

Ist - Years

Unit III

Social Stratification: Meaning Definition/ Forms of social stratification-caste /class and gender.

Social stratification refers to society's categorization of its people into groups based on socioeconomic factors like wealth, income, race, education, gender, occupation, and social status, or derived power (social and political). As such, stratification is the relative social position of persons within a social group, category, geographic region, or social unit.

The term social stratification is derived from the Latin *stratum* (plural 's; parallel, horizontal layers) referring to a given society's categorization of its people into rankings of socioeconomic tiers based on factors like wealth, income, social status, occupation and power

In modern Western societies, social stratification is typically defined in terms of three social classes: (i) the upper class, (ii) the middle class, and (iii) the lower class; in turn, each class can be subdivided into, e.g. the upper-stratum, the middle-stratum, and the lower stratum.¹ Moreover, a social stratum can be formed upon the bases of kinship, clan, tribe, or caste, or all four.

The categorization of people by social strata occurs most clearly in complex state-based, polycentric, or feudal societies, the latter being based upon socio-economic relations among classes of nobility and classes of peasants. Determining the structures of social stratification arises from inequalities of status among persons, therefore, the degree of social inequality determines a person's social stratum. Generally, the greater the social complexity of a society, the more social stratification exists, by way of social differentiation.

Four underlying principles.

Four principles are posited to underlie social stratification.

First, social stratification is socially defined as a property of a society rather than individuals in that society.

Second, social stratification is reproduced from generation to generation.

Third, social stratification is universal (found in every society) but variable (differs across time and place).

Fourth, social stratification involves not just quantitative inequality but qualitative beliefs and attitudes about social status

Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. All societies arrange their members in terms of superiority, inferiority and equality. Stratification is a process of interaction or differentiation whereby some people come to rank higher than others.

In one word, when individuals and groups are ranked, according to some commonly accepted basis of valuation in a hierarchy of status levels based upon the inequality of social positions, social stratification occurs. Social stratification means division of society into different strata or layers. It involves a hierarchy of social groups. Members of a particular layer have a common identity. They have a similar life style.

The Indian Caste system provides an example of stratification system. The society in which divisions of social classes exist is known as a stratified society. Modern stratification fundamentally differs from stratification of primitive societies. Social stratification involves two phenomena (i) differentiation of individuals or groups on the basis of possession of certain characteristics whereby some individuals or groups come to rank higher than others, (ii) the ranking of individuals according to some basis of evaluation.

Definitions:

1. Ogburn and Nimkoff:

‘The process by which individuals and groups are ranked in more or less enduring hierarchy of status is known as stratification’

2. Lundberg:

“A stratified society is one marked by inequality, by differences among people that are evaluated by them as being “lower” and “higher”.

3. Gisbert:

“Social stratification is the division of society into permanent groups of categories linked with each other by the relationship of superiority and subordinations”.

4. Williams:

Social Stratification refers to “The ranking of individuals on a scale of superiority-inferiority-equality, according to some commonly accepted basis of valuation.

5. Raymond W. Murray:

Social stratification is horizontal division of society into “higher” and “lower” social units.”

Origin of Stratification:

Regarding the origin of stratification many views have been given.

(i) According to Davis, social stratification has come into being due to the functional necessity of the social system.

(ii) Professor Sorokin attributed social stratification mainly to inherited difference in environmental conditions.

(iii) According to Karl Marx, social factors are responsible for the emergence of different social strata, i.e. social stratification.

(iv) Gumplovioz and other contended that the origin of social stratification is to be found in the conquest of one group by another.

(v) According to Spengler, social stratification is founded upon scarcity which is created whenever society differentiates positive in terms of functions and powers.

(vi) Racial differences accompanied by dissimilarity also leads to stratification.

Types of Social Stratification:

Social stratification is based upon a variety of principles. 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, Kshatriyas, Vishay's 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.

(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.

Characteristics of Social Stratification:

On the basis of the analysis of the different definitions given by eminent scholars, social stratification may have the following characteristics.

(a) Social stratification is universal:

There is no society on this world which is free from stratification. Modern stratification differs from stratification of primitive societies. It is a worldwide phenomenon. According to Sorokin “all permanently organized groups are stratified.”

(b) Stratification is social:

It is true that biological qualities do not determine one’s superiority and inferiority. Factors like age, sex, intelligence as well as strength often contribute as the basis on which statuses are distinguished. But one’s education, property, power, experience, character, personality etc. are found to be more important than biological qualities. Hence, stratification is social by nature.

