SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN KAMPONG BAGAN

A Study of Class, Status, Conflict and Mobility in a Rural Malay Community

by

S. HUSIN ALI

1964
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN KAMPONG BAGAN
A Study of Class, Status, Conflict and Mobility in a Rural Malay Community

by
S. Husin Ali
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Tables</th>
<th>vi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter I: INTRODUCTION**

- A. Purpose and Scope of Study ........................................ 1
- B. Definitions of Concepts
  - i. Marxian Concept .................................................. 5
  - ii. Weberian Concept ............................................... 7
  - iii. Warnerian Concept ............................................. 8
  - iv. Working Definitions ........................................... 10
- C. Method of Study .................................................... 12
- D. Problems of Study ................................................ 15

**Chapter II: KAMPONG BAGAN (GENERAL BACKGROUND)**

- A. Geographical Setting ................................................ 18
- B. Social Structure Organisation
  - i. The Mukim Structure ............................................ 21
  - ii. The Parit Structure ........................................... 23
  - iii. The Surau-based Structure .................................. 24
  - iv. The Household Unit .......................................... 27
- C. Historical Background .............................................. 29

**Chapter III: CLASS STRUCTURE IN KAMPONG BAGAN**

- A. General Agricultural Activity .................................... 34
- B. Categories of People Dependent on Agriculture ............... 36
- C. Distribution of Land Ownership Among People Dependent on Agriculture ................................................. 39
- D. Distribution of Incomes Among People Dependent on Agriculture ......................................................... 43
- E. Distribution of Land Ownership and Incomes Among People Not Dependent on Agriculture ................................. 46
- F. Possible Division of Classes .................................... 51
Chapter IV: STATUS STRUCTURE IN KAMPONG BAGAN

A. Status Factors in the Kampong
   i. Personal Qualities
   ii. Education and/or Knowledge
   iii. Religion
   iv. Community Responsibility
   v. Occupations
   vi. Economic Well-being

B. The Status Factors and Kampong Status Structure

C. Relationship Between Class and Status

Chapter V: MANIFESTATIONS OF CLASS AND STATUS IN KAMPONG BAGAN

A. Classes and Individual Attitudes On One Another
   i. Religious Occasions
   ii. Marriages and Marriage Ceremonies

B. Separation of Classes
   i. Separation of Members of Middle Class
   ii. Separation of Members of Landlord Class
   iii. Separation of Members of Farmer Class

C. Division of Influence Among Classes

Chapter VI: CONFLICTS IN KAMPONG BAGAN

A. Two Examples of Group Conflicts
   i. Conflict During The Penghulu Election
   ii. Conflict During The Federal General Election

B. Stages of Conflict

C. Areas of Conflict of Interest
   i. Ownership of Means of Production
   ii. Marketing of Goods Produced and Consumed

D. Consciousness Regarding Situation of Conflict

E. Why Open Conflict Not Evident

Chapter VII: SOCIAL MOBILITY IN KAMPONG BAGAN

A. Upward Social Mobility
   i. Inheritance
   ii. Well-paid Occupations
   iii. Ability and Capacity

B. Downward Social Mobility
   i. Islamic Law of Inheritance
   ii. Leases and/or Sales

C. Tendency For Greater Inequity
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose and Scope of Study

This is a case study in social stratification. It is not going to dwell at length on any theoretical aspects of social stratification in general, that is, it will not devote much space to tracing historical developments, analysing the various similarities and differences of basic concepts, or discussing the many theories and methodologies. These will be referred to briefly only by way of introduction. On the other hand this study is intended to be a practical community study. It seeks to discover the nature of social stratification, the realities of class and status, and the roles of class and status within the framework of the whole social organisation in a particular community.

Social stratification has been popularly and extensively studied in the West, particularly in America after the first World War. In many parts of Asia too, the study has been quite actively pursued. In India and Indonesia, for example, various problems related to the question of social stratification have been investigated. But in Malaya, the field has been left almost barren. This is not so surprising because in this country very little of what can be called sociological and anthropological studies have been carried out.

