



COURSE CODE: MASOD 204

COURSE NAME: SOCIAL
STRATIFICATION

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND
ONLINE EDUCATION
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

MASTER OF ARTS

**SOCIOLOGY
BLOCK I**



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MSO-204: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION
ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr Rabin Deka	Head and Associate Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University
Prof. Chandan Kumar Sharma	Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University
Prof. Kedilezo Kikhi	Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University
Dr Amiya Kumar Das	Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University
Ms Ankita Bhattacharyya	Assistant Professor, Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University

CONTRIBUTORS

Module I	Dr Kuntala Dowarah	Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Madhabdev College
	Mr Digantaraj Medhi	Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Tezpur University
Module II	Dr Kuntala Dowarah	Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Madhabdev College
	Dr D.R. Gautam	Research Officer, Dr Ambedkar Chair, Tezpur University
	Ms Madhuri Deka	Independent Scholar

EDITOR

Dr. P. Salah	Assistant Professor, Centre for Regional Studies, University of Hyderabad
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BLOCK I

MODULE I: INTRODUCING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

UNIT 1: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: THE CONCEPT OF STRATIFICATION IN SOCIOLOGY

UNIT 2: SOCIAL MOBILITY AND STRATIFICATION: MEANING AND FORMS

MODULE II: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT 3: FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT 4: MARXIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT 5: WEBERIAN PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT 6: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

TABLE OF CONTENT

MODULE I: INTRODUCING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION	
UNIT 1: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: THE CONCEPT OF STRATIFICATION IN SOCIOLOGY	
	4-15
1.1 Introduction 1.2. Objectives 1.3. Basic concepts of Social Stratification 1.4 Dimensions of Social Stratification 1.4.1 Class 1.4.2 Status groups 1.4.3 Power 1.4.4 Authority 1.4.5 Prestige 1.4.6 Property 1.4.7. Socio-economic Status 1.5. Hierarchy and Difference in Class 1.6 Summing Up 1.7 Questions 1.8 Recommended Readings and References	
UNIT 2: SOCIAL MOBILITY AND STRATIFICATION: MEANING AND FORMS	
	16-28
2.1 Introduction 2.2 Objectives 2.3 Social Mobility and Stratification 2.3.1 Inter-Generational and Intra-Generational Mobility 2.3.2 Vertical Mobility and Horizontal Mobility 2.3.3 Structural and Circulation Mobility 2.3.4 Significance of Social Mobility 2.3.5 Social Mobility in India	

2.4 Summing Up	
2.5 Questions	
2.6 Recommended Readings and References	
MODULE II: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON STRATIFICATION	
UNIT 3: FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION	30-41
3.1. Introduction	
3.2. Objective	
3.3. Functional Necessity of Stratification	
3.4. Two Determinants of Positional Rank	
3.4.1. Differential Functional Importance	
3.4.2. Differential Scarcity of Personnel	
3.5. Davis-Moore Theory of Social Stratification	
3.5.1. Functional Necessity of Stratification	
3.6. Critique	
3.7. Functionalist Perspective on Indian Studies	
3.8. Summing Up	
3.9. Questions	
3.10 Recommended Readings and References	
UNIT 4: MARXIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION	42-53
4.1 Introduction	
4.2 Objectives	
4.3 Marxist Approach	
4.3.1 Basic Assumption of Marx/Marxist Scholars Towards Social Stratification	
4.4 Comprehension About Stratification	
4.5 Social Change	
4.6 Relevance of Marxist Ideas on Stratification	
4.7 Summing up	
4.8 Questions	
4.9 Recommended Reading and References	

UNIT 5: WEBERIAN PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION	54-64
5.1 Introduction 5.2 Objectives 5.3. Weber's Class, Status and Party 5.3.1. Class 5.3.2. Status Group 5.3.3. Class Interest and Communal Action 5.4. Guarantees of Social Stratification 5.4.1. Power 5.5. Weberian Perspective on Indian Studies 5.6 Summing Up 5.7. Questions 5.8. Recommended Readings and References	
UNIT 6: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION	65-80
6.1 Introduction 6.2 Objectives 6.3 Feminism 6.3.1 Malestream Sociology 6.3.2 Contribution of Feminism 6.4 Gender and Social Stratification 6.4.1 Gender Socialisation and Gender Inequality 6.4.2 Gender and Class 6.5 Theories of Gender Inequality: Feminist Approach 6.5.1 Different Feminist Perspectives on Social Stratification 6.5.2 Future of Feminism 6.6 Summing Up 6.7 Questions 6.8 Recommended Readings and References	

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course introduces the concept of social stratification and its theoretical foundations. It aims to acquaint the learners with the key issues with regard to social stratification across societies. The course is weaved upon the central axes of the phenomena of stratification in the society like class, gender, race, tribe, caste, ethnicity, etc. While examining the intersection of these categories in the making of stratification in society, questions would be raised about the relevance of applying theory and methods for studying social stratification in contemporary India.

