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# UNIT 25 AGRARIAN CLASS STRUCTURE

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## Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Notions of Agrarian Societies
  - 25.2.1 The Classical Notion of Undifferentiated Peasant Society
  - 25.2.2 Feudalism as a Type of Agrarian Society
  - 25.2.3 Contemporary Agrarian Societies in a Sub-Sector of Modern Capitalist System
  - 25.2.4 Agriculture and Market
- 25.3 The Concept of Class and its Application in Analyses of Agrarian Societies
- 25.4 Agrarian Social Structure and Change in India
  - 25.4.1 Agrarian Changes During the British Colonial Rule
  - 25.4.2 Agrarian Changes After Independence
- 25.5 Agrarian Class Structure in India
- 25.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.7 Key Words
- 25.8 Further Readings
- 25.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 25.0 OBJECTIVES

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This Unit provides an introduction to the social structure of agrarian societies by focussing specifically on :

- what do we mean by agrarian social structure?
- notions and conceptions of agrarian societies,
- agrarian class structures and their transformations in India.

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## 25.1 INTRODUCTION

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What do we mean by agrarian social structure: In very simple words the agrarian societies are those settlements and groupings of people who earn their livelihood primarily by cultivating land and by carrying out related activities like animal husbandry. **Agricultural production or cultivation is obviously an economic activity.** However, like all other economic activities, agricultural production is carried out in a framework of social relationships. **Those involved in cultivation of land also interact with each other in different social capacities.** Some may self-cultivate the lands they own while others may employ wage labourers or give their land to tenants and sharecroppers. Not only do they interact with each other but they also have to regularly interact with various other categories of people who provide them different types of services required for cultivation of land. For example, in the old **system of jajmani relations** in the Indian countryside, those who owned and cultivated land had to depend for various services required at different stages of cultivation on the members of different caste groups.

### Box 25.01

The cultivators were obliged to pay a share of the farm produce to different caste groups, in exchange of labour. Similarly, most of the cultivating farmers today sell a part of their farm yield in the market to earn cash income with which they buy modern farm yield in the market to earn cash income with which they buy modern farm inputs and goods for personal consumption. These relationships of farmers with the market are often mediated through middlemen.

All these interactions are carried out in an institutional set-up. The most important aspects of this social or institutional framework of agriculture are the patterns of land ownership and the nature of relationships among those who own or possess land and those who cultivate the lands. Agricultural practices and the land ownership patterns in a given society evolve historically over a long period of time. Those who own land invariably command a considerable degree of power and prestige in the rural society. It is these sets of relationships among the owners of land and those who provide various forms of services to the land-owning groups that we call the agrarian class structure.

## 25.2 NOTIONS OF AGRARIAN SOCIETIES

Unlike the modern industrial societies where it is rather easy to identify various class groups (such as, the working class, the industrial and the middle classes), the social structures of agrarian societies are marked by diversities of various kinds. The nature of agrarian class structure varies a great deal from region to region. The situation is made even more complex by the facts that in recent times the agrarian structure in most societies have been experiencing fundamental transformations. In most developed societies of the West, agriculture has become a rather marginal sector of the economy, employing only a very small proportion of their populations, while in the Third world countries it continues to employ large proportions of their populations, though the significance of agriculture has considerably declined. Thus, to develop a meaningful understanding of the agrarian social structure, we need to keep in mind the fact that there is no single model of agrarian class structure that can be applied to all the societies.

### Activity 1

Visit a village close to your residence and try to ascertain various classes in it. How is it related to caste in that village? Write down your findings in a note and compare it with other students in your study centre.

### 25.2.1 The Classical Notion of Undifferentiated Peasant Society

Anthropologists developed the classical notion of peasant society during the post-war period (after 1945). This notion was largely derived from the Western experience. Peasant societies were seen to have emerged after disintegration of the tribal form of social and economic life and when human beings began to earn their living by cultivating land. They also started living in small settlements. Further, the typical peasant societies were seen to be pre-industrial in nature. As the economies developed with the onset of the industrial revolution, the traditional "peasant way of life" gradually began to change, giving way to the modern urban life styles.

