

⁸⁷ Bose, N.K., *Tribal Life in India*, New Delhi: NBT., 1971.

Continua in Central India"(1965)⁸⁸, R.K. Prasad's "Some Aspects of Stratification and Interaction among the Parahiya of Palamau" (1975)⁸⁹, Ghanshyam Shah's "Tribal Identity or Class Differentiation: A Case Study of Chaudhri Tribe"(1979)⁹⁰, *Economic Differentiations and Tribal Identity* (1984)⁹¹ and "Stratification Among the Schedules in the Bharuch and Panch Mahals Districts of Gujarat" (1986)⁹², R.K.Bhadra and S.R. Mondal(ed)'s *Stratification, Hierarchy and Ethnicity in North – East India* (1991)⁹³, S.L. Doshi's "Ethnicity and Class among the Bhils of Rajasthan (1992)⁹⁴, Adityendra Rao's *Tribal social stratification* (1988)⁹⁵ and S.L. Sharma's *Ethnicity and Stratification Among Tribals in Urban Setting* (1996).⁹⁶

Since the advent of Britishers in Mizo hills a number of studies are conducted on the Mizo. At the outset the studies are carried out by English writers who came to Mizo hills as administrators; conspicuous amongst them are L.T. Lewin's *A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India* (1884)⁹⁷ and *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein* (1869),⁹⁸ C.S. Soppitt's *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East*

⁸⁸ Sinha, Surajit, 'Tribe-Caste and Tribe-Peasant Continua in Central India', *Man in India*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 1965.

⁸⁹ Prasad R.K. 'Some Aspects of Stratification and Interaction among the Parahiya of Palamau', *Journal of Social Research*, Vol. 18 (1), 1975.

⁹⁰ Shah, Ghanshyam, 'Tribal Identity or Class Differentiation: A Case Study of Chaudhri Tribe', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14, No. 7-8, February 1979.

⁹¹ _____, *Economic Differentiations and Tribal Identity*, New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1984.

⁹² _____, *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.

⁹³ Bhadra R.K. and Mondal S.R.(eds.), *Stratification, Hierarchy and Ethnicity in North – East India*, Delhi: Daya Publishing House, 1991.

⁹⁴ Doshi S.L., *Ethnicity and Class among the Bhils of Rajasthan* in K.L. Sharma (ed.) *Social Stratification in India*, (Reprint), Delhi: Manohar, 1992.

⁹⁵ Rao Adityendra, *Tribal social stratification*, Udaipur: Himanshu Publications, 1988.

⁹⁶ Sharma S.L., *Ethnicity and Stratification Among Tribals in Urban Setting*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1996.

⁹⁷ Lewin L.T., *A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India*, London: W.H. Allen, 1884.

⁹⁸ _____, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, Calcutta: Bengal Printing Press Company, 1869.

Frontier Districts (1884)⁹⁹, A.S. Reid's *Chin-Lushai Land* (1893)¹⁰⁰, J. Shakespear's *The Lushai Kuki Clans, Part I & II* (1912)¹⁰¹, N.E. Parry's *A monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* (1928)¹⁰² and *The Lakhers* (1932)¹⁰³ and A.G McCall's *Lushai Chrysalis* (1949)¹⁰⁴. Amongst the Indian studies J.D. Baveja's *The Land Where The Bamboo Flowers* (1970)¹⁰⁵, Chitta Ranjan Nag's *Impact of Christianity on the life of the Mizos* (1973)¹⁰⁶, V. Venkata Rao's " *The Sociology of Mizo Politics*" (1978)¹⁰⁷ and Suhas Chattopadhyaya's *The English and the Lushais(1844-1904)* (1969)¹⁰⁸. Significance writing amongst the Mizo themselves are Rev. Liangkhaia's *History of Lushais* (1951)¹⁰⁹, Zatlunga's *Mizo Chanchin* (1966)¹¹⁰, R. Thanhlira's " *Mizo Tribes of Assam*" (1969)¹¹¹, L.B. Thanga's *The Mizos* (1978)¹¹², Rev. Zairema's *God's Miracle in Mizoram* (1978)¹¹³, R. Vanlawma's *Ka Ram Leh Kei (My Country and I)* (1972)¹¹⁴, Pastor Challiana's *Pipu Nun* (1978)¹¹⁵ and K. Zawla's *Pipute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin* (1981).¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, an in depth analysis of the studies on the Mizo reveal that almost all of them are biased towards ethnography of the Mizo. They

