

AN UNSEEN PERSPECTIVE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT: RISE OF RURAL ELITE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

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In spite of modern and ever-changing values, caste division plays a significant role both in regular social interactions and in the ideal scheme of values in rural Sri Lanka. Therefore, the so-called rational interventions for rural development have long been struggling with inescapable socially defined obstacles which are thought to be rather irrational. Due to its fundamental functionality, caste has a strong socio economic dimension, and particularly interwoven with the rational social institutions such as education, health etc. The objective of the study is to understand how different caste groups in rural Sri Lanka are engaged in accumulating wealth of any kind in line with modern values and their mutual association with education. Employing guidelines provided by phenomenology, a case study was conducted. Walapne Division in Nuwaraeliya District is selected as the research area, and is composed of five cases. Focus group discussions and Interviews were used as data collection methods. Collected data were analyzed using narrative and thematic approach. Rural sector in Sri Lanka has undergone a transitional turmoil towards an unprecedented value system while preserving some traditional institutions. The so-called lower caste groups have used education as a way towards their material growth. Aristocracy appears to be a strong obstacle to the mobilization of the high caste people, particularly of women in terms of their educational progress. Because of the modern economic value system, some of the functions performed by lower castes have become market oriented, thereby giving rise to a new rural-economic elite. Life of the lower caste elite then became stable and it has inspired them towards a high societal platform; education has provided the necessary means for the lower class to achieve stable economic status, and education has reinforced the rise of lower caste people to an elite class, resulting in accumulation of wealth. Migration of resourceful persons from lower caste due to inner rural unrest, in return contributed to the sophistication of caste enclaves in rural areas. Suppressed caste identity and life would have adopted a new identity through modern values. Acquired prosperity, therefore, is subjected to sustenance congruent with outcomes of the school education. On the other hand, bonding social capital, both among men and women in any lower caste group was strengthened because of the school education. In conclusion, the rural sector in Sri Lanka has no exception from globalization, and subjected to unprecedented changes with many challenges. It has changed owing to rational interventions such as education. Although, the so-called irrational caste system still thrives, it is clear that education is a strong institution which has contributed to the rise of rural economic elite class that upholds a new value system in developing rural Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Rural development, Rural elite, Rational inerrancies, Caste