Peasantry, in its anthropological perspective, was essentially an undifferentiated social formation. In terms of their social and economic organisation, peasants were all like each other. They cultivated their own plots of land with the labour of their families and produced primarily for their own consumption. In other words, there were no significant class differences within the peasantry. While internally the peasantry was more or less homogenous, peasant societies were invariably dominated from outside by the urban elite. Eric Wolf points out that unlike the "primitive communities" peasant societies produced surplus (more than their consumption/subsistence requirements), which was generally transferred to the dominant rulers in the city, mostly in the form of land tax or land revenue.

In cultural and social terms, peasants were seen to be fundamentally different from the modern entrepreneurs. Their attitude towards work and their relationship with the land was very different from that of the profit-seeking entrepreneurs of the modern Industrial societies. Robert Redfield, who pioneered anthropological research on peasantry, argued that "the peasantry was a universal human-type". Peasants were attached to land through bonds of sentiments and emotions. Agriculture, for them, was "a livelihood and a way of life, not a business for profit".

Following this "classical discussion", Theodor Shanin developed an "Ideal Type" of the peasant society. He defined peasants as "small agricultural producers, who, with the help of

simple equipment and the labour of their families, produced mostly for their own consumption, direct or indirect, and for the fulfillment of obligations to holders of political and economic power". He further identified four interdependent facets of peasant societies.

- i) Peasant family works as the basic multi-dimensional unit of social organisation. The family farm operates as the major unit of peasant property, production, consumption, welfare, social reproduction, identity, prestige, sociability and welfare. The individual tends to submit to a formalised family role-behaviour and patriarchal authority.
- ii) Land husbandry works as the main means of livelihood. Traditionally defined social organisation and a low level of technology. Traditionally defined social organisation and a low level of technology characterise peasant farming.
- iii) Peasant societies follow specific cultural patterns linked to the way of life of a small rural community. Peasant culture often conforms to the traditional norms of behaviour and is characterised by face to face relations.
- iv) the domination over peasantry by outsiders. The peasants are invariably kept at arm's length from the source of power. Shanin argues that their political subjugation interlinks with their cultural subordination and economic exploitation.

In this kind of a framework, though peasants are seen as dominated by outsiders, they are not very different from each other, particularly in terms of their class status. In other words, in this classical notion of the peasant society, there are no internal class differences within the peasantry. The core unit of social organisation is the peasant household.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Describe the notion of undifferentiated peasant societies. Use about ten lines for your answer.

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- 2) Discuss Shanin's "Ideal Type" of a peasant society. Use about ten lines for your answer.

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However, this conception of peasant society emerged from the specific experience of the European societies. The historical literature on different regions of the world tends to show that the agrarian societies were not as autonomous as they are made out to be in such formulations. Agrarian societies were also internally differentiated in different strata. In India, for example, the rural society was always divided between different caste groups and only some groups had the right to cultivate land while others were obliged to provide services to the cultivators. Similarly, parts of Europe had serfdom where the overlords dominated the peasantry. Such societies were also known as feudal societies.

### 25.2.2 Feudalism as a Type of Agrarian Society

Historically, the concept of feudalism has generally been used for social organisation that evolved in parts of Europe after the tribal groups settled down and became regular cultivators. With the success of industrial revolution during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, feudal societies disintegrated, giving way to the development of modern capitalist economies. However, over the years, the term feudalism has also come to acquire a generic meaning and is frequently used to describe the pre-modern agrarian societies in other parts of the world as well.

