

# Emerging Patterns and Nature of Social Inequalities in Rural India



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By

Supriya Singh

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## FOREWORD

Indian society has been marked by social inequality since ancient times, to the extent that the Indian man/human is considered to be *Homo Hierarchicus/Homo unæqualis*. Social inequality in the form of caste is found at every level - micro, meso, and macro. It has been a ubiquitous and persistent feature of Indian society. A corresponding inequality can also be observed in the economic conditions of the Indian people. Indeed, there have been some variations in the nature and dynamics of social and economic inequality in the course of history; nevertheless, the basic structure of social inequality has remained, undeviating. Moreover, the expansion of corporate global capitalism and concomitant neo-liberal political economy in India has increased economic inequality at an alarming rate. The World Inequality Lab has taken note of it in its recent study of income inequality in India at the macro level.

Notwithstanding a large number of studies on social inequality by social scientists, and some studies of economic inequality at the macro level, we are in need of micro level studies of the dynamics of economic and social inequality at the micro/village levels. The present work can be considered an inquisitive endeavor in this context. It studies empirically the nature, forms, and dimensions of economic and social inequalities at the village level, and examines them in the wider context of Indian society. This work attains more relevance as it evaluates the aspects of inequality in an economically underdeveloped district of a backward province of India. This crucial work would be well received by researchers, readers, and policymakers interested in understanding the nuances of inequality in contemporary India. I hope that the present volume, based on a comprehensive study of the selected villages of India, will be appreciated by readers for its fresh perspective and insight into the different forms of inequality prevailing in rural India.

—Rajesh Misra  
Former Professor  
Department of Sociology  
University of Lucknow

## PREFACE

The present volume, on the basis of a two-village study, deals with inequality, mainly in terms of caste, class, and power, in rural India. The study is a detailed appraisal of the ever-growing multidimensional inequalities in contemporary rural India, to explain the nature and dynamics of social inequalities. It studies the existing nature, forms, and dimensions of economic, political, and social inequalities at a micro rural level, and compares it with the Indian macrocosm of increasing inequality, with a view to revealing uneven facets of rural India. This book will provide an insight for further studies to explore micro-level inequalities at rural level.

The book reflects that inequality in terms of caste is more prominent within the lower castes, in comparison to inequality between the lower and the upper castes. Education is the main source through which inequalities are reproduced, not only in terms of educational opportunity and educational achievements, but it is also visible in maintaining class and caste inequalities. In spite of having low profile jobs, the lower caste women have more equal opportunities to choose their livelihood, in comparison to the upper caste women, where their caste locations become important in deciding the nature of their jobs. The unequal relationship in families, mainly in terms of mobility, is quite obvious in the upper caste. The hegemonic relationship of patriarchal society is maintained through cultural dominance. Caste inequalities are strong enough to de-motivate women to stand on the same forum. As the majority of rural women are employed in non-organized sectors, inequality in terms of wages is also higher in rural areas. Not only in terms of economy or status, women are also deprived from power, as their voting choices are insignificant. Women are marginalized in both voting choices and political participation. This book will provide an insight into grassroots level inequalities, and the way inequalities are constructed and reproduced in day to day interactions.

The book is not only based on secondary sources. Data has also been corroborated by observations in the village, and conversation with the villagers, with the help of the observation schedule. Village studies have been a long tradition in India, but they have mostly focussed on the structural features of the village with a functional view point. The present

study is a further attempt to relocate prevailing inequalities in a contemporary context. The book highlights how, in rural society, inequality is not only prevailing, but is being reinforced by many structural factors. The three dimensions of inequality, namely caste, class, and power, do not exist in isolation, rather they are interconnected. The findings support the Marxian logic that economic inequality leads to other social inequalities. Those who are economically better off, in spite of their lower caste situation, bear less inequality in terms of caste and power. As the study analyses the details of social inequality, Weber's emphasis on various forms of inequality was more important for the study. The findings also support Weber's analysis, which reflects that the relationship between political groups, class, and status groups is not certain; rather it is more dependent on time, place, and social context. Inequality can even be found within these forms of inequality, caste, class and power. A class may have inner differentiations.

The book is divided into eight sections. In the first section, a review of salient studies on social inequalities, along with their different types, has been attempted. The second chapter contextualizes the selected villages, and describes in detail the differential relationship between castes, and tries to link it with the inequality. The chapter presents the profile of the area and the studied villages. The aim is to describe the profile of the villages in terms of cultural, socioeconomic, political and educational features. The third chapter is an endeavour to pinpoint and explain the aspects and conditions of economic inequality. The section tries to identify different classes based on occupational groups in rural areas. The fourth chapter deals with caste and inequality, highlighting how prevailing caste inequalities are constructed and reproduced in day to day interactions. The fifth section delineates the aspects of gender inequality prevailing in rural India. This section also deals with mobility among women brought about by self-help groups functioning at the village level and assisting rural women financially. The sixth section deals with educational inequality, and how this inequality is being reproduced rather than mitigated, in spite of so many efforts by the government. The seventh section deals with political inequality, and the eighth chapter, which concludes the present study, is a sociological appraisal of the social inequality and intersections between caste, class, and gender, along with concomitant changes in rural society.