The course is divided into five Modules, each consisting of multiple units. This has been done to discuss the major concepts more elaborately and, in a learner-friendly way.

Module I gives an introduction to Social Stratification. This module has two units. **Unit 1** deals with the concept of stratification in sociology. **Unit 2** discusses the relationship between social mobility and stratification.

Module II is about the sociological perspectives on stratification and it is divided into four units. **Unit 3** deals with the Functionalist Perspective. On the other hand, the Marxist Perspective is covered in **Unit 4**. **Unit 5** will help the learners to understand another important perspective, that is the Weberian Perspective. The Feminist Perspective will be discussed in **Unit 6**.

Module III is about the different axes of stratification like caste, class, etc. The module is divided into three units, each dealing with different axes of stratification. **Unit 7** deals with Caste, Class and Gender and shows the inter-relation among them. Tribe, Race and Religion are discussed in **Unit 8**. **Unit 9** discusses two other axes of stratification—Language and Region.

Module IV has three units, each dealing with an aspect of the contemporary debate in stratification. The concepts of Deviance, Disability and Sexuality are the three important aspects that are covered in **Unit 10**, **Unit 11** and **Unit 12** respectively

The last Module, that is **Module V** deals with the concept of stratification in contemporary society, focusing on the changes that have been observed in

recent times. This Module consists of two units. **Unit 13** discusses Exclusion and its relationship with stratification. On the other hand, **Unit 14** is about the concept of Inclusion and the challenges to it in the contemporary society.

The complete course is divided into two Blocks. Block I contains Module I and II. Block II will have Module III, IV, and V

MODULE I: INTRODUCING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

UNIT 1: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: THE CONCEPT OF STRATIFICATION IN SOCIOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2. Objectives
- 1.3. Basic concepts of Social Stratification
- 1.4 Dimensions of Social Stratification
 - 1.4.1 Class
 - 1.4.2 Status groups
 - 1.4.3 Power
 - 1.4.4 Authority
 - 1.4.5 Prestige
 - 1.4.6 Property
 - 1.4.7. Socio-economic Status
- 1.5. Hierarchy and Difference in Class
- 1.6 Summing Up
- 1.7 Questions
- 1.8 Recommended Readings and References

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Social stratification refers to unequal relations between individual and groups in a society. All the members of the society are a part of this arrangement of unequal social relations. Those who have occupied lower position in this order of relations have often resented their underprivileged status, whereas those who have enjoyed a privileged status have been averse to concede any change in the existing system.

Social Stratification is as old as human civilization. When human moved from fishing and gathering societies to sedentary agricultural societies with surplus economy, a variety of occupations developed which were essential

to the proper functioning of the society. Inevitably, these occupations began to be ranked hierarchically based on the importance of that particular occupation to a society. Therefore, in all societies three kinds of resources are valued i) power - the ability to impose one's will on others; ii) prestige – respect from others; iii) property – wealth owned. These resources are unequally distributed among individuals and groups, be it in a complex or simple society.

When people are evaluated on the basis of their ascribed and achieved characteristics, a social hierarchy is formed. A hierarchy is a set of ranked statuses from highest to lowest. Because both the most and the least valued traits are likely to be relatively rare, status hierarchies tend to be diamond shaped, narrow at both the top and bottom. Within the hierarchy, people at different levels or strata can claim different amounts of power, prestige and property. In this way, a set of ranked statuses based on evaluations of social significance is transformed into a hierarchy of control over societal resources. Stratification systems thus, are both a cause and consequence of inequality. Although in hunting and gathering society all members are equally valued and rewarded, yet once the division of labour expands beyond gathering, some tasks will be considered more important than others, and the people who perform such tasks are rewarded with power, respect and material goods. At the very least, labour is divided on the basis of sex and age, so that all societies have gender and age stratification systems. The more complex the division of labour, or the more heterogeneous the society in terms of race, religion, and national origin, the more ways are there to judge people differently- by what they do (achieved status) or by what they are (ascribed status).