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- ⁹⁹ Soppitt C.A., *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontier District*, Shillong: Government Press, 1884.
- ¹⁰⁰ Reid A.S., *Chin-Lushai Land*, Calcutta: Thacker & Spink Co., 1893.
- ¹⁰¹ Shakespear J., *The Lushai Kuki Clans, Part I & II*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1912.
- ¹⁰² Parry N.E., *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1928.
- ¹⁰³ _____, *The Lakhers*, London: Mcmillan & Co., 1932.
- ¹⁰⁴ McCall A.G., *Lushai Chrysalis*, London: Luzac & Co., 1949.
- ¹⁰⁵ Baveja J.D., *The Land Where The Bamboo Flowers*, Gauhati: Publication Board, 1970.
- ¹⁰⁶ Nag, Chitta Ranjan, *Impact of Christianity on the life of the Mizos*, Gauhati: (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), Gauhati University, 1973.
- ¹⁰⁷ Rao, Venkata V., *The Sociology of Mizo Politics* in S.M. Dubey (ed.), *North-East India-A Sociological Study*, Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1978.
- ¹⁰⁸ Suhas Chattopadhyaya, Suhas, *The English and the Lushais (1844-1904)*, Gauhati: (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), Gauhati University, 1969.
- ¹⁰⁹ Liangkhaia, Rev., *History of Lushais*, Aizawl: Hmingliana & Sons, 1951.
- ¹¹⁰ Zatlunga, *Mizo Chanchin*, Aizawl: Khuma Printing Press, 1966.
- ¹¹¹ Thanhlira R. " *Mizo Tribes of Assam*", in S. Barkataki (ed.), *Tribes of Assam*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1969.
- ¹¹² Thanga L.B., *The Mizos*, Gauhati: United Publishers, 1978.
- ¹¹³ Zairema, Rev. *God's Miracle in Mizoram*, Aizawl: Synod Press, 1978.
- ¹¹⁴ Vanlawma R. *Ka Ram Leh Kei (My Country and I)*, Aizawl: Zalen Printing House, 1972.
- ¹¹⁵ Challiana, Pastor, *Pipu Nun*, Aizawl: Trio Book House, 1978.
- ¹¹⁶ Zawla K., *Pipute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin*, Aizawl: H.A. Press, 1981.

hardly go beyond the ethnographical details. Most of the studies are devoted to descriptive paradigm rather than explicit analysis and interpretation of the Mizo society. Moreover, recent research on the Mizo society simply followed the conventional models of earlier writings rather than exploring systematic analysis and expositions of the Mizo society. They believe that Mizo society is small and homogeneous and there is no distinction on grounds of sex, kinship, clans, politico-economic, power and prestige. The Mizo emphasise common conscience and groups solidarity and do not much give importance to individualism. Hence, Mizo society is characterised by social equality rather than social inequality. However, this postulation of Mizo egalitarianism is a delusion.

The present investigation attempts to highlight the fact that *ranked differentiation* or *inequality* has been characteristic attributes of the Mizos. In fact, no detailed study has so far been taken up on this subject. It is felt therefore that an enquiry on social stratification will be of crucial significance for the understanding of the past and of the changing nature of the Mizo society. This study will be the first empirical research on social stratification amongst the Mizos.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present research is an attempt to study the existence of inequalities and the process of social stratification amongst the Mizos in Mizoram. It tries to explore, examine and to analyse the genesis, cause, development, dimensions, impact and changing pattern of social stratification system in order to understand and expound the true nature and depiction of social stratification in Mizo society. The main objectives of the present research investigation are:

- (i) To trace, explore and delineate the traditional system of social inequalities that existed among the Mizos in the past.

(ii) To analyse the changes and emerging trends of social inequalities among the Mizo, particularly after they came in contact with the British and the Christian Missionaries. Our hypothesis is that inequality has increased in Mizo society, specifically since the arrival of the Britishers and after the attainment of independence, which introduced a modern political system amongst the Mizo.

METHODOLOGY

Since our objective is to describe and analyse the traditional system and changing patterns of social stratification amongst the Mizo, we considered the whole area of the state of Mizoram as the field of our study. Mizoram is situated in the Northeast corner of India. It has a total geographical area of 21,087 square kilometres. Also has a total population of 891,058 out of which 459,783 are male and 431,275 are female. The urban population is 3,17,948 whereas rural population accounts for 3,71,810. It has a high literacy rate of 88.49 per cent, out of which 90.69 per cent are male and female 86.13 per cent.¹¹⁷ The State is divided into eight Districts and three Autonomous District Councils.