The book is an outcome of the erudite and valuable guidance that I have received from my mentor, Prof. Rajesh Misra, an eminent scholar and a great teacher. The present volume would not have been possible without his support and guidance. I sincerely thank him for his valuable input and comments. I am also thankful to my postdoctoral research supervisor, Prof.

D. R. Sahu, for his guidance and support. His appreciation has always helped me to refine my ideas. Thanks are extended to the villagers who supported me during my fieldwork by welcoming me into their lives, patiently answering my repeated queries, and by sparing time from their busy schedules. I am especially thankful to Bhirendra Singh, the village head of Bharthipur, and Nagendra Singh of Lalman Kheda, and their families, who not only appreciated my research work, but helped me in gaining the confidence of the village people as well as providing great support, hospitality, and affection, during my fieldwork. I am highly thankful to my parents, who took great care in bringing me up to this level of academic achievement. My father, Mr. Anil Kumar Singh, and my mother, Mrs. Deepa Rani, motivated me to achieve my best and helped me to retain my confidence and interest throughout my research work. Last but not least, I appreciate my husband, Dr. Prashant Singh and my brother, Ashish Pratap Singh, for their emotional support. Ultimately, I am grateful to the Almighty for keeping so many compassionate and supportive people around me, who gave me the willpower, patience, and courage, to accomplish this research smoothly. Ultimately I am grateful to the publisher, for appreciating my work and deciding to publish it.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BDC	Block Development Committee
BJP	Bhartiya Janta Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
BPL	Below Poverty Line
MA	Master of Arts
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of Legislative Council
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi Nation Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NSS	National Sample Survey
SHG	Self Help Group
SP	Samajwadi Party
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UP	Uttar Pradesh



## CHAPTER ONE

### SOCIAL INEQUALITY: UNDERSTANDING PATTERNS AND NATURE

Right from its emergence, the main focus and domain of sociology has been inequality. Ingenuous or sophisticated sociologists have long been pointing out that Indian society has been ridden with inequality, particularly caste, for ages. Indian society is primarily considered as a rural society, with caste and inequality being its chronic features. Though there have been egalitarian reform movements, radical movements against class and political dominance, constitutional democracy based on principles of equality and fraternity, and policies to mitigate caste, class, and gender differences, however social inequality in India has prevailed and proliferated. The processes of globalization, liberalization, and urbanization, contribute to ever-growing inequality in India, making the task of inclusion much more demanding. On the one hand, some sections of the elite are provided with the best quality of life, and on the other hand, there is growing inequality in rural areas in terms of life chances, which can be observed in commonplace droughts, water crises, and scarcity of food, education, and health. In this context, it is proposed to study the existing nature, forms, and dimensions of economic, political, and social inequalities at a micro rural level, and to compare it with the Indian macrocosm of increasing inequality, with a view to revealing uneven facets of rural India.

The book is divided into eight sections. In the first section, a review of salient studies on social inequality, along with its different types has been attempted. The second chapter contextualizes the selected villages, and describes in detail the differential relationship between different castes, trying to link it with inequality. The chapter presents the profile of the area and the villages studied. The aim is to describe the profile of the villages in terms of cultural, socioeconomic, political, and educational features. The third chapter endeavors to pinpoint and explain the aspects and conditions of economic inequality. The section tries to identify different classes based on occupational groups in rural areas. The fourth chapter

deals with caste and inequality. This section highlights how prevailing caste inequalities are constructed and reproduced in day-to-day interactions. The fifth section delineates the aspects of gender inequality prevailing in rural India. This section also deals with mobility among women brought about by self help groups functioning at the village level, and assisting rural women financially. The sixth section deals with educational inequality, and how this inequality is being reproduced rather than mitigated, in spite of so many efforts by the government. The seventh section deals with political inequality, and the eighth chapter, which concludes the present study, is a sociological appraisal of the social inequality and intersections between caste, class, and gender, along with concomitant changes in rural society.

### **Inequality as a Theoretical Concept**

Tilak (1978:418) mentions that in a discourse on the origin of inequality Rousseau (1937) discussed two types of inequality: natural inequality established by nature (e.g., differences in "age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or of the soul") and social inequality "authorized by the consent of men", such as inequality in income, wealth, honor, and power. Response to social inequality falls into two distinctive categories: (a) efforts to justify the existence of inequality, and secure acceptance of it, either by reason or by forcing the under-privileged to accept by coercive power; and (b) efforts to eliminate the causes and conditions of inequality.