1.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will discuss and learn the meaning and concept of social stratification. By the end of the unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the concept of social stratification;

- Explain the concepts related to social stratification; Examine the various dimensions of social stratification;
- Critically assess the concepts inherent in social stratification vis-a-vis its relationship to different social context and situation.

1.3 BASIC CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

According to Jean Jacques Rousseau, the question of inequality was a basic one. He believed in the cause of the corrupting influence of civilisation. The social structure itself perverted human nature, our way of life, our search for happiness. According to him, society came to be as an act of human will and that it is possible to conceive of a natural man living in isolation. However, Rousseau's discussion on inequality tells us that historical or social man, because of the very conditions of social living, is inevitably evil, that is he is impelled to selfish actions, inimical to his fellow beings. The more civilised the society, the more evil he will be. Further Rousseau's natural man is happy and unchanged. The imposition of society on this natural man created a situation of conflict, inequality, distorted values and misery. Such an origin seems to be logically sound, philosophically convincing but unrealistic in actual social life. Today, social inequality is generally considered a matter of distributed justice and social relations among people of higher and lower strata. Income, wealth, occupation, education, power, style of life etc. determine the nature and process of distributive justice or injustice, as the case may be. Based on differentiation emanating from these considerations, social relations are shaped among people in a society. Thus, there could be several modes of status determination, including birth, ethnicity, race, and other such criteria. A given pattern of stratification would determine the nature and functioning of a society.

The German-British sociologist and class conflict theorist, Ralf Dahrendorf while tracing the history of inequality, says that in the 18th century, the origin of inequality was the focal point, and in the 19th century, the formation of classes was debated and in 21st century, we are talking of

theory of social stratification. He gives two approaches to study inequalities. First, we must distinguish between inequalities of natural capabilities and those of social position, and secondly, we must distinguish between inequalities that do not involve any evaluative rank order and those that do. Based on the combination of both, Dahrendorf refers to four types of inequality in relation to individual. They are: a) natural differences of kind in features, character and interests, b) natural differences of rank in intelligence, talent and strength. Correspondingly in relation to society, these are: c) social differentiation of positions essentially equal in rank, d) social differentiation based on reputation and wealth and expressed in a rank order of social status.

Dahrendorf while acknowledging Rousseau's distinction between natural and social inequalities and also the preference for the natural inequalities as good, expresses his interest primarily in inequalities of the stratification type. Inequalities are both distributive and non distributive. Wealth and prestige are distributive whereas, property and charisma are non distributive. The distributive and the non distributive could also be termed as intransitive and transitive inequalities.

Inequality is there in all human societies, as a set of norms of behaviour and sanctions are attached to all of them. Law in a broad sense is the epitome of all norms and sanctions. And as such, law is both a necessary and a sufficient condition of social inequality. All persons may be equal before the law, but they may no longer be equal after it. In other words, norms, sanctions, and that is law, make people unequal.

Dahrendorf observes social inequality lies neither in human nature nor in the historically dubious conception of private property. It lies rather in certain features of all human societies, which are necessary for them. Differentiation of social positions in terms of the division of labour or the multiplicity of roles is a universal feature of all societies. However,

evaluative differentiation of ranks or social positions based on scales of prestige and income is not correspondingly universal and inevitable.

Social stratification is a very real element of our everyday lives. It is a system of distributive system, i.e. a system of differential distribution of desired and scarce things. Besides honour and wealth, prestige and income, legitimate legitimacy and power, patronage or the distribution of power as a reward for certain deeds or virtues could be considered as criteria of differential ranks. Following Weber's distinction between power and authority, Dahrendorf, observes that power and power structures logically precede the structures of social stratification. Thus, the explanation of inequality lies in power structure. In other words, norms, sanctions and power are closely related phenomenon phenomena in the explanation of social inequality.

The term 'hierarchy' is used for ordering of social units as superior and inferior or higher and lower. Race and caste are considered as natural hierarchies as both imply an ordering of endogamous groups having an unchanging hereditary membership. Hierarchy as a principle of ranking or ordering signifies for more rigidity compared to the terms like stratification, differentiation, class and power. Louis Dumont gave the concept of hierarchy while explaining India's caste as a rigid and static system of stratification in his famous work *Homo Hierarchicus*.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What do you mean by inequality?