(i) *Selection of sample*: The present enquiry is mainly based on purposive sampling technique. We have selected respondents from four urban areas namely Aizawl, Lunglei, Lawngtlai and Saiha, and seven rural areas viz., Lungtian, Bualpui (Ng), Lungzarhtum, Theiriak, Buarpui, Thingsai and Kawlkulh villages so as to represent the universe of our study. That is, we have covered four towns and seven villages, which are located in Northern, Eastern and Southern parts of the state. We considered that these eleven

¹¹⁷ Census of India, 2001 (Provisional).

areas out of the universe could represent the Mizos of the Mizoram and suffice our present study.

From each village, we have selected ten (10) respondents each and thirty-five (35) each from each town. Thus, we have selected a total of two hundred and ten (210) respondents as a whole for our inquiry. We carefully selected the samples in such away that it included the people of different ethnic groups of the Mizo. The Lusei, Hmar, Ralte and Paite mainly occupy the northern villages; whereas Lai and Mara occupy the Southern most villages. From urban areas, particularly Aizawl town, Mizos belonging to different ethnic groups are included in our sample. The fieldwork has been conducted between June 2000 to February 2001 and April 2001 to March 2002; and all the relevant primary data were collected during the said period.

(ii) *Collection of data*: Our fieldwork has been carried out in both urban and rural areas within Mizoram state. With the help of an interview-schedule, fieldwork was conducted. The study is based mainly on the data collected both from primary and secondary sources. Most of the primary data were collected through an interview schedule administered personally by the researcher and by means of a questionnaire. All the 210 respondents are interviewed. Therefore, we can say that our study is based on information gathered from 210 respondents. This has been supplemented by case studies, informal interviews of some knowledgeable persons and by field observation. Through informal interviews of some knowledgeable persons, we have gathered invaluable information, and this greatly contributed to the reliability of our research enquiry.

Secondary sources are mainly drawn from Government records, District and State statistical reports, Census reports, published materials, unpublished documents, books, seminar papers, journals, reports of commissions and committees, various articles and other relevant sources.

CHAPTER-VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The research on the system of social stratification amongst the Mizo is an important subject of study. It is interesting and significant in the sense that no extensive study has been done so far regarding the subject on social stratification in Mizo society. In the present study an attempt has been made to highlight the process of social stratification among the Mizos specifically to examine and analyse the genesis, dimensions, development, impact and its changing pattern in the Mizo society.

To summarise the research study, the thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is an introductory part, which consists of the concept and theories of social stratification. It also discusses genesis, types and dimensions of social stratification. Theoretical framework like Marxian approach, Functional approach and Weberian approach are analysed. Review of literature, main objective and methodology used in the investigation are also included. Chapter two describes a characterisation of Mizoram and the people. It deals with the historical, ethnological, cultural, religious, political and socio-economic background of the Mizos. Chapter three deals with the system of social stratification amongst Indian tribals. The fourth chapter delineates and analyses social stratification prevalent in traditional Mizo society. The fifth chapter underlines the emerging pattern of social inequalities amongst the Mizos since the arrival of British and Christian missionaries, also after the acquisition of independence right up to the present day. And the sixth chapter includes the summary and conclusion of the thesis.

The concept of social stratification pertains to the division of group of individuals into strata or layers. Social stratification denotes a system of

ranked statuses by which the members of a society are placed in higher and lower positions in a hierarchical order in the social structure. Income, wealth, property, occupation, education, socio-economic conditions, political power and ethnicity are some of the important variables, which determine the ranking in a society.

Our study exhibited that traditional Mizo society was not characterised by social inequality as claimed by all writers on history of Mizo society. Nonetheless contrary to the claim made by the colonial writers as well as Mizo historian, it was found that traditional Mizo society was in fact marked by system of social inequality rather than social equality.

Limited acquaintance and understanding of the Mizo social system led the earlier writers and contemporary scholars on Mizo society to conjecture that traditional Mizo society was attributed by collective consciousness, solidarity and communal ownership of property. Accordingly, they postulated that social equality rather than inequality typified Mizo society.

Nevertheless, the present study showed the shortcoming and fallacy of such depictions of the Mizo society. In actuality, social inequality or distinction on the basis of power, status and prestige has been a part and parcel of the traditional Mizo society. On the basis of our data we could classify Mizo society into the following strata:

- i) *Upper strata*: Lal (chief), Upas, Thangchhuahpa, Puithiam, Ramhual, Zalen, Pasaltha and Thirdeng.
- ii) *Middle strata*: Hnamchawm (commoners)
- iii) *Lower strata*: Bawi and Sal (Slave).