The gap between rich and poor, between the upper and lower classes, and between the elite and the masses has significantly increased generally, and in rural areas in particular (Suryanarayana 1988; Jayaraman and Lanjouw 1999; Deaton and Dreze 2002; Sen and Himanshu 2004; Sarkar and Mehta 2010). The processes of globalization, liberalization, and urbanization, contribute to the ever-growing inequality in India, making the task of inclusion much more demanding. This can be observed in everyday social life. On the one hand, some sections of the elite are provided with best quality of life, and on the other hand, growing inequality in rural areas in terms of life chances can be observed in commonplace droughts, water crises, and scarcity of food, education, and health. This research is focused on the study of the existing nature, forms, and dimensions of economic, political and social inequalities at a micro rural level, and compares it with the Indian macrocosm of increasing inequality, with a view to revealing uneven facets of rural India.



Although rural wage inequality has remained stable over the years, according to the India Inequality Report (2018:16 & 44), there is a clear rise in urban wage inequality. Not only this; in comparison to other countries, India is home to the largest number of people living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day, as established by the World Bank. Inequality in India has seen a rising trend in the last three decades, contrary to most other countries which show a decline in inequality. The Report (2018:10) also states that in India, inequality is not only visible, and has been a rising trend in recent decades using the conventional indicators of income and consumption, but there is also increasing disparity between social and economic groups in access to education, health, and public services.

Piketty, with his colleagues, produced the World's Top Incomes Database (WTID), which is an accomplished source for empirical data which documents the scale of contemporary inequalities and their historical formation. This rich resource has enabled Piketty to highlight the magnitude of contemporary inequality, how it has come about, why it matters, and what might be done about it (Perrons 2014). There is, however, considerable research on the consequences of inequality. In economics, for example, there is relatively robust literature on the effects of economic inequality on economic growth (Carter and Reardon 2014). The study of inequality has not been given adequate attention in India, partly because of the argument that inequality is a natural by-product of rapid growth. However, on the contrary, the overall trends in inequality of consumption expenditure, income and wealth, show that India is a high inequality country and among the most unequal in the world (India Inequality Report 2018:6).

The literature on inequality focuses more on inequality in terms of income, consumption, or wealth, and less on inequality in terms of access to basic services such as education, health, safe drinking water, sanitation, or electricity. Sen (2014) made it clear that the consequences of inequality depend on what type of inequality we are considering. Inequality in terms of income distribution is just as high in China as it is in India. But there is close to full coverage of education and health services in China, which makes the consequences much less severe than India (India Inequality Report 2018:63).

Economists have tended to define inequality in terms of money incomes, however some have rejected this measure, and advocate a measure of inequality in economic opportunities (Stewart 2013). Danial (1010)

interprets that if we look back to the origin of modern exclusion we can find its roots in a time when pauperization was some kind of natural phenomenon. The statistics produced by some international bodies, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), suggest that they still continue the tradition of trying to defend elitism as natural. In his book on British conservatism, Dorey also concludes that conservatism can be readily understood as a philosophy which is largely concerned with offering a defense, or even advocacy, of socio-economic inequality. In so doing, conservatism is concerned to depict inequality as natural and inevitable; a fact of life which cannot be altered, and which should therefore be readily accepted, rather than viewed as a problem to be eradicated. Quoting the Conservative party, he says that the simple logic held by Conservatives is that since some people have more ability and a greater opportunity to acquire property than others, there are bound to be economic and social inequalities, as success brings inequality' (2011:5-7). Generally instead of attributing poverty and massive inequalities of wealth to 'the system' or the apparent greed of the rich, the poor themselves have often been blamed, due to enduring assumptions or prejudices about their laziness and incompetent lifestyles. Therefore, rather than poverty being viewed as structural or systemic in origin, it is often depicted as something which occurs as a consequence of individual failings and inadequacies among the poor (Dorey 2011:199). This kind of perspective reinforces inequality in society instead of mitigating it.

Prudence L. Carter and Sean F. Reardon (2014:1-2) identified four notable gaps in the scholarship on social inequality: (1) less knowledge about inequality of opportunity; (2) research on inequality has largely focused on evaluating policies rather than on broader strategies for reducing inequality; (3) social processes which preserve social inequality and social and historical reproduction processes that create and maintain common sense notions of the resources of inequality have not been focused; and (4) the problem of inequality has been framed as a problem of poverty.

Carter and Reardon (2014:3) emphasize that there is a need to differentiate between two things regarding inequality; first, the unequal distribution of desirable life outcomes (such as health, happiness, educational success, or material possessions) and the unequal distribution of opportunities (access to power and life chances that facilitate the attainment of desirable outcomes). Secondly, the distinction between the unequal distribution of opportunities and outcomes among individuals and between groups. As individuals have different backgrounds, resources, and dispositions, the

same environment may not provide equal opportunity to each individual. Frances Stewart (2013) says that equality of opportunities is more radically defined by Paes de Barros, Ferreira et al. (2009) as a situation in which ‘morally irrelevant pre-determined circumstances, such as race, gender, place of birth and family background’ do not affect outcomes.