In the past, studies and writings on matters related to Malay society were undertaken mainly by British colonial officers. Such names as Winstedt, Wilkinson, Swettenham, Skeat, Taylor, Maxwell and Gullick are still well-known. They and their contemporaries wrote on a wide range of topics, but concentrating more on the 'exotic' and 'out-of-the-ordinary' aspects of Malay life. Malay beliefs, superstitions, magic, customs and ceremonies pertaining to fishing and rice planting etc. were commonly followed. The matriarchal society of

3. M. A. Jaspan, Social Stratification and Social Mobility in Indonesia; a trend report and annotated bibliography, Jokjakarta, 1959.
4. See Bibliography A for books and articles which deal with various aspects of Malay life. The writer does not claim that this is complete, but it does give a general idea of what has been done in this field in Malaya. The short discussion in the proceeding pages is based on this bibliography.
Social Stratification in Kampong Bagan

Negri Sembilan and its tribal territories were keenly studied. Their codes, sayings, customs and laws, their social, political and economic organizations have been the subjects of many articles and books. In the same way the 'wild aborigines' were never left out.

This trend in the studies on Malay society did not continue. After the second World War a few social scientists began to show interest in a wider Malayan society. They were keen to study the working of the society, its organization and structure, particularly at the village level. It may be said that the way was first opened by Firth with his study of Malay fishermen before the outbreak of the second World War. These post-war studies were strikingly different from the pre-war ones, because most of them were carried out by trained scientists. No doubt the attraction of matriarchy in Negri Sembilan, for instance, was still there. Anthropologists like de Jong, Swift and Diane Lewis still turned to them. But these anthropologists displayed in their analysis greater depth and greater insight into the workings of the society.

Among the names most prominent in this group of social scientists are Wilson, Ungku Aziz, Swift, Gullick and Burridge. Being trained as economists, Wilson and Ungku Aziz, obviously showed leanings towards the economic issues. The former concentrates particularly on the problems of land tenure and ownership in the padi area of North Malaya. The latter is more involved the theory of poverty, and has organised several surveys in fishing and farming villages, in order to develop this theory. Burridge and Swift are both anthropologists. Burridge has studied the Malay village in Johore, especially regarding its administration, management and race relationships. Swift's socio-economic analyses of the kampong (village) takes him to the problems of capital accumulation, savings and credits. In some respects he covers the same area as Gamba does in his study of poverty. As for Gullick, his scope covers that of the indigenous political systems.

The studies undertaken by them, as well as by others such as Wells, Downs, Djamour and Carnell only touched on certain aspects of social stratification. There is yet to be a study that is devoted only or mainly to social stratification, either on the village or the national scale in this country.

This dearth of studies on social stratification means that the writer has no local example which can serve as a guide for his own attempt. There has not been much in previous studies which can give a clear idea of what to expect regarding the nature of class and status structures in a Malay community. Consequently he has to start with some general hypotheses. These hypotheses are based on sociological concepts (explained later in this chapter)
as well as on personal impressions of rural Malay communities secured from youth to manhood. The hypotheses are:

a. that in a Malay rural community the people can be categorised into various classes, and these classes are closely linked either (a) with the main economic activity in the community, namely agriculture, and so related to the possession of land, or (b) with other types of occupations, and

b. that the status position of members of the community is determined primarily by the factor of class and secondarily by other factors such as religion and education which enjoy respectable positions in the social order owing to the values and attitudes of the community towards such values.

The community which has been chosen in order to provide a test for these hypotheses is Kampong Bagan. There are no special reasons for this choice. From the start, the writer’s intention was to study social stratification — or class and status structures — in a Malay community. In Malaya over 80% of the Malays live in the rural areas, occupied mainly in agriculture. Thus, to study the Malays, attention must be given first to those living in the rural and agricultural sector of the country. A rural community, therefore, had to be chosen for the study and Kampong Bagan was the one which struck the writer’s mind first because the village, only eight miles from his home, had been known to him for a long time.