The upper strata were ranked highest in the social hierarchical order of the social system. They were accorded high status and enjoyed tremendous privileges and prestige in the society. The administrative affair of the village was under the governance of the Upper strata. Almost all the sub-systems of society viz., social, economic, politic and legal were predominated by this stratum. Hence, we can conclude that they were the privileged strata in traditional Mizo society.

The chief (Lal) was the supreme administrative head of the apex legal authority whose words and commands becomes law in his village. He was the pivot of legal authority and the fountainhead of justice. He was everything to his subjects and in fact, the whole administrative machinery orbited around the chief who was considered as all-powerful and supreme. Being the supreme head of the village the chief enjoyed high status and immense privileges in the traditional social structure of the village. He was entitled to get specific dues/taxes from the villagers. The significant dues received by the chief are *fathang*, *sachhiah*, *chichhiah*, *khuaichhiah* and *sechhiah*.

In order to maintain and preserve the purity of their blood, the Mizo chief practised *clan endogamy*. They strictly observed this rule and failure to follow this would lead to excommunication from the clan. The consequence of this ostracism was to lose status, prestige and privileges. Accordingly, marital alliance between the chief's clan and commoner's clan hardly took place. It was noted therefore that clan exogamy was not existent as far as the chief's clans are concerned.

The *Upas* were powerful and influential persons in the traditional Mizo village next to the village chief. They were selected or appointed by the chief to aid and advice him in the execution of his duties and functions. Though the chief had the liberty of selecting the *Upas*, nonetheless he usually chose from wealthy persons, warriors, good hunters and

thangchhuahpa. All the important administrative decisions-executive, legislative and judicial problems in the village are adjudicated by the chief with the aid and advice of the *Upas*.

The *Upas* have the privilege to select a plot of land for jhuming after the chief and they were exempted from paying varied dues to the chief. Furthermore, the most competent or efficient *Upa* who was favourite by the chief was given special dispensation to establish a hamlet adjacent the main village known as '*khawper*'. Such *Upa* was called '*Belrawh mualkil*' and, if he was accredited to exact '*sachhiah*' dues then he was known as '*sangal khawnghrang*'. In this way, they became petty chiefs in their own right.

Puithiam was one of the most important officials in the administration of traditional Mizo society. The *Puithiam* played a significant role in the religious life of the society. The principal functions and duties of the *Puithiam* was to conduct ceremonies and to perform varied sacrifices on behalf of the community. Since there was an intimate affinity between their religion, economy and political life, the duties and roles of the *Puithiam* was very important and essential for the smooth functioning of village administration. As a matter of fact, he always took part in the deliberations of village official meeting. Thus, the *Puithiam* occupied an important place in the village administrative system. There were two types of *Puithiam*- *sadawt* and *bawlpu*. The post of *sadawt* was higher than the office of *bawlpu*. The *Puithiam* was given in paddy for his services.

The *thangchhuahpa* too occupied high status in the traditional social structure of the Mizo. On account of their high status and prestige the chief usually selected them as his *Upas*. The *thangchhuahpa* enjoyed various privileges. They are entitled to wear a specific style of striped clothes, to make windows in the side of their houses according to their wishes, to construct dividing walls in their houses, to elevate a shelf at the end of their

beds, erect a beam on their veranda and to enter *Pialral* right away without any tribulations. They are also entitled to seat next to the village chief on social gathering and festive occasions.

Nonetheless, to acquire *thangchhuah* title was not easy as it entailed spending of a large amount of material wealth and resources. In actuality, those persons who possessed adequate economic resources and surplus wealth alone were able to obtain the title of *thangchhuah*. This evidently demonstrated that only rich and affluent people like chief and some *Upas* could attain the *thangchhuah* title.

The *Ramhuals* were expert jhum-cultivators who were appointed by the village chief, usually from those families who were economically well off and possessed large labour forces. They enjoyed the privilege to select jhuming spot before the *hnamchawm*. Nevertheless, they were compelled to give larger *fathang* to the chief. Hence, to become *Ramhual* a man should be economically better off and self-reliant. The *Ramhual* are regarded as 'men of possessions' and by virtue of their material possession and beneficial services rendered to the chief, they become the sole economic advisors to the chief. Accordingly they acquired high status and prestige and came to be recognised as dominant and distinguished figures in the village.