When compared with the concept “peasant society”, the term feudalism conveys a very different notion of agrarian class structure. **Cultivators in feudal societies are seen as a subordinate class.** The land they cultivate does not legally belong to them. They only have the right to cultivate the land whose legal owner is usually the “overlord” or “feudal lord”. The distinctive feature of the agrarian class structure in feudalism is the relationship of “**dependency**” and “**patronage**” that exists between the cultivators and the “overlords”. The cultivating peasants have to show a sense of “**loyalty**” and obligation towards their overlords. This sense of loyalty is expressed not only by paying a share of the produce of land to the landlord but very often the peasants are also obliged to work for the overlord and perform certain duties without expecting any wages in return. The system of **begar** was (unpaid labour) popular in many parts of India until some time back is an example of this kind of a system.

### 25.2.3 Contemporary Agrarian Societies: A Sub-Sector of Modern Capitalist System

The spread of industrialisation in the Western countries during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in rest of the world during 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought about significant changes in the agrarian sector of the economy as well. We can identify two important changes in the agrarian economy that came with industrialisation and development. First, agriculture lost its earlier significance and became only a marginal sector of the economy. For example, in most countries of the West today, it employs only a small proportion of the total working population (between two to five or six per cent) and its contribution to the total national income of these countries is also not very high. In the countries of the Third World also, the significance of agriculture has been declining over the years. In India, for example, though a large proportion of population is still employed in agricultural sector, its contribution to the total national income has come down substantially (from nearly sixty per cent at the time of independence to less than thirty per cent during early 1990s).

The second important change that has been experienced in the agrarian sector is in its internal social organisation. The social framework of agricultural production has experienced a sea change in different parts of the world during the last century or so. The earlier modes of social organisations, such as, “feudalism” and “peasant societies” (as discussed above) have disintegrated giving way more differentiated social structures. This has largely happened due to the influences of the processes of industrialisation and modernisation. The modern industry has provided a large variety of machines and equipment for carrying out farm operations, such as, ploughing and threshing. This mechanisation of agricultural production has made it possible for the landowners to cultivate much larger areas of land in lesser time. Certain other technological breakthroughs also gave the cultivators chemical fertilisers and the new high yielding varieties of seeds. The net result of these changes has been an enormous increase in the productivity of land. The introduction of new farm technologies has not only increased the

productivity of land but has also led to significant changes in the social relations in agrarian societies.

#### Box 25.02

The mechanisation and modernisation of agriculture made it possible for the cultivating farmers to produce much more than their consumption requirements. The surplus came to the market. Also they began to produce crops that were not meant for direct consumption of the local community. These “cash crops” were produced exclusively for sale in the market. The cultivators also needed cash for buying new inputs. In other words, **the mechanisation of agriculture led to an integration of agriculture in the broader market economy of the nation and the world.**

### 25.2.4 Agriculture and Market

The mechanisation of agriculture and its integration in the broader market economy has also in turn transformed the social relations of production in the agrarian sector. While some scholars see it merely as a new mode of subordination of the peasant economy by the urban industrial economy, others have looked at it as a more fundamental change that transforms the agrarian society as well. Scholars call this process of change as the development of capitalist relations in agriculture. The development of capitalism in agriculture transforms the earliest relations of loyalty and patronage into those that are instrumental in nature. The relations among different categories of population involved in agricultural production tend to become formalised, without any sense of loyalty or obligation.

#### Activity 2

**Talk to some villagers about the effects of mechanization in agriculture in their village. Note down and compare your findings with other students in the study centre.**

This process is also expected to lead to a process **of differentiation among the peasantry.** The peasantry gets divided into different strata or classes. **Not everyone benefits from the mechanisation process equally.** Further, the market mechanisms put pressure on the cultivating such peasants in a manner that some survive while others tend to loose out and become landless labourers. **Similarly, those who worked as tenants are generally evicted from the lands being cultivated by them** and are employed as wage servants by the landowners. While some among the cultivating population become rich, others are left with small plots of land.