2. What is Hierarchy?

3. Who wrote the book *Homo Hierarchicus*?

1.4 DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification refers to the unequal distribution of power, prestige, and property. In many ways there is a basic unity among these three: wealth is often power, and both can be used to command respect. Max Weber, however, emphasised the need to consider three different ways of ranking, even though they cannot always be separated in real life (Weber: 1922, 1968). These ways are:

1.4.1 Class refers to the people at the same economic level, who may or may not be aware of their common interests.

1.4.2 Status groups are based on prestige, whose members share a common lifestyle. Just what qualities earn respect will vary from one society to another. Parties are political groupings that may or may not be organised around class interests.

1.4.3 Power as defined by Max Weber, is the ability to impose one's will on other social actors, regardless of their own wishes. Power is a social resource that is unequally distributed in most societies, groups and relationships. Power is also relational, that is, it can be realised only when other people obey.

1.4.4 Authority refers to the power that belongs to a socially recognised status, such as the power exercised by the president, police officers, or employer and therefore, considered to be legitimate by other members of the society.

Influence in contrast to authority is the ability to persuade others to bend to your will and is based more on interpersonal skills than on occupying a

particular position. Influential people are often close to those in authority or possess unique skills and knowledge.

1.4.5 Prestige or status honour is uniquely a social unit that depends on the respect that others are willing to give. Some societies honour the wise and humble, others the immodest and hostile, but everywhere respects from others are a valued resource. In modern industrial societies, prestige is largely based on occupational status, although income is also important. As for example, the highest scores are given to professionals such as physicians, lawyers, scientists, and college professors. A profession is an occupation that requires a long period of training and for which those already in the field control the number and type of people allowed to practice, monitor peer performance and protect their members from public review.

Lowest rankings, in contrast, are given to people whose jobs require little training and who do dirty work or who must take orders without question; for example, nursing home attendants, sweepers, etc.

1.4.6 Property: Certain objects of a society signify the material success of a society. While some societies, wealth may be measured by counting the money value of everything owned by a person, family or household including houses, cars, bank accounts, stocks and bonds, life insurance, retirement funds, artwork and jewellery, in others, wealth may include some other movable and immovable property like the pets and domesticated animals and birds.

1.4.7 Socio-economic Status: One simplified measure that the social scientists have constructed is the socioeconomic status to measure the social rank that accounts for all the three dimensions of social stratifications: power, prestige, property. Socioeconomic status is based on the income, occupational rank, and education. It is used as a measure of another concept that is social class.

Thus, Social stratification is the ordering of social differences with the help of a set of criteria or a single criterion. The system of stratification exists with the deliberate act of the observer who opts for a common criterion. Social stratification has various reckonings and when these systems do not match there is resistance.

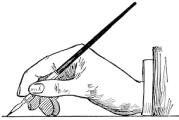
Social Stratification deals with the ways in which the human population is socially differentiated, i.e. differentiated publicly and demonstrably (Gupta 1991: 2). The principle on which caste system is based is the principle of 'natural superiority'. Natural superiority is not on the basis of physical ability or intelligence but on the basis of 'endowment of bodily purity'. Louis Dumont in *Homo Hierarchicus* opines how the society is stratified on the basis of purity and impurity. Thus, according to Louis Dumont, the extreme form of social stratification co-exists with occupational stratification, linguistic stratification, sexual stratification and religious stratification. And these stratifications have its principles. Hierarchy is one form of stratification in which the strata are arranged vertically.

Inequality pervades all forms of differences. And thus, it leads to stratify horizontally too. There can be separate classes of strata and these strata need not be unequal whether there are differences in wealth, power or prestige. As for example, in the modern industrial system, the complex division of labour is witnessed. There are a number of positions which seem to be equal but are different from one another. Horizontal stratification, no doubt, brings in differences but not inequality, for instance, the Personnel Manager of Social Welfare of a company has the same power, prestige and wealth as that of the Personnel Manager of Finance.

Caste and Class symbolise inequality and hierarchy. These two terms used in social stratification emphasise hierarchy and differences. Bougle emphasised two aspects of hierarchy and differences in the caste system with three important characteristics in it. They are hierarchy, repulsion and hereditary specialisation (Bougle, 1971: 9). But in modern times, caste

cannot be related to the occupation expect in some cases. Bougle emphasised the importance of mutual repulsion that exists between two castes. Repulsion is exhibited in endogamy, commensal restrictions and even contact. And for these reasons, each caste is ‘atomised’, ‘isolated’ and ‘opposed’. Thus, there are differences in each caste groups.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Match the following:

Prestige	Legitimate power
Power	People at the same economic level
Authority	ability to impose one's will on others, regardless of their own wishes
Class	depends on the respect that others are willing to give

1.5 HIERARCHY AND DIFFERENCE IN CLASS

Dipankar Gupta in his work *Social Stratification* admits that when we talk of stratification in India, it is very often that we only relate to the caste system. He says that it includes a lot more. He states, “When hierarchy and differences are externalised and socially demonstrated then we can truly talk about social stratification.” Thus socially visible differentiation can be termed as social stratification. Gupta writes “Social differentiation then deals with the ways in which the human population is socially differentiated, i.e., differentiated publicly and demonstrably”. The social display of differentiation usually includes a host of factors. Social stratification manifests itself in almost every aspect of social life.