The *Zalen*, which means 'free men', are exempted from payment of *fathang* to the chief. However, they are obliged to render any kinds of assistance or help to the chief if he befell into any kind of hardship, difficulties, complications and dilemmas. Customarily the *Zalens* were appointed from the wealthy and affluent persons. Thus *Zalens* were the rich and materially better off families in the village.

Accordingly, the institution of *Ramhual* and *Zalen* were exclusively linked with the economic aspects of the chief administration. Their significance and importance in the social hierarchy of the village could not

be disparaged so long as they were considered as lifeline or back-bone of their economy. They constituted special strata and indeed, we could call them as the economic elite of traditional Mizo society. The *Hautla*, which was purely a local arrangement, could also be included in these strata.

The *Thirdeng* was an expert blacksmith whose main duty was to make and repair all types of villager's tools, instruments and weapons. As remuneration to his valuable services the *Thirdeng* received a basket of rice known as '*khawlai buh*' and was warranted to get a small portion of meat in every animal killed by the villagers called '*Thirdeng sa*'

In the olden days the Mizo raided each other's village and practised 'head hunting'. The *Pasaltha* played an important role in the socio-politico-economic setting up of the village. The burden or responsibility of village safety, protection and security was to a great extent lies in the hand of the *Pasalthas*. They played a decisive role either in the safety or glory of a village. Because of their significant contributions for the security and smooth functioning of socio-politico-economic administration of the village, they were ranked very high in the social hierarchical order of the society. Accordingly, they commanded high status and prestige in the social structure of traditional society. The *Pasaltha* indeed, could enhance the prestige of the village considerably.

Nevertheless the indepth study of the social structure of traditional Mizo society illustrated that the status of *Upa*, *Thangchhuahpa*, *Ramhual*, *Zalen* and *Pasaltha* were intertwined and cut across each other. The boundaries or demarcation lines between them were not clearly defined or specified. In other words, there was no clear-cut borderline between the status of these strata. Accordingly, one person could combine in him both the status of *Upa* and *Thangchhuahpa* or *Thangchhuahpa* and *Pasaltha* and so on. This indicates that the relationship amongst these strata was rather fluid and flexible than specific and rigid.

The *middle strata* were mainly composed of the *hnamchawm* (commoners) who constituted the majority of the society in the traditional Mizo society. They were generally drawn from different people belonging to various clans and sub-clans. Though the *thlangau* occupied the status of chief's official in the administration of the village he was considered as belonging to lower position in the hierarchical arrangement of the social system. Although each household gave him a basket of paddy as a salary for his service, his occupation was never viewed as respected or dignified profession. Hence, no villager coveted the *thlangau* job. In fact, the *thlangaus* were considered as fools and half-witted. It was therefore proper to place them in lower strata of the society.

The *lower strata* of the society were composed of *bawi* and *sal*. They were the under-privileged strata of the society. They were accorded low status and virtually deprived of freedom and liberty. Hence, they belonged to the lowest strata of the society. They were like a property, which could be owned and oppressed by the owner. The institution of *bawiship* was inheritable. That is, once a person became a *bawi*, automatically his descendants from generation to generation would become a *bawi*. There were three distinct kinds of *bawi*- *inpuichhung bawi*, *chemsen bawi*, and *tuklut bawi*. Furthermore, related to the three types of *bawis*, there were two other categories of *bawi* such as *chhuak bawi* and *fatlum bawi*.

The *sal* composed of those persons who became captives in inter-village feud and squabble. Literally, the epithet *sal* refers to slavery. Contrasted to *bawi*, who are owned by the chief only, the *sal* could be kept by each and everybody in the village. As a matter of fact, the *sals* were the private property of their captors. They did not possess personal liberty and freedom and thus could be sold and bought like a commodity.

On the basis of village planning and layout we could detect the kernel of *social segregation* in traditional Mizo society. The villages were arranged in such away that *hnamchawm* did not have the prerogative to select house plot as they desired. This was mainly because certain specific sites were reserved for the privileged strata of the society. Moreover, villagers belonging to the same clan generally resided in the same neighbourhood. Accordingly almost all the localities were named and called after each particular clan's name. The different localities were known as 'Hmar veng' 'Paite veng' and so on.

Thus the traditional Mizo village was comprised of various localities populated by different clans who observed and followed their own distinct system of custom, norm, belief and practices as far as possible within their respective neighbourhood. This showed the existence of *clan segregation* based on residential settlement in traditional villages of the Mizo.

The chief and the other privileged strata resided in a separate locality known as '*mual veng*' whereas lower strata like widows and orphans usually dwelled at the outskirts of the village. In fact, social interrelation and interaction between these strata were relatively less.