In focusing on a range of capabilities, Sen abandoned the money metric of incomes and moved to a plural assessment of well-being and inequality; and by focusing on capabilities; he also advocated opportunities rather than outcomes as the space for assessing inequality. According to the capability approach, incomes remain important as they help determine what people can be or do, but there are many other factors besides income that are relevant to this, including the availability of public services, the extent and nature of civil society, a person’s own characteristics, and so on (Stewart 2013:8).

### **Capabilities Versus Functioning**

Within the capability set, people actually choose a subset of things to do or be, which Sen defines as functioning. In some respects functioning is a more useful space for assessing inequality than capabilities. However, we should recognize that the distribution of functioning does not represent the full set of capabilities, and we could come to wrong conclusions about the distribution of capabilities on the basis of observed functioning (Stewart 2013:9). Stewart, however, points out that this divergence between capabilities and functioning is less likely when it comes to group inequalities, because it is less likely that there are systematic differences in the move from capabilities to functioning for a group as a whole, than for particular individuals.

Quoting some thinkers (Dworkin 1981; Ferreira and Gignoux; Roemer 1998) Stewart says that inequality is justified if, and only if, it results from a person’s own choices – e.g. with respect to work or lifestyle (or from luck) (Stewart 2013:8). To the extent that a person’s own choices are heavily influenced, if not determined, by background, luck egalitarianism would justify only limited vertical inequality. The fundamental premise of ‘luck egalitarianism’ is that people should not suffer advantage or disadvantage for elements outside their own control, such as race, gender, place of birth, and family background, which are outside the individual’s control.

## Globalization and Inequality

The dynamics of inequality are particularly due to influences or significant processes of change, such as democratization, constitutional provisions, specific state policies, or the economic process of increasing industrialization of capital in rural areas, particularly under the influence of liberalization and globalization. There is a continuous dynamic in the forms of inequality, and globalization has enhanced this. According to Marxian logic, inequality also increases in the capitalist mode of production, which results in income inequality. With the coming of global capitalism, inequality has increased globally, and globalization has also contributed to rising inequality (Mills 2009), especially in terms of wages on a wider scale (Acharyya and Marjit 2000; Anderson 2001). Studies (Treitler and Boatcă 2016) have highlighted how patterns of inequality associated with global capital have been reconfigured in different contexts and have historically produced varied results, and how complex socioeconomic hierarchies, including, but not limited to, class, reinforce inequalities among social groups around the globe.

The claims that globalization will lead to decreasing inequality in developing countries has been questioned by many (Majumdar et al., 2017). This has been examined with specific reference to the nature of Indian labor markets, outlining why this might not be the case, as suggested in the literature, although there are also some studies (Narayan 2016) which indicate decrease in inequality among scheduled caste and other backward castes in healthcare facilities because of various programmes launched by the government. Quoting a recent World Bank policy paper (Milanovic 2011) Treitler and Boatcă (2016:156) argue that, unlike in the mid-19th century's inequality between capitalists and workers (i.e., the world described in Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*), today's global income differences are marked by gaps in income between countries – hence international migration becomes a powerful tool for reducing global poverty and inequality, and replaces class struggle as a social issue. Although it can be said that globalization has opened new avenues and platforms globally by mitigating boundaries between different countries and individuals, it has induced inequality at different levels, both within and outside countries.

## **Nature, Aspects and Prominent Forms of Inequality**

According to a report on global inequality by Oxfam, the richest 10% in India own 80% of its wealth, while the richest 1% possesses 58% of all wealth. Even income growth has been uneven over the years. Between 1988 and 2011, incomes of the poorest 10% of Indians rose by \$29, or around Rs. 2,000, at an increase of 1% each year. For the richest 10% in the same period, incomes increased by almost Rs 40,000, with an annual increase of 25%. (<https://scroll.in/article/826484/>). The report clearly indicates the widening gap of income inequality in India, but this gap is not limited to income alone, rather inequality is reflected in socio-cultural aspects as well. For most of the time, poverty and inequality are dealt with as synonymous. Many researchers have tried to focus on the spatial association between rural poverty and inequality. The association between poverty and inequality in general has been recognized and debated extensively. The region comprising the Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh has undergone rapid development in rural areas, especially since the introduction of the green revolution. These regions were economically the most prosperous parts of India, which was evidenced by an enormous increase in agricultural and industrial production (Dayal 1985:379).