**The attitude of the peasants towards their occupation also undergoes a change.** In the pre-capitalist or the traditional societies, the peasantry produced mainly for their own consumption. The work on the fields was carried out with the labour of their family. **Agriculture, for the peasantry, was both a source of livelihood as well as a way of life.**

As agriculture is integrated in the capitalist market economy, the social framework of agriculture also undergoes a change and so does the attitude of cultivators towards their occupation. They begin to **look at agriculture as an enterprise.** They work on their farms with modern machines and produce cash crops that are sold in the market. Their primary concern becomes earning profits from cultivation. Thus, the peasants are transformed into enterprising “farmers”. The agrarian societies also loose their earlier equilibrium. **Farmers, unlike the peasantry which is viewed as a homogenous class category, as a differentiated lot.** They are divided in different categories or classes. The agrarian class structure undergoes a basic change with the development of capitalism in agriculture.



Agrarian life usually means a lower class existence, with small dwellings and few amenities

*Courtesy: B. Kiranmayi*

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### 25.3 THE CONCEPT OF CLASS AND ITS APPLICATION IN ANALYSES OF AGRARIAN SOCIETIES

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The concept of class was developed by sociologists and other social scientists to describe the prevailing structures of social relationships in the industrial societies of the West. Prominent among those who developed the concept were Karl Marx and Max Weber. Giddens defined classes as “large scale groupings of people who share common economic resources, which strongly influence the types of life style they are able to lead. Ownership of wealth, together with occupation, are regarded as the chief basis of class differences”.

As mentioned above the concept of class was first used to describe the social groupings in the industrial societies of the West. Over the years scholars have used the concept to understand social structures in other settings as well. During the early twentieth century, Lenin developed an elaborate theory to explain the process of class differentiation among the peasantry in Russia. Similarly, Mao Tse Tung, the leader of the Chinese revolution used the concept of class in his analysis of the Chinese revolution used the concept of class in his analysis of the Chinese peasantry. The writing of Lenin and Mao are regarded as pioneering works in understanding agrarian class structures and agrarian changes.

Lenin suggested that with the development of capitalism in agriculture, the peasantry, the hitherto was an undifferentiated social category, gets differentiated or divided into various social classes. Initially, the Russian peasantry was divided in five different classes that included the i) the landlords; ii) the rich peasants; iii) the middle peasants; iv) the poor peasants; and v) the landless labourers. Lenin also argues that gradually, the peasantry, in Russian as well as in other countries, would experience a process of polarisation. Eventually there would be only two classes, the capitalist farmers and the landless proletariats.

However, the actual empirical experience of capitalist development in agriculture in different parts of the world does not confirm to Lenin's prediction. Though agriculture has been gradually integrated in the market economy and peasantry has also got divided into various classes, there is very little evidence to support the argument that the agrarian

population is getting polarised into two classes. In Western countries as well as in the countries of the Third World; the middle and small size cultivators have not only managed to survive, in some countries their numbers have even gone up.

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## 25.4 AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CHANGE IN INDIA

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As mentioned above, agrarian class structure in a given society evolves over a long period of time. It is shaped historically by different socio-economic and political factors. These historical factors vary from region to region. Thus, though one can use the concept of class to make sense of agrarian structures in different contexts, the empirical realities vary from region to region.

The traditional Indian “rural communities” and the agrarian social structures were organised within the framework of “jajmani system”. This was a peculiarly Indian phenomenon. The different caste groups in the traditional Indian village were divided between jajmans (the patrons) and the kamins (the menials). The jajmans were those caste groups who owned and cultivated lands. The kamins provided different kinds of services to the jajmans. While the kamins were obliged to work for the jajmans, the latter were required to pay a share from the farm produce to their kamins. The relationship was based on a system of reciprocal exchange.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write a note on contemporary agrarian society. Use about ten lines for your answer.

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- 2) Describe in brief Lenin’s view on the development of capitalism in agriculture. Use about ten lines for your description.

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However, those who participated in this system of reciprocal exchange did not do so on equal footings. Those who belonged to the upper castes and owned land were obviously more powerful than those who came from the menial caste groups. The structure of agrarian relations organised within the framework of jajmani system reinforced the inequalities of the caste system. The caste system in turn provided legitimacy to the unequal land relations.

