

Melvin M. Tumin has mentioned the following characteristics of social stratification:

1. It is Social:

Stratification is social in the sense that it does not represent inequality which are biologically based. It is true that factors such as strength, intelligence, age, sex can often serve as the basis on which status are distinguished. But such differences by themselves are not sufficient to explain why some statuses receive more power, property and prestige than others.

Biological traits do not determine social superiority and inferiority until they are socially recognized. For example, manager of an industry attains a dominant position not by physical strength, nor by his age, but by having socially defined traits. His education, training skills, experience, personality, character etc. are found to be more important than his biological qualities.

2. It is Ancient:

The stratification system is very old. Stratification was present even in the small wandering bands. Age and sex wear the main criteria of stratification. Difference between the rich and poor, powerful and humble, freemen and slaves was there in almost all the ancient civilization. Ever since the time of Plato and Kautilya social philosopher have been deeply concerned with economic, social, political inequalities.

3. It is Universal:

Social stratification is universal. Difference between rich and poor, the 'haves' or 'have notes' is evident everywhere. Even in the non-literate societies stratification is very much present.

4. It is in diverse Forms:

Social stratification has never been uniform in all societies. The ancient Roman society was stratified into two strata: the Patricians and the Plebians. The Aryan society was divided into four Varnas: the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Sudras, the ancient Greek society in to freemen and slaves, the ancient Chinese society into mandarins, merchants, Farmer and soldiers. Class and estate seem to be the general forms of stratification found in the modern world.

5. It is Consequential:

The stratification system has its own consequences. The most important, most desired and often the scarcest things in human life are distributed unequally because of stratification. The system leads to two kind of consequences: (i) Life chances and (ii) Life style.

Life chances refer to such things as infant mortality, longevity, physical and mental illness, marital conflict, separation and divorce. Life styles include the mode of housing, residential area, education, means of recreation, relation between parent and children, modes of conveyance and so on.

Social stratification is based on four major principles:

1. Social stratification is a trait of society, not simply a reflection of individual differences.
2. Social stratification persists over generations.
3. Social stratification is universal (it happens everywhere) but variable (it takes different forms across different societies).
4. Social stratification involves not just inequality but beliefs as well (inequality is rooted in a society's philosophy).

It indicates that, the social stratification is socially constructed or determined, it is ubiquitous that is universal in nature, found in all human societies, it is functional in nature, in the sense it contributes to the smooth functioning of society by assigning statuses and roles that are essential for the persistence of society.

Types of Social Stratification:

Social stratification is based upon a variety of principles. So we find different type of stratification.

The major types of stratification are

(i) Caste (ii) Class (iii) Estate (iv) Slavery

(i) **Caste** is a hereditary endogamous social group in which a person's rank and its accompanying rights and obligations are ascribed on the basis of his birth into a particular group. For example-Brahmins, Kshyatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudra Caste.

(ii) **Class-Stratification** on the basis of class is dominant in modern society. In this, a person's position depends to a very great extent upon achievement and his ability to use to advantage the inborn characteristics and wealth that he may possess.

(iii) **Estate** system of medieval Europe provides another system of stratification which gave much emphasis to birth as well as to wealth and possessions. Each estate had a state.

(iv)**Slavery** had economic basis. In slavery, every slave had his master to whom he was subjected. The master's power over the slave was unlimited.

In the modern times, Stratification is classified as , Social Stratification, Economic Stratification, Political Stratification, Occupational Stratification, and Gender Stratification

Stratification and Caste:

Under the caste system status is hereditary. It is based on birth, it is purely an ascribed status. Once such positions are assigned, they cannot advance and improve their social status in any way. Hence, caste as a major type of social stratification does not facilitate vertical social mobility.

Social Stratification and Class:

Class is an "open" system. Under this system vertical mobility is absolutely free. Movement from one status to another has no barrier. Status is based on achievement. It is determined by the talents, wealth, money, intelligence, power, education, income, etc. of a person. There is no inheritance of parental status.

Gender:

Like caste and class gender is another kind of social stratification system. Gender, perhaps is the oldest and permanent source of social differentiation. But within the broad hierarchy of caste and class, gender cuts across caste and class. In present day Indian society caste, class and gender are dynamic phenomena which vary between groups, communities and regions. Recent years have witnessed a thorough and widespread discussion on gender. It has claimed critical address within gender as a concept and as a set of practices has occurred during the last three decades.

The origin of the concept gender can be traced to the 19th century women's movement and in Marxism. But it seems to have first appeared among American Feminists who wanted to reject biological determinism. Feminists prefer the term gender than sex.