With the rise of Indian sociology, multi-faceted social inequality has been analyzed at various levels, and in its different forms; caste, class, and power (Mukherjee 1977; Singh 1974. Preliminary studies of villages, particularly single villages, have discussed the holistic nature of village communities on one hand, and on the other, they have tried to bring certain specific aspects of rural life into sharper focus (Chauhan 1974). The analysis of these studies reveals that they are mainly focused in analyzing micro level inequality in terms of caste (Srinivas 1952; Wiser 1936; Ghurye 1957; Majumdar 1958; Bailey 1958) and sub-caste (Chauhan 1967; Atal 1968; Mayer 1960). These studies have focused on inter-caste relations, inter-caste hierarchy, factionalism, Sanskritization and Jajmani relations, but all these studies are primarily confined in studying caste as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Later on, some multi-village studies of caste have also analyzed caste in terms of inequality (Atal 1968; Berreman 1968; Bhattacharya 1896). Frances Stewart (2013) distinguishes between two types of inequality. One of these, in which only individual/household distribution is reported and which is widely used for World Development Indicators describes vertical inequality and inequality among groups as horizontal inequality. People are members of multiple

groups, and particular combinations of identity can lead to the worst poverty.

Usually, the studies on related aspects deal with a single form of stratification or interplay between any two forms of stratification, and hang around at a descriptive level. Nevertheless, a detailed appraisal of the ever-growing multidimensional inequalities in contemporary rural India, in terms of a more synthetic perspective, is called for to explain the nature and dynamics of social inequality. Many academicians have clubbed social and economic inequality into one. Carter and Reardon (2014) define socioeconomic inequality as the unequal distribution of economic resources (e.g., money, usually measured by income or wealth, and access to credit), opportunities to build human capital (e.g., from schooling, technology, and job training), and social resources (e.g., access to social capital and information). A review of prominent forms of inequality reveals the different facets of social inequalities.

## **Economic Inequalities in Terms of Class, Land and Green Revolution**

In the studies of class, people have gone beyond the single village, because class is a macro or regional phenomenon (Desai 1948; Mukherjee 1957; Thorner 1962), and class has been studied in different contexts in these studies. On the other hand, Dhanagre (1983) mainly talks about class in a rural context, and has identified five classes of Indian peasants. The correspondence between caste and class hierarchies, and their interwoven relationship, has been examined in detail (Beteille 2012: 1965). There have also been attempts to examine class inequality in terms of income at national level (Deaton and Dreze 2002; Sen and Himanshu 2004; Sarkar and Mehta 2010), and persistent income inequality has also been examined in the particular context of Indian villages (Jayaraman and Lanjouw 1999).

It is obvious that, for any given level of average per capita income, the higher the level of inequality, the higher the poverty rate. If inequality rises, so does poverty (Stewart 2013). There have been many other studies on land reforms and the green revolution that deal with the dimension of mobility-focused inequality. With the Zamindari abolition and the Land Reform Act (1850) all intermediaries between the state and cultivators were done away with, and the land was vested in the state. The system of collection of land revenue in the state has also undergone change. The status of cultivators has thus been raised to that of independent peasants.

The land reforms engendered mobility in the peasants' social life. A class of prosperous rich peasantry, comprising of some of the former landowners and a section of newly emerged peasant proprietors, has arisen (Srimali, 1981). It can be argued that land reforms started social mobility, not only in caste status, but also in class status, particularly among the erstwhile lower peasantry. The studies of the green revolution express mobility in terms of two opposite processes of embourgeoisement and proletarianization. Many scholars have pointed out the negative impact of the green revolution. Despite the growth in income, wages, and supposedly rising employment, landless labors continue to be at a rock bottom, below a subsistence level of existence (Patnaik 1987; Ahlawat 1988; Jha 1997; Chakravarti 2001). Like other state initiatives, the green revolution seems to have unleashed unequal development and differential processes of mobility leading toward inequality. The rural poor among cultivators who are unable to adopt the green revolution technology find a widening gap between their departure from cultivation to labor, and the wage rate (Patnaik 1987).

In his 2010 article "Social Inequality and Peasantry" Xaxa traces the transformation of peasant society from forces within the structure of the society, *viz*; forces and the relation of production, and other external forces, such as trade and market. In traditional society, inequality was based broadly on two factors; one was legally/religiously defined, and the other was based on land. The forces affecting society at large affect the peasantry or peasant community or the village where they live, in the process. The peasantry and the village have also undergone change. Many of the changes they have undergone have bearing on the peasantry in terms of inequality, within as well as outside the village.

On the basis of the studies discussed above, it may be argued that both of these state policy initiatives lead to different natures and dimensions of social mobility in rural India. Land reforms have resulted in mainly downward mobility of the upper castes and the upper classes, and upward mobility of the lower classes and the lower castes. In a way this is indicative of the structural shift in the rural society. However, the green revolution has had a different impact on the rural social structure. The studies suggest that the green revolution mainly unleashed the downward mobility of the marginal peasants and of the lower castes on the one hand, and on the other, it pushed the upper-middle and the upper sections of farmers and castes upward. Consequently, it has reproduced or increased socioeconomic inequality.