Over the years the jajmani system has disintegrated and rural society has experienced profound changes in its social structure. The agrarian class structure has also changed. These changes have been produced by a large number of factors.

#### **25.4.1 Agrarian Changes During the British Colonial Rule**

The agrarian policies of the British colonial rulers are regarded as among the most important factors responsible for introducing changes in the agrarian structure of the sub-continent. In order to maximise their incomes from land (which was collected from the cultivators in the form of land revenue), they introduced some basic changes in the property relations in the Indian countryside. These agrarian policies of the colonial rulers had far reaching consequences. In Bengal and Bihar, in parts of Chennai and United Province they conferred full ownership rights over the erstwhile zamindars that were only tax collecting intermediaries during the earlier regimes. The vast majority of peasants who had been actually cultivating land became tenants of the new landlords. Similarly, they demanded revenues in the form of a fixed amount of cash rather than as a share from what was produced on the land. Thus, even when bad weather destroyed the crop; the peasants were forced to pay the land revenue.

These changes led to serious indebtedness among the peasantry. They were forced to mortgage their land in order to meet the revenue demands. In the long run it led to peasants losing their lands to moneylenders and big landowners. The big landowners and moneylenders emerged as a dominant class in the countryside while the ordinary peasants suffered. In the new agrarian class structure that emerged during the colonial rule, peasants had no motivation to improve their lands and work hard. As a result the agricultural production declined.

#### **25.4.2 Agrarian Changes After Independence**

The nationalist leadership during the struggle for freedom had mobilised peasantry on the promise that once the country was liberated from colonial rule, they would introduce changes in the land relations. This process was initiated immediately after Independence. The central government directed the state governments to pass "land reform legislations" that would abolish the intermediary landlords, the zamindars, and grant the ownership rights to the actual tillers of the land. Some legislations were to also grant security to the tenants. The states also fixed an upper ceiling on the holding size of land that a single household could possess. The surplus land was to be surrendered to the state and was to be redistributed among those who had no land.

However, though the legislations were passed by all the states, only in some cases they produced desired effects. It has been argued that only in those parts of the country where peasants were politically mobilised that the land reforms could be effectively implemented. While the zamindari system was abolished in most parts, the ceiling legislations had very little effect.

##### **Box 25.03**

The government of free India introduced developmental programmes to encourage the cultivators to increase productivity of their lands. These included the Community Development Programme (CDP), the Co-operatives and the Green Revolution Technology. These programmes were designed to introduce modern methods of cultivation in the Indian countryside. The cultivating farmers were provided with new technology, seeds and fertilisers at subsidised rates. The state agencies also provided them cheap credit. Though in principle these schemes were



meant for everybody, studies carried out in different parts of India tend to reveal that the benefits of the state support to agriculture were not equally shared by all the sections of rural society. **Most of the benefits went to those who were already rich and powerful. However,** despite this bias, these initiatives have been able to bring about a significant change in the agrarian economy at least in some parts of the country. This is particularly true about the regions like Punjab, Haryana, Western U.P., Coastal Andhra, and parts of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Apart from increasing productivity of land, these changes have transformed the social framework of the Indian agriculture. Agriculture in most parts of India is now carried out on commercial lines. The old structure of jajmani relations has more or less completely disintegrated, giving way to more formalised arrangements among the cultivators and those who work for them. Some scholars have argued that these changes indicate that capitalist form of production is developing in agriculture and a new class structure is emerging in the Indian countryside.