According to Gupta, hierarchy and differences are the key concepts of social stratification. As such, stratification does not signify simply a multi-layered phenomenon. Stratification is more than vertical and horizontal differences because differentiation is always on the basis of a criterion or a set of criteria.

The class is economic in characteristics in the stratification system. Terms like upper class, middle class and lower class are very much familiar to us. As stratification deals with the hierarchical scale, so class category depends upon the criterion of land, money, marketable yield and disposable income. All these can be converted into money or wealth. Therefore, in class stratification, money or wealth is an important factor to count upon.

It is also very much important to look into the matter of using the terms as certain precautions need to be taken. Because, if the hierarchical scale is determined monetarily than the cut off points for each stratum like the upper class and so on will be dependent on certain considerations. And these considerations are demarcated on the basis of cohort factors for demarcation in the hierarchy differs.

So long we have been discussing on the hierarchical strata based on a single hierarchical measure, a composite index can be made from different variables. And these attribute to the formulation of a hierarchical measure. As for example, in the formulation of socioeconomic status, education, prestige, income, are the first hierarchised and then merged together. Each stratum in the hierarchy has different attributes but they are visualised to be related causally.

1.6 SUMMING UP

Apart from the debates explained in this unit, there are numerous debates on the approaches to the study of social stratification. The debate on the functional approach to social stratification was initiated by Wilbert E. Moore and Kinsley Davis. This approach states the inevitability of social

stratification and the functional necessity and corresponding intent and ability for different tasks, value and rewards. The writings of Melvin Tumin have taken this debate a step further. Along with the lively debate on the functional approach, the impact of Max Weber's view of social stratification in terms of "Class, Status and Party" has been immense. Weber considers class, status and party as economic, social, and political aspects as analytically distinct phenomena. The Marxian view on class and class conflict has also inspired studies of agrarian and industrial relations in India.

Besides these general observations on the studies and analyses of social stratification, there are also a couple of writings on social mobility, which have been widely used in the Western context, assuming class as the system of stratification in the context of social mobility- horizontal and vertical, which is well explained in details in the following unit.

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. What do you mean by Social Stratification? Explain social stratification with various examples from the Indian Context.
2. Discuss critically various dimensions of social stratification.
3. How do you define inequality? Do you consider inequality and social stratification as related terms? Justify your answer.
4. Critically examine how inequality is related to hierarchy.
5. Discuss in detail the concepts of 'hierarchy and differences' in the class structure of an Industrial Society.

1.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2: SOCIAL MOBILITY AND STRATIFICATION: MEANINGS AND FORMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Objectives

2.3 Social Mobility and Stratification

2.3.1 Inter-Generational and Intra-Generational Mobility

2.3.2 Vertical Mobility and Horizontal Mobility

2.3.3 Structural and Circulation Mobility

2.3.4 Significance of Social Mobility

2.3.5 Social Mobility in India

2.4 Summing Up

2.5 Questions

2.6 Recommended Readings and References

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you learned about the concept of social stratification and the significance of the concept in the field of sociology. In this unit, we will study and learn about social mobility and its relationship with social stratification. First, we'll learn about the meaning of social mobility, its various forms and its significance in sociology and finally, we'll focus on social mobility in the Indian context. As we proceed, you'll see that social mobility is an important aspect that is closely related to social stratification.

For you to comprehend this unit, an understanding of the basic concepts of sociology is important. Also, if you have a good grasp of the concept of social stratification and its significance, this unit will be much easier. Therefore, it would be advisable to quickly go through key concepts in sociology. This will allow you to get the maximum out of this unit.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we introduce you to social mobility, its meaning and its various forms. We will also focus on social mobility in the Indian context. By the end of the unit, you will be able to:

- Explain what is meant by social mobility;
- Describe the various ways we can look at the concept of social mobility;
- Explain the significance of social mobility in sociology;
- Describe social mobility in the Indian context.