(c) It is ancient:

Stratification system is very old. It was present even in the small wandering bands. In almost all the ancient civilizations, the differences between the rich and poor, humble and powerful existed. During the period of Plato and Kautilya even emphasis was given to political, social and economic inequalities.

(d) It is in diverse forms:

The forms of stratification is not uniform in all the societies. In the modern world class, caste and estate are the general forms of stratification. In India a special type of stratification in the form of caste is found.

The ancient Aryans were divided into four Varna’s: the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vishay’s and Sudras.

The ancient Greeks were divided into freemen and slaves and the ancient Romans were divided into the patricians and the plebeians. So every society, past or present, big or small is characterized by diverse forms of social stratification.

(e) Social stratification is Consequential:

Social stratification has two important consequences one is “life chances” and the other one is “life style”. A class system not only affects the “life- chances” of the individuals but also their “life style”.

The members of a class have similar social chances but the social chances vary in every society. It includes chances of survival and of good physical and mental health, opportunities for education, chances of obtaining justice, marital conflict, separation and divorce etc.

Life style denotes a style of life which is distinctive of a particular social status. Life-styles include such matters like the residential areas in every community which have gradations of prestige-ranking, mode of housing, means of recreation, the kinds of dress, the kinds of books, TV shows to which one is exposed and so on.

Life-style may be viewed as a sub-culture in which one stratum differs from another within the frame work of a commonly shared over-all culture d possessions. Each estate had a state.

Social Stratification and Social Mobility:

Social mobility refers to the movement within the social structure, from one social position to another. It means a change in social status. All societies provide some opportunity for social mobility. But the societies differ from each other to extent in which individuals can move from one class or status level to another.

It is said that the greater the amount of social mobility, the more open the class structure. The concept of social mobility has fundamental importance in ascertaining the relative “openness” of a social structure. The nature, forms, direction and magnitude of social mobility depends on the nature and types of social stratification. Sociologists study social mobility in order to find out the relative ‘openness’ of a social structure.

Any group that improves its standard will also improve its social status. But the rate of social mobility is not uniform in all the countries. It differs from society to society from time to time. In India the rate of mobility is naturally low because of agriculture being the predominant occupation and the continuity of caste system as compared to the other countries of the world.

Types of Social Mobility:

In social stratification the movement occurs in three directions.

- (a) From lower to higher
- (b) From higher to lower
- (c) Between two positions at the same level.

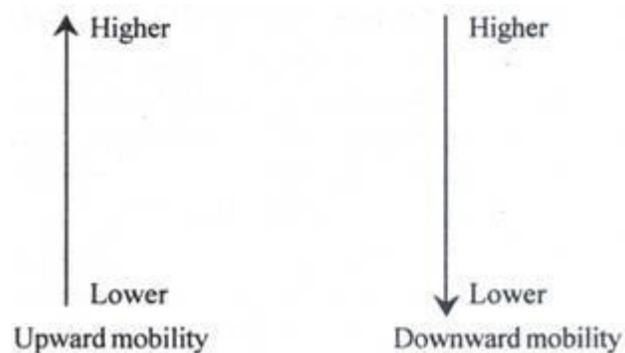
Social mobility is of two types:

- (i) Vertical mobility
- (ii) Horizontal mobility

(i) Vertical mobility:

It refers to the movement of people from one stratum to another or from one status to another. It brings changes in class, occupation and power. It involves movement from lower to higher or

higher to lower. There are two types of vertical mobility. One is upward and other is downward mobility.



When an individual moves from lower status to higher status, it is called upward mobility. For example, if the son of a peon joins a bank as an officer, it is said to be upward social mobility but if he loses the job due to any other reason or inefficiency, he is downwardly mobile from his previous job. So downward mobility takes place when a person moves down from one position to another and change his status.

(ii) Horizontal Mobility:

It refers to the movement of people from one social group to another situated on the same level. It means that the ranks of these two groups are not different. It indicates change in position without the change in status. For example, if a teacher leaves one school and joins another school or a bank officer leaves one branch to work in another or change of residence are the horizontal mobility.

Horizontal mobility



Apart from the above two broad types of social stratification, there are two other types of social stratification in terms of dimension of time. They are:

(i) Inter-generational mobility:

When changes in status occur from one generation to another, it is called intergenerational mobility. For example, if the son changes his status either by taking upon occupation of higher or lower rank with that of his father, there inter-generational mobility takes place.

(ii) Intra-generational mobility:

When changes in status occur within one generation, it is called intra-generational mobility. For example, the rise and fall in the occupational structure of a family which leads to change in its social status

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 can not 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. This is called achieved 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 status within one generation is called intra-generational mobility.

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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 vary 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.