As compared to man, a woman is accorded low status in traditional Mizo society. The Mizo society followed patrilineal and patri-local system of descent and kinship. The women did not have the right to partake in the socio-economic and politico-religious affairs of the society. They could not possess property of their own and did not have the right to inherit of family property.

The traditional system of social stratification was altered after the coming of the Britishers and Christian missionaries in Mizo hills. The advent of the Britishers and Christian missionaries had a profound and far reaching impact on the history of the Mizo. Due to contact with the western

civilization the social structure of traditional Mizo society markedly changed.

Their age-old customs, social institutions, system of beliefs and practices were discarded or modified. The institutions of *chiefship*, *bawship*, *sal* and *zawlbuk* have disappeared. The practices of inter-village feud, head-hunting, sacrifices to *Ramhuai*, *thangchuah ceremonies*, *fano dawi* and *kawngpui* siam ceremonies, observance of *kut* (festivals) like *chapchar kut*, *Pawl kut* and *mim kut* were either totally abandoned or reshaped.

This process of change had tremendous implications on the system of social stratification among the Mizos. It radically altered the power structure, ranking system or hierarchical schema of the society. In the beginning, the British administration employed the policy of '*non-intervention*' in the internal administration of the village. They empowered the village chief to retain their traditional authorities and powers in maintaining internal governance and administration of the village. Thus, the chief enjoyed some of their powers in the formative phase of British administration. However, the policy of '*non-interference*' and the upholding of chiefship was apparently for their own advantage and convenience of their administration.

After consolidating their administration, the Britishers interfered in the internal administration of the village by introducing *Land settlement* in 1898-99. According to this provision, the chief's land and jurisdiction were demarcated by the British government. The chief's right of dividing his own land was taken away by the British. Consequently, the British constituted a large number of new chiefs who were generally known as '*Hnamchawm Lal*'. These new chiefs were mainly drawn from commoner strata. This greatly lowered the whole status and prestige of the traditional chiefs.

The Britishers usurped the power and authority of the village chief. They had the power to appoint new village chief and the authority to penalise and dismiss them according to their discretion. In fact, the Britishers became the 'chief makers' or 'chief movers'. Though the chiefs were empowered to continue their rule in the internal administration of the village, they had to govern and administer in accordance with the wishes and desires of the Britishers. During the British administrative period the top British bureaucrats the *Bawrhsap* (Superintendent) wielded power and authority over village's administration. In fact, the power and authority of village chief was ceded to the *Bawrhsap*. Therefore, village chiefs were compelled to recognise a higher and more powerful authority above them. This considerably belittled their status, which in turn debilitated their influence in the society.

Besides *bawrhsap* the introduction of other salaried officials such as circle interpreter, circle chaprasi, village writer (*khawchhiar*), Lushai clerk coupled with the imposition of tribute/ taxation and coolie labour greatly affected the power structure of traditional Mizo society. The introduction of coolie labour and taxation by the British administration by-passing the chief's position exhibited the eroding power, authority and prestige of the chiefs. This obviously marked the transposition of power from the chief to the Britishers. Slowly and steadily the powers and rights of the chief were rescinded and taken away by the Britishers.

Thus the traditional power structure and hierarchical schema of the traditional Mizo society were deranged and disturbed. The traditional privileged strata no longer commanded high status, prestige and privileges as they were replaced by the new privileged classes drawn mainly from the commoner strata. They were educated from missionary school and obtained 'salaried jobs' both from the British government and Christian

missionaries. Besides these, some of them pursued petty-trade as their professions.

Another phenomenon that greatly altered the traditional hierarchical power was the emergence of political consciousness amongst the Mizos towards the concluding period of British administration. Notwithstanding the squashing of any effort to political movement in the Mizo hills, political consciousness among the Mizos was imperceptibly gaining ground. Varied factors such as first and second World Wars, exposure and experience beyond the confines of the hills, obtaining government offices/jobs, circulation of cash money, frantic political avocation and a number of developmental projects started by the government greatly imparted political consciousness in the mind of the Mizos. However, the genuine expression of political awareness emerged when Young Lushai Association (YLA) was established on 15th, June 1935. At the end of Second World War YLA started to get involved in political activities of the days. When they met McDonald, the then Superintendent of the hills discussed their desire to have a democratic system of administration. This political frame of mind triggered the genesis of political party in Mizoram. The first political party called *Mizo Common People's Union* was constituted on 9th April 1946, which later on renamed as *Mizo Union* on 11th April 1946.

