

CASTE AS MANIFESTED IN THE INDONESIAN SOCIETY

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which the idea of caste is manifested in the Indonesian society. While this paper agrees that caste system in India is not different from other systems of social stratification in other parts of the world (H.A. Gould; 1972 : 4), there are variations in different societies due to differences in the underlying cultural systems. Indonesia is composed of 3000 islands stretching from northern Sumatra to western New Guinea for a distance of some 3,400 miles but for the purpose of this paper only two areas of Indonesia are considered namely Java and Bali.

Studying social stratification has been one of the main preoccupations of Anthropology. What is implicit in the idea of stratification in any society is social inequality. To the extent that the Indian caste system expresses this idea of social inequality it is no different from any other system of social stratification. However, the Indian caste system is certainly more complex, elaborate and rigid than the division of Indonesian society into the abangan, santri and prijaji cultural types. The island of Bali, however, manifests a stratification system which is closer to the Indian caste system. This is partly due to the much greater Hindu influence in Bali compared to Java.

Indonesia is taken as the unit of analysis and comparison because throughout its history it has been subject to influences from India. Without the necessity of going back into history, suffice it to say that Hindu influence can still be observed in Indonesian culture such as that reflected in the *wajang kulit* or shadow play which is still widely popular among the Indonesians today. What is immediately apparent in the *wajang kulit* characters is the idea of status and the refinement of temperament and manner. The recurring themes always feature the battle between the *halus* (refined) heroes and their *kasar* (crude) enemies and as expected the refined heroes always emerge victorious. This idea of *kasar* and *halus*, as we shall see, form the basis for the differences in world outlook between the prijaji (nobility) and the rest of the Indonesian population.

Nowhere in Indonesia did Hindu exert its greatest influence than in Bali. The Balinese share many things in common with the Javanese. Both use the Kawi language which makes distinction between the language used when speaking to persons of high and low castes. Besides sharing the Kawi language, both the Javanese and the Balinese enjoy the *wajang kulit* and *wajang wong* dramas although Hindu influences are manifested in varying degrees in their cultures. There are also differences between the two societies. Big scale export agriculture, Islamic influences and Dutch colonialism did not penetrate into Bali in the same degree as they did in Java and in all likelihood Balinese villages to-day resemble closely to the Javanese villages prior to these incursions.

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It is clear that the stratification system in Bali is unique compared to the rest of the Indonesian islands. In a sense it can be said that the caste system in Bali is a variation of the Indian caste system. The intricate network of Balinese social structure, the remains of 'feudal states', ranked title groups, corporate kin groups, agricultural societies, hamlet associations, government, villages and districts and musical and dramatic groups do not place Bali in the same category as the less sophisticated Javanese system (R.T. McVey, ed., 1967 : 57).

One of the prominent landmarks in the history of Indonesia was the one time strong Muslim empire of Mataram. In this early Muslim empire, the political head was also the head of religious affairs but the spiritual specialists were Muslim scholars and scribes and holy men. They exercised a great deal of influence on temporal affairs. The rulers gained legitimacy through them and until late in the 18th century they occupied important positions in the Javanese courts (Palmier, 1960 : 202).

A word about the Makassarese system may not be out of context here for the purpose of comparison. Makassarese stratification system appears to resemble that of Bali but it seems to be much more fluid. Mobility is possible for a man who has initiative and the support of his kinsmen. A man's rank in Makassar is determined by two factors. First is the status of his parents and other kinsmen and second his own personal attainments in terms of wealth, office and education. His status is also enhanced by the amount of the bride price of his sisters and daughters which is kept in the Mosque records (R.T. McVey, ed., 1967 : 62).

In Java, the nobility (including the ruler) formed the upper layer of the Javanese society while the villagers formed the lower stratum. Most probably the influence and power of the nobility never extended beyond the homogeneous cultural area of Central and East Java. According to an estimate of 1802, some 12½% of the population were accounted nobility (Palmier, 1960 : 203).