## 25.5 AGRARIAN CLASS STRUCTURE IN INDIA

As mentioned above the traditional Indian society was organised around caste lines. The agrarian relations were governed by the norms of jajmani system. However, the jajmani relations began to disintegrate after the colonial rulers introduced changes in the Indian agriculture. The process of modernisation and development initiated by the Indian State during the post-independence period further weakened the traditional social structure. While **caste continues to be an important social institution in the contemporary Indian society, its significance as a system of organising economic life has considerably declined.** Though the agricultural land in most parts of India is still owned by the traditionally cultivating caste groups, **their relations with the landless menials are no more regulated by the norms of caste system.** The landless members of the lower caste now work with the cultivating farmers as agricultural labourers. **We can say that in a sense, caste has given way to class in the Indian countryside.**

However, the agrarian social structure is still marked by diversities. As pointed out by **D.N. Dhanagare**, “the relations among classes and social composition of groups that occupy specific class position in relation to land-control and land-use in India are so diverse and complex that it is difficult to incorporate them all in a general schema”. However, despite the diversities that mark the agrarian relations in different parts of country, some scholars have attempted to club them together into some general categories. Amongst the earliest attempts to categorise the Indian agrarian population into a framework of social classes was that of a well-known economist, **Daniel Thorner**. He suggested that one could divide the agrarian population of India into different class categories by taking three criteria. **First, type of income earned from land** (such as, ‘rent’ or ‘fruits of own cultivation’ or ‘wages’). **Second, the nature of rights held in land** (such as, ‘proprietary’ or ‘tenancy’ or ‘share-cropping rights’ or ‘no rights at all’). **Third, the extent of field-work actually performed** (such as, ‘absentees who do no work at all’ or ‘those who perform partial work’ or ‘total work done with the family labour’ or ‘work done for others to earn wages’). On the basis of these criteria he suggested the following model of agrarian class structure in India.

- i) **Maliks**, whose income is derived primarily from property rights in the soil and whose common interest is to keep the level of rents up while keeping the wage-level down. They collect rent from tenants, sub-tenants and sharecroppers.
- ii) **Kisans**, working peasants, who own small plots of land and work mostly with their own labour and that of their family members.
- iii) **Mazdoors**, who do not own land themselves and earn their livelihood by working as tenants/ sharecroppers or wage labourers with others.

Thorner’s classification of agrarian population has not been very popular amongst the students of agrarian change in India. **Development of capitalist relations in agrarian sector of the economy has also changed the older class structure. For example, in most regions of India, the Maliks have turned into enterprising farmers.** Similarly, most of the tenants and

sharecroppers among the landless mazdoors have begun to work as wage labourers. Also, the capitalist development in agriculture has not led to the kind of differentiation among the peasantry as some Marxist analysts predicted. On the contrary, the size of middle level cultivators has swelled.

The classification that has been more popular among the students of agrarian structure and change in India is the division of the agrarian population into four or five classes. At the top are the big landlords who still exist in some parts of the country. They own very large holdings, in some cases even more than one hundred acres. However, unlike the old landlords, they do not always give away their lands to tenants and sharecroppers. Some of them organise their farms like modern industry, employing a manager and wage labourers and producing for the market. Over the years their proportion in the total population of cultivators has come down significantly. Their presence is now felt more in the backward regions of the country.

After big landlords come the big farmers. The size of their land holdings varies from 15 acres to 50 acres or in some regions even more. They generally supervise their farms personally and work with wage labour. Agricultural operations in their farms are carried out with the help of farm machines and they use modern farm inputs, such as, chemical fertilisers and hybrid seeds. They invariably belong to the local dominant castes and command a considerable degree of influence over the local power structure, both at the village level as well as at the state level. While the big farmers is more visible in the agriculturally developed regions of the country.

The next category is that of the middle farmers who own relatively smaller holdings (between 5 acres to 10 or 15 acres). Socially, like the big farmers, they too mostly come from the local dominant caste groups. However, unlike the big farmers, they carry out most of the work on farms with their own labour and the labour of their families. They employ wage labour generally at the time of peak seasons, like harvesting and sowing of the crops. Over the years, this category of cultivators has also begun using modern inputs, such as, chemical fertilisers and hybrid seeds. Proportionately, they constitute the largest segment among the cultivators.