The incipient political consciousness in the very outset was directed against the traditional privileged strata. As discussed earlier the introduction of mass education, monetary economy, new occupation like salaried jobs, commercialization of agriculture, generated the emergence of a new privileged class. There was a mutual distrust between the traditional elites and the new elites. This was mainly due to the fact that the new elites wanted acquiescence and appreciation of their new found status and prestige in the society. Thus, there was intense power struggle between the traditional elites and new elites at the close of the British regime in

Mizoram. It was therefore noted that the antagonism between the traditional elites and new elites was the end result of power conflicts. When the new elites evolved in Mizo society, they could not be accommodated in the hierarchical order of the village. Hence, to acquire new status and position for themselves the new elite tried to derange the traditional elites from their high status and position. Thus, the foremost aim of the new elites was to seize power, authority and prestige from the traditional elites.

As mentioned before the power conflict between the traditional elites and new elites was mainly because of the fact that the traditional socio-political framework had not been flexible enough to accommodate the emerging new elites particularly educated elites in the power structure of the society. This rigidity greatly disappointed the emerging new elites who became determined to fight for power in order to secure a higher status and position for themselves in the society. In their struggle for power, status and privileges the new elites emerged victorious, as they possessed modern education took advantage of modern political system and commanded popular support in their fight against traditional privileged strata.

Nevertheless, it was noted that the transposition of traditional system of social stratification greatly broadened the wedge between the privileged class and unprivileged class. This was primarily because stratification system no longer specifically based on status but rather it was based on class differentiation. It was observed that there was an intimate relation between economic, education and political power in Mizo society.

Thus at the concluding period of the British era and the dawn of modern political system Mizo society was increasingly differentiated on the basis of education, occupation, socio-economic and political power.

It is observed that social distance on the basis of *religious denomination* was existent in present day Mizo society. Though almost all

the Mizos are Christians, nonetheless they are divided into various different denominations. The adherents of varied denominations zealously committed to their own specific denomination and usually have biased and prejudiced attitudes towards people belonging to other denominations. This greatly affected the process of social interaction and inter-relation amongst followers of different denominations in the society. Though the basic tenets of Christianity were the same, different denominations have their own specific doctrine, which they ardently followed and guarded. To propagate and disseminate their specific doctrine and versions almost all the denominations employed whatever means, without confirming whether it was good or bad, moral or immoral. Thus, there was an intense power struggle amongst different denominations, which resulted in the division of their members in the society.

It is thus observed that incessant power struggle and conflict was a part and parcel of religious denomination's history in Mizoram. The main factors of power struggle were different interpretations of Bible, different doctrines, and the so-called expansion campaign undertaken by almost all denominations within and outside Mizoram. Because of this power conflict their members are slowly differentiated and observed social distance amongst themselves. This had a far-reaching effect on the process of socialisation, way of inter-action, pattern of inter-relationship, voting behaviour and pattern of mate selection amongst the Mizos. It was noted that at the time of General election the electorate usually inclined to vote those contestants belonging to their denomination irrespective of party affiliation. Moreover, power struggle was not only between inter-denomination but also within denomination. Usually it resulted in the setting up of new separate denomination by the nonconformist leaders and their followers. Thus members belonging to the same denomination earlier are divided and differentiated again.

It is also found out that distinction or cleavage within one's own denomination also existed. Income, wealth and property played an important role for an individual to move upward in the hierarchical order of the church. Accordingly, to acquire the position of *Kohhran upa* and *Rawngbawltu*, a person was not judged by his commitment, virtue, integrity and honesty but by his wealth, income and property.

It is noted that *educational inequality* was emerging in Mizo society. Contrary to the principle of modern education that rests upon social equality, education in Mizoram generated social inequality. Educational system did not really provide equal opportunity to every one. Education can be considered as one of the mechanism through which social inequality was accelerated and perpetuated in Mizo society. An individual's educational attainment and success greatly depended upon his family background, socio-economic conditions, political link, property, wealth and income. Through education wealthy persons acquired higher prestige and respectable in the society.

It is therefore seen that the existing educational system is unequivocally biased in favour of the privileged class of the society. Instead of becoming mass phenomenon, it became to a great extent elite based. In actuality, it did not much improve the status and position of the unprivileged class in the society.