Bakshi (2008) deals with an important form of discrimination in the countryside, the lack of access of Dalit (scheduled caste) and Adivasi (scheduled tribe) households to ownership and operational holdings of land in rural India. The social distribution of land in a village economy determines the economic position and power relations between different social groups in the village. The exclusion faced by Dalits in India in terms of access to basic economic resources remains a reality in contemporary India. Bakshi mentions that because of land reforms in West Bengal, Dalit households have better access to land compared with that in other states. The distribution of ownership of land in India is extremely unequal. The inequality in ownership, on a scale of zero to one, is about 0.76. The data show that, on the one hand, about 40 percent of rural households do not own land, and on the other, a large potential for redistribution of land exists in many states (Rwal 2008:47).

Rural studies have been focused on inequality in terms of income, providing sufficient literature on this topic. However, most of these studies are confined only to poverty and inequality in income distribution (Dandekar and Rath 1971; Bardhan 1973; Rajaraman 1974 and 1977; Ahluwalia 1976 and 1978). Inequality prevailing in rural areas needs to be looked at beyond income inequality. Dhanagare (1887), while examining the extensive literature which has accumulated about the green revolution, with a view to determining the impact of the developmental strategy on different sections of rural society, tries to probe into whether the green revolution succeeded in reducing socio-economic inequalities in rural India. He concludes that without some rethinking on development strategies for basic changes in the system, rural inequalities cannot be reduced, even a bit, let alone be eliminated from rural India.

Carter and Reardon (2014), quoting Bourdieu (1986) & Passeron (1977), say that economic power engenders cultural capital, or what some refer to as the 'culture of power'. Cultural sociologist Pierre Bourdieu highlighted how economic inequality becomes institutionalized as cultural inequality. Cultural inequality also intersects with material inequality. Unquestionably, recent technological advances (including the internet, smartphones, and tablets) either have led, or will lead, to large macro-cultural changes in communication around the globe in the 21st century. Internet usage is higher among the young, the highly-educated, and those with high incomes. The internet and the various cultural tools have expanded access, not only to education, but also to good jobs, better healthcare, and political discussions and campaigns. In sum, cultural inequality often works in tandem with other forms of material, political, and health inequality



(Carter and Reardon 2014:9-10). In addition to economic inequality, social inequality has also been studied by many sociologists. Some have tried to look into the intersections between economic and social inequality, and others have seen it as an independent identity, as an aspect of social stratification.

## **Social Inequality in Terms of Gender, Health, Education and Caste**

Hollander and Howard (2000), while analyzing the existence and importance of inequality theories in social psychology, claim that social psychological theory has neglected systems of social hierarchy, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. They identify the reason behind this neglect as the lack of theoretical integration, both within social psychology, and with sociology more generally. A review of pertinent literature has been done to identify different facets of social inequality.

### ***Gender and Inequality***

Quoting many social scientists (Andersen & Collins 2012; de Beauvoir 1989; Hochschild 1973), Carter and Reardon have said that gender inequality certainly derives in part from a history of cultural norms in the family and other domains of the private sphere, and from institutionalized sex discrimination at work, school, political arenas, and so on. According to Carter and Reardon, disparities in economic resources (income and wealth) typically favor men. Sandbergen analyzes the government-promoted Anandadhara microcredit/self-help group programme in a study on the conceptualization of the Water, Land and Ecology (WLE) project (Sandbergen 2018:46). It has been assumed that globalization and climate change have triggered a negative process of 'feminization of agriculture' in the Eastern Gangetic plains, mainly because of the outmigration of men, leaving behind women with restricted access to services, infrastructure, institutions, and markets, to manage productive (as well as reproductive) responsibilities.

Perrons (2014:6) while discussing Piketty's analysis of contemporary inequality, points out the lack of gender in his analysis. He claims that a focus on gender could give a better understanding about inequality. According to Perrons, Piketty neglects to consider how these social norms are also gendered, and how contemporary super-managers, in the USA and UK at least, are predominantly white and male. Introducing a feminist

perspective could not only point attention to the gendered composition of contemporary inequality, but could also introduce an inter-disciplinary perspective capable of examining the multiple ways in which inequalities are naturalized and legitimated.