C. Geertz has described in great length the three cultural types in Modjokuto, a community located in Java. These cultural types are termed the *abangan*, *santri* and *prijaji*. According to Geertz group boundary is maintained between the three cultural types because of differences in religious orientation, locality and economic activities. Originally the term *prijaji* referred to the gentry way of life (courtiers and officials of the king) but now the term seems to imply a whole set of values and attitudes of nearly every white-collar Javanese irrespective of his social origin (R.T. McVey, ed., 1967 : 42). If the *prijaji* is closely associated with the social role of the gentry, the *santri* is associated with the trading element of the Javanese society. If the *prijaji* and *santri* represent two elements of urban Java, the *abangan* is essentially rural and is closely associated with the peasantry.

Let us now examine in greater details the three groups that constitute the Javanese society. *Abangan*, *santri*, and *prijaji* are concentrated in three socio-structural nuclei in Java today. They are the village, the market and the government bureaucracy (C. Geertz, 1969 : 5). *Abangan* religious belief embodies the combination of animistic, Hinduistic and Islamic elements. The *slametan* is the *abangan's* important ritual ceremony which is associated with the whole realm of spirit

beliefs. The *santri* religious variant represents purer Islam involving the practice of the basic rituals in Islam such as the prayers, the Fast and the Pilgrimage. The *prijaji* originally referred only to the hereditary aristocracy. During the Dutch colonial period, they were absorbed into the government bureaucracy and became salaried civil servants. This group of Indonesian elite who trace their origin to the Hindu-Javanese courts of pre-colonial times exhibit a highly refined court etiquette and set them apart from the rest of the Indonesian population. In religious outlook, they differ from the *abangan* and *santri* because of its Hinduistic tendency.

In large measure, the *prijaji* to-day are mostly bureaucrats. They are white-collar nobles. They were unable to exert real influence on the peasant mass because being mainly of the towns they were not associated with land to the degree that the agricultural gentry of Western Europe did. There was also no patron-servant relationship such as to be found in the caste system in India (C. Geertz, 1969 : 231).

It has been stressed earlier that the *prijaji* attach great importance to the concepts *halus* and *kasar*. *Halus* is closely associated with the etiquette of the court while *kasar* is just the opposite for it represents the crude and uncourtly. Peasants and kings represent two extremes and the Javanese are ranked between these two extremes. One descends downwards from the *prijaji* patterns to those of the *santri* and *abangan* (C. Geertz, 1969 : 231).

Most *prijajis* have both a literati and intelligentsia aspect to their outlook. The intelligentsia element seems to have been concentrated in such port cities as Djakarta, Surabaya and Semarang while the literati element increases as one climbs the status ladder in the direction of the great inland court centers (C. Geertz, 1969 : 237).

Bali affords a different picture from that of Java. It has been stressed at the outset that Bali felt the Hindu influence at a much greater degree than did Java and the social stratification in Bali affords a much closer approximation to that of the Indian caste than the stratification system in Java. In Bali a title that indicates the caste of an individual is inherited from the father and this resembles somewhat that of the Indian caste system (J.L. Peacock, 1973 : 101). However, a closer examination reveals that there are some variations that make the Balinese system different from that of India.

In what way does the Balinese system deviate from the Indian caste system? In Bali the *Triwangsa* (three peoples) is the highest caste. The *Triwangsa* includes the three *warna* (colors) of traditional Hinduism: the Brahman, Satria and Wesia. Only a very small proportion of the Balinese seem to belong to this caste. Majority of them, some 90% belong to the *djaba* caste (commoner) (H. Geertz in R.T. McVey, ed., 1967 : 51). Thus the main status distinction in Bali is between the gentry and the commoner or in Balinese the *djero* and the *djaba* which roughly mean the 'insiders' and the 'outsiders'. 'Insiders' implies those who are inside a palace and 'outsiders' implies those who are outside it. However, the palace does not seem to be very much different from the home of a commoner and almost the same standard of living is enjoyed by everyone.

In the Balinese society, aristocrats are accorded respect in speech and posture

by those in the lower stratum. In the Balinese caste system rank and title do not guarantee wealth or power. Economic or artistic training is not associated with aristocratic blood except in the supravillage political organization. There are cases in the Balinese society in which some members of the *Triwangsa* caste work as hired labourers for the more prosperous members of the *djaba* caste. A title only assures ceremonial respect. In speech a Balinese of a higher position is addressed in the *halus* (refined) language as opposed to the *kasar* (crude) language used when addressing persons of a lower caste.