The small and marginal farmers, are the fourth class of cultivators in India. Their holding size is small (less than five acres and in some cases even less than one acre). They carry out almost all the farm operations with their own labour and rarely employ others to work on their farms. In order to add to their meager earnings from cultivation, some of them work as farm labourers with other cultivator. Over the years, they have also come to use modern farm inputs and begun to produce cash crops that are grown for sale in the market. They are among the most indebted category of population in the Indian countryside. As the families grow and holdings get further divided, their numbers have been increasing in most part of India.

The last category of the agrarian population is that of the landless labourers. A large majority of them belong to the ex-untouchable or the dalit caste groups. Most of them own no cultivable land of their own. Their proportion in the total agricultural population varies from state to state. While in the states like Punjab and Haryana they constitute 20 to 30 per cent of the rural workforce, in some states, like Andhra Pradesh, their number is as high as fifty per cent. They are among the poorest of the poor in rural India. They not only live in miserable conditions with poor housing and insecure sources of income, many of them also have to borrow money from big cultivators and in return they have to mortgage their labour power to them. Though the older type of bondage is no more a popular practice, the dependence of landless labourers on the big farmers often makes them surrender their freedom, not only of choosing employer, but invariably also of choosing their political representatives.

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## 25.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, we have examined, discussed and analysed notions of Agrarian Societies. We examined various types of these notions and went on to present the concept of class and

how it is applied in the study of agrarian societies. We then discussed agrarian social structure and change in India and agrarian structure in India. We were, therefore, able to develop and present a lucid picture of agrarian class structure.

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## 25.7 KEY WORDS

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|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Agrarian</b>        | : rural, dependent on agriculture.                                       |
| <b>Kisan</b>           | : peasants who have small plots of land on which their is family labour. |
| <b>Malik</b>           | : Those who have property rights and work land by wage workers.          |
| <b>Mazdoor</b>         | : Landless sharecroppers or tenants.                                     |
| <b>Peasant Society</b> | : undifferentiated society, preindustrial in nature.                     |

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## 25.8 FURTHER READINGS

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Dhanagare, D.N. (1983), *Peasant Movements in India, 1920-50*, Delhi, OUP.

Gupta, D. ed. (1992), *Social Stratification*, Delhi, OUP.

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## 25.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The peasant society concept was derived largely from the western society. Peasants were believed to have emerged out of the disintegration of tribals who cultivated land. They lived in small settlements. Peasant societies are pre-industrial. Peasantry in this perspective was basically an undifferentiated social formation. This is because in their social and economic organisation peasants were similar to one another. They were basically self sufficient on the land they worked on. Thus, there were no significant class differences within the peasantry. However, while internally the peasants were homogenous from the outside they were dominated by the urban elite. Peasant societies even produced surplus which was given up to urban rulers as tax.
- 2) For Shanin the Ideal Type of peasant society as producers who produced mostly for their own consumption, and for the fulfillment of obligations to the rulers - that is the holders of political and economic power. He identified four inter-dependent facets of peasant life which were:
  - i) peasants work on their own land with the help of their family
  - ii) land is worked with low level technology
  - iii) peasants have specific cultural patterns
  - iv) peasants are dominated by outsiders.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The spread of industrialisation in the west made the work force in agriculture relatively low. Secondly, it altered agrarian structure. The mechanisation and the modernisation of agriculture made possible a huge surplus. Through the production of cash crops cultivators could reinvest their earnings and developed close links with the market. Thus, the development of capitalism in agrarian society changed the earlier relations of loyalty and patronage into those that are instrumental. It also lead to

differentiation among peasantry. Further, the pressure of mechanisation in agriculture benefited some peasants while others became landless labourers. Agriculture became an enterprise and profit from cultivation became the main motive in agriculture.

- 2) For Lenin development of capitalism definitely affected the peasantry dividing previously undifferentiated category into various groups. The Russian peasantry became divided into i) landlords, ii) rich peasants, iii) middle peasants, iv) poor peasants and v) landless labourers. Lenin felt the peasants would experience polarisation and eventually there would be only two classes, the capitalist farmers and the landless proletariat.