In his analysis of working women, Lutter points out that though most of the available literature on social capital highlights its positive and functional aspects, there is a dysfunctional or negative and dark aspect as social exclusion (Lutter 2015:331-332). Quoting Bourdieu (1984), Di Maggio and Garip (2012) and Lin (1999, 2001), Lutter says that if recruitment is to a great extent a result of interpersonal networks, there is a tendency to exclude and discriminate against actors based on ascriptive characteristics, regardless of talent. Most importantly, this position equips the broker with access to different sorts of people, communities, and cultures. Therefore, networks can offer a much broader variety of information, which is advantageous in building and making use of social capital. With regard to gender inequality, women are in danger of being disadvantaged by cohesive networks, but they can profit from open and more diverse network structures. Lutter finds that if women engage in teams with greater diversity, they can reduce their risk of career failure to a level indistinguishable from that of men. Gender differences are then fully negated.

In his analysis, Gupta suggests that there are two principal ways in which national or macro level factors can affect the earnings-based disparity in women's housework time (Gupta 2010:113). First, the size of this disparity among women in a given country is affected directly by the degree of inequality in their earnings. It will therefore reflect all the macro level factors that increase or reduce dispersion in women's earnings. Second, the disparity in women's housework time, based on differences in their earnings, is related to the extent to which those earnings can be translated into reductions in domestic labor. That, in turn, depends on the costs of housework substitution, the availability of domestic services, and the cultural norms regarding substitutes, such as food which is prepared outside the home and the employment of household help. This relationship between women's earnings and domestic labor in any particular country may also be affected by the magnitude of the housework burden there.

### ***Health and Inequality***

One of the main reasons behind the poor state of healthcare facilities in India and the high levels of health-related inequality across the states is the

very low level of public health expenditure, which happens to be among the lowest in the world, at 5.1 percent of Gross Domestic Product (Pal and Ghosh 2007:15). There are many studies which have investigated health inequalities and their subsequent impact, along with trying to explore the underlying mechanisms of health inequality. These studies tend to highlight the importance of socio-economic characteristics in explaining systematic differences in health status. Tubeuf and Florence, in their study of Europeans, discussed the determining factors of social health inequality, and explored in particular the role played by parents' social status, and their vital status or age at death, on social health inequalities in adulthood among older adults (Tubeuf and Florence 2011:3). According to them, health inequalities display a systematic relationship with indicators of socio-economic status, namely wealth. These are driven mainly by current social conditions. Both economic and social inequalities are related to poor health conditions in India. There are many researches which have tried to see the link between these variations. Borooah (2018:66-72) evaluates the relative strengths of economic and social status in determining the health status of people in India. Though he accepts that economic position and poor living conditions are more responsible for bad health conditions of socially depressed groups, their low social status also has some role to play in their worst health outcomes. In Borooah's study he attempts to connect health outcomes with the age at death and the self-assessed health status of elderly persons. He points out that living in a forward-progressing state (compared to a backward state), and belonging to a relatively affluent household, significantly improved health outcomes. The perception of being in poor health also varies along with environmental perception, caste, class, and religion. In their study of the health conditions of Bihar, Dahdah and Alok try to evaluate the mobile health facility as a neutral, universal, accessible and 'smart' technology to improve health (Dahdah and Alok 2018). The scheme, though implemented with the obvious intention of making health facilities approachable, reinforces inequalities on the ground.

Health, education, and nutrition, are central capabilities, so distribution in these dimensions is an important determinant of equity. Moreover, one reason why greater income inequality may reduce growth is because it worsens the human capital of the population (Stewart 2013). Carter and Reardon argue that there is, of course, considerable variation in health among individuals (Carter and Reardon 2014:5). Some of this variation is due to age, biological factors, personal choices, and the vagaries of luck. Of concern to us, however, is the extent to which health disparities — in both access to healthcare and health outcomes — are unequally patterned

among groups. In general, low-income and less educated individuals are at substantially higher risk for most diseases.

Carter and Reardon argue that some studies show that, in poor countries, life expectancy increases rapidly in the early stages of economic development (Carter and Reardon 2014:6). As countries become richer and living standards increase, however, the relationship between economic growth and life expectancy weakens, and eventually disappears. Thus, when rich countries get richer, on average, it appears to do nothing to further their life expectancy (Pickett & Wilkinson 2009). Likewise, comparative international studies indicate that countries with greater income inequality score worse overall on health indicators (Pickett & Wilkinson 2009). Thus, the richest societies do not have the best health — the countries with the least income inequality do.