Status is also indicated by the position where one sits in public gathering. Marriage can also be an indicator of status. Marriage between a *Triwangsa* and a *djaba* is discouraged and if such a marriage takes place, the *Triwangsa* would be expelled from his caste. A man is discouraged from marrying a woman above his caste. This means that he must marry a woman of his own caste or from a lower caste. The status of a woman is raised if she marries a man of a higher caste. A woman who marries a man of a higher caste is sometimes required to address her own children in high Balinese while her children need only to use ordinary Balinese when replying to her. Differentiation with regards to speech does not occur if both parents are of the same caste. The notion of untouchability is also inherent in the Balinese caste system as evidenced by the fact that one cannot touch high caste persons.

The indication of one's status in Bali is also expressed by the different standards of punishment meted out. A *Triwangsa* member who commits an offence against a person of an inferior status is usually less severely punished than when a person of an inferior status commits an offence against a *Triwangsa*.

It has been stressed that the notion of untouchability is inherent in the Balinese caste system. Close contact with a person of a lower caste is avoided. There is thus no possibility of persons of a higher and lower castes living together or sleeping in the same room or sharing the same building. Although eating together is permissible, nevertheless food or drink touched by a member of the lower caste may not be consumed by a person of a higher caste (J. Van Baal, 1969 : 210-211).

A closer examination reveals that Balinese traditional stratification system is neither a feudal system such as that prevailed in Western Europe nor a Hindu caste system although there is a tendency to depict it as one or the other (H. Geertz in R.T. McVey, ed., 1967 : 52). It is true that prior to 1908 there existed the feudal type patron-client relationship or service relationships between certain gentry and commoners but such a relationship was not associated with land or agricultural labour. Farming was done by the aristocrats themselves or they employed share-croppers (R.T. McVey, ed., 1967 : 52).

Gentry, priests and commoners cannot be thought as constituting distinctly separate groups in Bali and their members are closely related to one another. They are very general status categories (R.T. McVey, ed., 1967 : 51). One is tempted to think that the two groups, the nobility and the Brahman as comprising the top layer over the Balinese village community. While most institutions at the village level are in a sense independent of the political and religious system at the supra-

village level, nevertheless these upper ranks do form an integral part of the Balinese society.

It is interesting to picture the Javanese society as being rigidly compartmentalized into the *abangan*, *santri* and *prijaji* groups. In fact a Javanese scholar claims that in actual life the three cultural types interact freely with little regard to their cultural differences (S. Soemardjan, 1965 : 54). It is more reasonable to expect that group boundaries do exist but it is possible for members to cross such boundaries.

In recent years modernization rather than industrialization has brought some changes in the status pattern to the Indonesian society. Economic changes and western education have resulted in the basic change of the status pattern. New Jobs were created by the introduction of the capitalist economic system (Wertheim, 1955 : 42). In this connection, we should also note the changes in India with the advent of industrialization (L.I. Rudolf & S.H. Rudolf, 1967 : 23, 24). Education made possible the creation of a new class of intellectuals and near-intellectuals who began to challenge not only the colonial power but also threaten the position of the nobility. The position of the Javanese nobility was certainly affected by the coming of the west. While the positions of the individual rulers were strengthened by the Dutch, they were placed in a subordinate position to the Dutch (Palmier, 1960 204, 205).

One interesting phenomenon that emerged with the advent of Dutch colonialism was that the notion of nobility was broadened to include groups that were not included before (Palmier, 1960 : 204, 205). With the defeat of the Dutch, the nationalists proceeded to reduce the power of the regent by making the post no longer hereditary. Caste-like barriers of the former centuries gave way to tension between racial groups. In the social stratification system of new Indonesia, racial criteria will fade into the background. It is interesting to note that conditions that were created with the advent of modernization have forced even the members of the *prijaji* class to be traders which they scorned before.

In the case of Bali, at the time of the Dutch colonial administration, there were six major kings and countless minor independent princes. When the Dutch came, they introduced territorial boundaries and governmental districts (*Swapradja*). Smaller principedoms were incorporated into another district (R.T. McVey, ed., 1967 : 53).