It is hoped that after the hypotheses have been tested against the realities that exist in Kampong Bagan, answers to many questions will be provided. Can a Malay community be divided into groups which may be understood as class and status? Are there any inter-relationships, connections or reciprocal influences between the class and status structures? How are the class and status structures manifested in the community? Are the class and status groups closed, and if they are not, what are the possibilities and processess of social mobility? Are there any signs of conflict in the community, resulting from the differences of classes and status? Answers to these questions can give some clear picture as to what is the nature of social stratification in the community studied. More important, and this is what is hoped for, the findings may provide the basis on which further studies in the field can be pursued.

B. Definition of Concepts

Up to this point, the terms like 'social stratification', 'class' and 'status' have been used rather freely. Before the use of these terms gives rise to any confusion, it is well that we define them.

In its widest sense, the study of social stratification means the study of certain differences among men. By its very nature, this type of study is not particularly concerned with the differences of men merely as individuals. On the other hand, such a study is interested in seeing how these individual differences result in certain distinctive features which enable us to see a number of individuals as being relatively similar to one another and strikingly different from another number of individuals, thus marking off group differences in a community. Such 'distinctive features' may exist, for example, in the form of kinship, race and religion; and on the bases of these, kinship, racial and religious groups are formed. Kinship, race and religion are aspects of social organisation which normally attract the attention of social scientists investigating a society or community. Social stratification is another aspect and, in this case, the group which forms the basis of investigation is often known as 'class'.

The concept of 'class' is a very vague and confusing one. Even among professional social scientists disagreements and even contradictions are found in its definitions and interpretations. This may be due to two main reasons. Firstly, class has very strong political connotations. Social scientists with different backgrounds and training have different ways of looking at society and may thus have different attitudes towards the problems of class. Secondly, practical investigations for the purpose of studying social stratification have been carried out in various communities and societies. The conditions and social relationships revealed by these studies are unlikely to be the same and the data collected from different communities have been analysed and interpreted in a variety of ways. It is therefore not surprising that 'class' has different and sometimes conflicting definitions.

Further elaboration on this may perhaps clarify what is meant in the preceding paragraph. It may even serve as a helpful guide in formulating the writer's own understanding of class. Since it is only by way of introduction, the discussion will be confined mainly to three important figures in this field.

6. Gordon, op. cit. p.3, says "the concept of class has no precise well agreed meaning"; and O. C. Cox, Caste Class and Race, New York, The Monthly Review Press, 1959, p. 121, "Professor Pitrim Sorokin reports a collection of thirty two 'forms' of definitions of social class.....However, a convincing theory of 'class' relations is still not generally available."
of study. They are Karl Marx, Max Weber and Lloyd Warner. To a large extent they can be considered to be representative of three predominant schools of thought regarding the concept of class in the study of social stratification.

1. **Marxian Concept**

   Any study of class would inevitably begin with Karl Marx. Although about two thousand years ago, Aristotle had already noted the organisation of groups in society, it was not until Marx that the notion of class became analytically significant. According to Marx, society has two structures, the basic structure and the superstructure. What is regarded as the basic structure is the economic organisation in the society, and to a large measure this organisation determines the nature of other organisations in society, which he considered as the superstructure. Social stratification, or class structure, forms part of the social organisation which is based on the economic organisation.

   Marx pointed out that a society can be divided into classes, each determined by its own position in relation to the economic organization and the stage of development of the particular society. But the two major classes which, according to him, often predominate are categorised as the 'oppressed class' and the 'oppressing class'. In what Marx termed as a capitalist society, which formed an important basis for most of his analyses, the 'oppressed class' is called the 'proletariat' and the 'oppressing class' the 'bourgeoisie'. Within the context of the economic organisation for production, the 'proletariat' is the class of people who do not own the means of production, but who have to live by working and earning as the result of their labour. As for the 'bourgeoisie', they are the class of people who own the means of production, and who employ the labour of the proletariat for production. They live by earning part of the goods produced through the labour of the 'proletariat'.

   Again, within the framework of the capitalist society too, Marx explained that there is also a class of people who are distinct from the 'proletariat' and the 'bourgeoisie'. He called this class the 'petty bourgeoisie'. He believed that this class is not as important as the other two and contended that through the process of change it would ultimately disintegrate and get absorbed into one of the two major classes.

   Going further than just categorising the various classes, Marx stated that under the capitalist system of economy, there is an ever present conflict of

---