Surrogacy has emerged as a new occupation for many women who are willing to sell their wombs in order to earn money. Commercial surrogacy is a multi-billion-dollar industry across the world, with India being one of the world leaders. While liberal feminists defend the practice as a woman's right to use her body as she chooses, others focus on the multiple systems of inequality and exploitation that are potentially reinforced by such practices, or debate on the ethics or morality of this practice. Surrogacy is estimated to be a \$2 billion market in India with about 3000 clinics currently offering surrogacy services and 30,000 clinics having the potential to launch surrogacy practices (Kannan 2009; Krishnakumar 2003). With the United Nations countries on top in commercial surrogacy, India is also fast emerging as a key player. Providing the body for surrogacy is not easy in the Indian context. The decisions Indian women make about their own reproduction conform to the hegemonic agenda of reducing the fertility of lower class women (Pande 2016: 249). The fertility of lower class women has been seen as a danger in Indian society, but with the advent of surrogacy this fertility is temporarily revalued, as lower class women become reproducers for clients who are relatively more privileged. Surrogacy has become one of the glaring examples of stratified reproduction in India, through which, because of power relations, some people are empowered to nurture and reproduce and others are deprived of it, reflecting inequality in terms of gender and reproduction (Pande 2016: 255). The review of gender inequalities reveals that there are different forms and aspects of inequality which have been studied, but there is lack of studies that see gender in respect of its relationship to caste, class, and micro level data on inequality.

### ***Education and Inequality***

Tilak (1978: 419) states that inequality in educational opportunity is of different types: regional inequality, inequality by sex, inequality by caste, inequality by parental income, inequality by parental occupation, etc. Despite many attempts to reform, inequality, with its different faces, still persists in our educational system. According to Tilak, we can study the problem of inequality in education in the following four stages: 1. inequality in educational opportunity (IEO); 2. inequality in educational attainment (IEA); 3. inequality in occupational attainments (IOA); 4. inequality in return to education (IRE). Most of the research work done in India concentrates on IEO only, and policy measures are directed towards reducing IEO. The solution lies not in the provision for subsidized or free education, but in eradicating poverty at home.

A further dimension of gross inequality in the diffusion of education is that of 'social class'. The representation of the dominant strata is disproportionately high at all levels of education, and most conspicuously in the higher and elite echelons, in urban as well as rural areas. This implies that caste status continues to be indicative of occupational and economic status. Evidence of this is available from research conducted in several parts of the country (Velaskar 1990: 133). In his book *Distinction* (1979) Bourdieu argues that children develop from their parents a *habitus*, or form unconscious orientations towards ways of being that fit their class position, and thus reproduce social classes. He argues that these outlooks are set at birth, and attempts to add on cultural capital later in life will convey the sense that the child is an outsider. While talking about schools, Bordieu says that, in a sense, schools are markets wherein children enter with various stores of capital that can be exchanged for enhancement of their capital, and thereby their life-chances. Even children who lack the *habitus* of educated parents, or the working or poor classes, are simultaneously viewed as devoid of valued knowledge and filled with useless or detracting family baggage, or what Bourdieu described as 'an organic culture' (Biraimah and Zajda 2008: XXV).

Parker (2008) while describing the inequality in education system of Nicaragua, says that poor-quality education, overcrowding, overwhelming bureaucracy, and lack of safety, affect poor students' far more than wealthy students. Nicaragua has the greatest within-country disparities. He concludes that, though wealth continues to be an important predictor of secondary school attendance, the difference in secondary school attendance across income groups varies depending both on the age of the student and

the student's schooling gap. De Castrol and Luz, et al. (2008) argue that the educational system is at the same time inclusive and exclusive. While focusing on Brazil's educational system, they point out that the education system of Brazil, and policies regarding school meals, pupil transportation, and school violence, can simultaneously be inclusionary and exclusionary, by facilitating the inclusion of pupils within municipal schools, while excluding them from a quality education, with the organization of the system being crucial to the educative aim. Municipalities that have more resources are better organized, and have better trained teachers, who are more able to offer a good education.

In his study, Calarco (2014) shows instead how parents actively transmit class-based cultures to children, and how these lessons reproduce inequalities. His study reveals a key source of children's class-based behaviors, and highlights the efforts by which parents and children together reproduce inequalities; how parents actively transmit culture to children, how children respond, and how those responses generate stratified profits. The modern education system which is based on more egalitarian values results in a repressive society because of its implied unequal educational opportunities.

## **Power and Inequality**

Social inequality, the organizing principle of hierarchical structure in human society, is manifested in unequal access to goods, information, decision making, and power. Status is the determinant of social position, and status differentiation is the foundation of inequality. Social inequality is a characteristic of virtually every society on earth today, and its history goes back thousands of years (Price and Feinman 2010: 2). Political inequality generally points to imbalanced power distribution in the society. It can be defined as the extent of structured differences in influence over government decisions. Here, individuals, groups, and organizations, are defined by how much political influence they can exert, i.e. their potential of political influence (Dubrow and K. Jashua 2015: 14).

The idea that political power stratifies societies has a long, uninterrupted history (Dubrow, and Jashua (eds.) 2015). Though the study of power as an independent facet has been done mainly by political scientists, the interrelationship between caste, class and power has been examined by sociologists (Beteille 1965). Instead of examining power independently, it has been mostly studied in relationships with caste and class (Kothari 1973). Power inequality in a rural context has been mainly examined in