It is noted that social stratification based on *sub-ethnicity* was present in contemporary Mizo society. It was observed that there was a mutual distrust and antagonism amongst different sub-ethnic groups of the Mizo. This schism was more definite between the Lusei, Lai, Mara and Hmar. The latter three sub-ethnic groups emphasised that the Lusei generally monopolised and dominated every facet of the society. However, the Lusei on their part considered themselves as true representatives of the Mizo and champion for the cause of Mizo unification and integration.

Accordingly, they allege the Lai and Mara have a narrow, biased and prejudiced mentality causing to the emergence and development of pax-Mizo society.

Social stratification based on *Gender inequality* persists in contemporary Mizo society. The women continued to occupy low and inferior status in the patri-centric Mizo society. Empirical evidence indicates that politically, economically and religiously women are differentiated and discriminated. They do not have the rights to inherit family's property, they can not become *Kohhran upa* (church elder), can not become Pastors. *Uire* (adultery) can be committed by the women only and her husband had the sole right to divorce her according to his discretion. In the political field, since the attainment of Union Territory and Statehood, only one woman became Minister in the state. This manifests that they are clearly discriminated in *decision-making processes* in the society.

Thus from the foregoing explications it was clear that traditional system of social stratification was altered after the coming of the Britishers and Christian missionaries as well as the introduction of new political system in the Mizo hills. The eradication of some of the institutions and practices, stoppage of nomadic life, introduction of Christianity, money economy, mass education, new occupations and the dawn of political consciousness significantly transformed the traditional paradigm of social stratification. Because of this processes traditional power structure was radically transposed. Novel ranking system based on education, occupation, socio-economic clout, income and wealth and political power emerged specifically distinct from traditional schema of ranking. Accordingly, traditional privileged strata are being replaced by a new set of leaders who are essentially the products of Britishers, Christian missionaries and new political system at the closing period of British sovereignty. Based on criteria like education, occupation, income, wealth

and property, political ascendancy etc., we can classify Mizo society into two distinct classes- new elites and the common class.

It is therefore noted that vertical social mobility both upward and downward had existed at the time of British rule in the Mizo hills. Because of lack of education and ignorant about the benefits of money economy and new political system the traditional elites scaled down in the social ladder. Consequently, they had lost their status, prestige and privileges. On the other hand, the new elites took full advantage of the systems and hence moved upward in the social hierarchical order of the society. As a result they acquired high status, prestige and privileges in the society.

Nevertheless, the system of social stratification in Mizo society is more complex since the attainment of independence. After independence, the Mizo had further experienced social change. This was mainly due to further and more political modernisation, diversification of occupation, multiplication of market facilities, forces of modernisation and various constitutional provisions. This change however created more social inequality and social differentiation amongst the Mizo. In fact, its had intensified social inequality in Mizo society. Accordingly, Mizo society is markedly divided on the basis of income, wealth, property, education, socio-economic standing, political power and so on.

The socio-economic condition, political power, occupational standing, educational attainment, income, wealth and property are the main principal basis of emerging pattern of stratification system amongst the Mizos after Indian independence. Accordingly, an individual who possesses considerable income, wealth, property, and political power is accorded high status and thus enjoys prestige in the society.

The above variables along with political modernization and various developmental schemas have generated social distinctions on class lines. Due to uneven distribution of resources sanctioned by the government as a

part of developmental programmes, the present Mizo society is increasingly divided on class lines. It was noted that small sections of the Mizo benefited from these projects and rose in the socio-economic and politico-religious hierarchical model of the Mizo society.

It is also found that in contemporary Mizo society, Protective discrimination policy greatly contributed for social inequality rather than upliftment of Mizo society as a whole. In fact, implementation of various developmental schemes as a part of reservation policy had accelerated social inequality and class distinction amongst the Mizos.

The new administrative system, Christianity, education, occupation, money economy and so on become the source of power, influence and authority in Mizo society. The new yardstick of social ranking connoted income, wealth, property, occupation, education, political power and socio-religious prestige. The level of educational attainment, political mobility, occupational diversification and different levels of income, wealth and property helped the process of class formation in Mizo society. Social stratification amongst the Mizos is now increasingly determined by class rather than status.

We can conclude therefore that system of social stratification based mainly on status was existent in traditional Mizo society. Nevertheless, the traditional system of social stratification was transposed after the advent of Britishers and Christian missionaries and the development of political system. Thus, these three forces coupled with various government developmental schemes generated a new form of social inequality based on education, occupation, political power, income, wealth and property in contemporary Mizo society. This connotes that, on the basis of education, occupation, political power, income, wealth and property, social ranking is determined. This clearly indicates the shift from status based stratification to class stratification in contemporary Mizo society.