But the term gender means much more than sex and more inclusive than sex. It is a socially constructed category rather than biologically determined. The gender of a man is masculine and a woman is feminine. Neither a man nor a woman is sex alone. Gender refers to the socially constructed and culturally determined role that men and women play in their day-to-day lives. Gender is the most potent significant and enormously useful analytical concept used by the feminists.

It is a matter of social ascription, a socio-cultural construction and provided a deeper analysis of inequalities existing between male and female. It refers to the social institutionalization of sexual difference. In feminist literature gender is not a value free concept rather a value loaded term and has acquired new dimensions. It is a conceptual tool for analysis and is used to highlight different structural relationships of inequality between men and women. As a socially constructed differences and relations between males and females it very from time to time and from place to place.

Gender is defined as the social construction of relations between women and men and among various groups of women and men. Feminist consider gender as the socio-cultural manifestation of being a man or a woman.

(1) According to N. Kabeer “Gender is seen as the process by which individuals who are born into biological categories of male or female become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity.”

(2) According to A. Masefield—“Gender can be defined as a notion that offers a set of frameworks within which the social and ideological construction and representation of differences between sexes are explained.”

(3) According to ILO, “Gender refers to the social differences and relations between men and women, which are learned, which vary widely among societies and cultures and change over time.”

Thus, gender involves power structure and economic relationships. It is used to analyze the role, responsibilities, constraints, needs of men and women in all areas. It encompasses the social division and cultural distinctions between women and men. It plays an important role in shaping institutions and practices in every society.

Gender and Sex:

The term gender does not replace the term sex. It is necessary to distinguish between sex and gender. The distinction between sex and gender is fundamental, since many differences between males and females are not biological in origin. Sex refers to the physical differences of body whereas gender refers to social, cultural and psychological differences between males and females.

Sex refers to biological differences between male and female which are much more the same over time and space where as gender refers to socially and culturally constructed differences and relations between males and females which vary from place to place and from time to time. Sex refers to male and female whereas gender refers to masculinity and femininity. Gender is a structural feature of a society.

Functions for the Society:

The system of social stratification is also useful for the progress and the well-being of the society. This can be seen if we take into account two forms of stratification.

1. Ascriptive Form of Stratification:

Under the caste system, the status of the individual is fixed at birth and different castes are hierarchically arranged. However, even within the caste system those members who perform their caste roles effectively and efficiently occupy higher’ status. On the other hand, those members who do not perform their role properly occupy lower status even when they belong to the same caste. This functional base has given rise to sub castes. In other words, one caste is further divided into different sub castes and these sub castes are hierarchically divided within a caste group.

Fixation of status of a caste group also facilitates better training of the members. As the members are made aware about the future roles, they start getting training from the

childhood. Such a situation was more applicable in the traditional societies where knowledge was foil knowledge and it could be acquired through membership of a caste group.

In this way we find that under ascriptive form of stratification, society was being well-served and there was interdependence of the caste because of the specialization of their roles.

2. Achieved Form:

Under the achieved form of social stratification, the social statuses are assigned according to the worth of the individual. This system serves the following functions for the society:

(a) Occupational Hierarchy:

Depending upon the importance of a particular occupation, different occupations are hierarchically divided. The occupations which are very important for the well-being of the society are associated with high prestige and those occupations which do not need specialized training are given low status. Such a system is free from confusion, and motivates the people to work hard, so that they could take up occupations of high prestige.

(b) Division according to Intelligence:

All persons are not equal with regard to their intelligence. Those persons with higher level of intelligence can perform more complicated functions of the society. Hence they are provided with different opportunities and high prestige.

(c) Training:

Society makes elaborate arrangements for the training of younger generation. Those who spend more time on training and acquiring new skills are compensated with high returns. Even though such persons start working later yet the economic returns and social prestige associated with their work is higher than others.

(d) Work Efficiency:

Persons with appropriate knowledge and training occupy appropriate positions. Hence, their work efficiency is also higher. Under this system there is no place for parasites and those who shirk work. The fittest to survive is the rule which is followed.

(e) Development:

The competition to move higher in the social ladder has resulted into new inventions, new methods of work and greater efficiency. This system has led to progress and development of the country. The Western societies are highly developed; it is attributed to the fact that these societies adopted open system of stratification.

In this way we find that system of stratification helps in the progress of the society. There are some sociologists who are of the opinion that social stratification is also associated with dysfunctions e.g. giving rise to frustration, anxiety and mental tension. In short, we can say that social stratification has both positive and negative functions. But no society can survive unless it has some system of stratification.

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