

Caste and land tenure in Sri Lanka (based on 'Madagama' village)

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A critical examination of the Sri Lankan rural social structure and the organization will reveal that Caste system and Land Tenure have been playing a very significant role in the traditional society in the past and the modern society as well. Many scholars have ventured to study the manner in which the Caste system and the Land Tenure had influenced the rural community life. But an analysis of these studies clearly shows that no substantial effort had been made to identify clearly the link between the Caste and Land Tenure. In these circumstances the primary objective of this study was to identify the inter relation between the Caste and Land Tenure.

This research was mainly focussed on the issue as to whether there existed a close connection between the Caste system and Land Tenure in Sri Lanka, while Madagama village was chosen as the village to be covered by the study.

Madagama is a village where traditional characteristic features of a rural village still remain to be seen. The village is populated by several communities representing different Castes. The renowned Anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere also had selected Madagama as the focal area for conducting his research in to the Social Anthropological conditions of rural communities in Sri Lanka and this fact has underscored Madagama as a Classic example of a typical rural village.

Historical Method for ascertaining the historical background and assessing the progression of the village, the Comparative method for comparing the past and the present conventions, traditions and practices pertaining to Caste and Land Tenure, and the Statistical method for collecting and analyzing the data were the methodologies adopted in conducting the study. It is also expected to apply the Participant Observation method and Interview method to collect qualitative data.

This study is aimed at achieving several basic objectives. They are the identification of the relation that existed between the Caste and Land Tenure in the past traditional society, Comparative study of the present situation vis-à-vis the Caste and Land Tenure systems adopted by the traditional society in the past and ascertainment of factors that led to change the nature of correlation between Caste and Land Tenure.

In the end, the study revealed that in the process of modernization the village had undergone various changes particularly including the relaxation of restraints and prejudices associated with Caste distinctions and opening of equal chances for members of the low caste communities to gain access to recognized positions in the society without discrimination on caste. However, the correlation that existed in the traditional past continues to prevail unchanged in the village even today. Therefore we can reasonably deduce that Caste and land ownership continue to remain as deciding factors in determining the social Status of an individual.

Key words: Caste, Land tenure, Land use, Sri Lanka, Social groups

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