During the Dutch colonial period, Indonesia was subject to the colonial 'caste system' in which the Eurasians (now mostly called the Indo-Europeans) were included within the European ruling class though their social position was inferior to that of the pure Dutch parentage. The intermediate group was filled by the Chinese and 'foreign Orientals' where in Java they were mostly traders and handicrafts men. The rise of the new class of intellectuals helped to get rid of the colonial stratification according to race. The new middle class consisted of numerous officials, employers and technicians in the government service. Large monopolistic enterprises and the state which govern the economic life of the country have to depend on the co-operation of the new middle class.

During the Dutch colonial period, the Javanese officials were regarded as functionaries within a bureaucracy. These Javanese officials, to the Javanese eyes, constituted the literati representing traditions of the *prijaji* (J.L. Peacock, 1973 : 45).

It has been emphasized that race was the basis of status in the wider Indonesian society during the colonial period. The natives who belong to the lowest stratum in the social stratification were discriminated against. Only the native was subject by law to compulsory service and forced labour. A native mother who married a European could not gain custody of the child on the death of the father (J.L. Peacock, 1973 : 45).

It can thus be said that in the present century the social and political positions of the *prijaji* group vis-a-vis other groups has been weakened. Even the lower born can gain access to the bureaucracy through education. Antagonism seems to be greatest between *santri* and the other two groups but tension also exists between *prijaji* and *abangan* (C. Geertz, 1969 : 356). History has shown that since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries *prijaji* and *santri* groups had been at variance and there was resentment of the ruling aristocracy and the urban centered *santri* traders. It can be felt that conflict between the various groups is more intense now than in the past (C. Geertz, 1969 : 360).

The tension between *prijaji* and *abangan* is closely related to the question of status. There is still the prejudice on the part of the *prijaji* against the less sophisticated 'village people'. However, the caste or semi caste mechanism which in the past operated to isolate one from the other no longer operate with the traditional effectiveness. They have to come to terms with one another and have to compete with one another (C. Geertz, 1969 : 360). Changes in the hierarchical patterns of prestige also resulted in the combination of forces between *santri* and *abangan* groups against the *prijaji*.

CONCLUSION

Social stratification based on social inequality is a universal phenomenon. The degree of rigidity of this division varies from society to society. This happens because of the differences in the underlying cultural systems of each society.

Social stratification system has been examined in the foregoing pages. Bali in Indonesia affords an example of a type of social stratification which is closer to the Indian system than that afforded by Java. The notion of caste though in a less sophisticated form as manifested in the Balinese system can be related to the Hindu influence and the fact that Islam and Dutch colonialism did not penetrate to Bali in the same degree that they did to Java. This is not to imply that had Islam and Dutch colonialism penetrated to Java more intensively, the Balinese caste system would not have emerged. However, Islam did very much to destroy the structure of Hindu Majapahit empire and its influences in the area when Islam penetrated into the island.

Talking about Indonesia as a whole we find that one difference between India and Indonesia is the degree of importance attached to caste. The idea of pollution

and purity so characteristic of the Indian caste system is not embodied in the Indonesian system in the same degree as in the Indian system. In the Hindu-Javanese society the priestly and the royal were regarded as the highest castes and the society was ranked accordingly with these castes at the top. However, there is a difference between India and Indonesia. In the Indonesian case, the priests were never able to outrank the kings sheerly through the ritual purity.

There are variations in the Balinese system that makes it different from the Indian system. It has been shown that the idea of untouchability and segregation is present in the Balinese system although perhaps in a less sophisticated form. The Balinese system is also unique in the sense that it can neither be the western type feudal system nor the Indian caste system. What is implied here is that we certainly cannot say that the Balinese system is a 100% replication of the Indian caste system because of the absence of a division of the society into ascriptive corporate groups with distinct occupational functions which is typical of the Indian caste system. The idea of ritual contamination which is conspicuous in the Indian caste system is also absent in a significant degree in the Balinese system.

In conclusion it can be said that the Balinese caste system is unique to Bali and the same thing can be said about the stratification system in Java. Both the Balinese and the Javanese systems constitute a form of social stratification which manifests itself in one form or another in other societies.

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