2.3 SOCIAL MOBILITY AND STRATIFICATION

As we all know, all societies that exist in the world are stratified societies, i.e. societies are divided into different strata or layers. Although the strata in different societies might vary, every society displays some form of stratification. Hardly would anyone find a society that is completely egalitarian. Also, it is rare for societies to remain static. Societies are always dynamic and there is always some movement between the different strata. Social mobility, therefore, in common parlance, means movement of individuals or groups from one stratum/layer to another. “The movement – usually of individuals but sometimes of whole groups – between different positions within the system of social stratification in any society” is called social mobility (Dictionary of Sociology 1994: 480). Thus, social mobility might either refer to individual movement or group movement within a stratified system. P.A. Sorokin’s work on social mobility is quite well known and widely used in sociology. Sorokin in his famous work *Social and Cultural Mobility* describes the concept of social mobility in elaborate detail and its significance. According to him, “social mobility is understood as any transition of an individual or social object or value – anything that has been created or modified by human activity – from one social position to another” (Sharma, 2013:165).

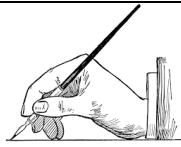
Now, there are different ways in which social mobility might be looked at. On that basis, we can say that there are many forms of social mobility. We can classify them as inter-generational versus intra-generational mobility, vertical versus horizontal mobility and structural versus circulation mobility.

2.3.1 Inter-Generational and Intra-Generational Mobility

Some sociologists have classified social mobility on the basis of timeline or generation, i.e. it can be either inter-generational mobility or intra-generational mobility. Inter-generational mobility means social mobility between generations while intra-generational mobility means social mobility within a single generation (Haralambos, 1980: 83). The former refers to the change in the social position from father's generation to son's generation while the latter refers to the change in the positions held by people during the course of their lifetime or working careers (Tumin, 1985: 139).

When sociologists study inter-generational mobility, they generally compare the positions of two generations, for example, between father and son and then study the mobility. It is generally used in the case of occupational changes. For example, many fathers are managers have sons who have become manual workers, clerks etc. and similarly, many sons who are now managers had fathers who were manual workers, clerks etc. On the other hand, in the case of intra-generational mobility, sociologists compare the positions of an individual or group at two or more points in time but within the course of his/her lifetime. For example, a person's occupational status might be used as a criterion and compared between two points in time to measure mobility. A person promoted from the post of a clerk to that of a manager may be cited here as an example.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Define Social Mobility.

2. What is the difference between Inter-Generational and Intra-Generational Mobility?

2.3.2 Vertical and Horizontal Social Mobility

One important aspect when it comes to social mobility is the direction in which the mobility occurs. Is it upwards or downwards or is it sideways? Here, P.A. Sorokin's classic work on social mobility deserves a mention. He says that there are two important types of social mobility – vertical and horizontal. As you might have realised, vertical and horizontal social mobility signifies the direction in which mobility takes place.

Vertical social mobility signifies vertical movement of an individual or group from one stratum to another stratum. It refers to the relations involved in the transition of an individual or group from one social stratum to another stratum which is either above or below it (Sharma, 2013: 165). Now there are two possibilities in this case, either it is upwards, or it is downwards. They may be referred to as ascending or descending mobility. Alternatively, they are also called social climbing or social sinking respectively (ibid).

Ascending mobility has two main forms: (a) as an infiltration or movement of individuals of a lower stratum/layer in society into an existing higher one, and (b) the creation of a new group and insertion of a new group into a

higher stratum instead of being side by side with the existing groups of this stratum (ibid). Likewise, descending mobility also has two forms: (a) when there is a movement of individuals from a higher social position into an existing lower one, and (b) when there is a degradation of a social group as a whole, resulting in a decrease in rank among other groups, or its disintegration as a social unit (ibid). Here, as you can see, in both ascending and descending mobility, the first point refers to individuals while the second one refers to groups. Therefore, we can say that there are two patterns (i) ascending/descending of individuals and (ii) ascending/descending of groups (Sharma 2013: 166).

In Sorokin's work, there is also the mention of two important terms that are related to vertical mobility – *intensiveness* and *generality*. Intensiveness refers to the vertical social distance, or the number of strata (economic, political or occupational) that is crossed by an individual in a definite period of time, and it could be either upward or downward movement (Sharma 2013: 166). Generality, on the other hand, refers to the number of individuals who have changed their social position in the vertical direction in a definite period of time (ibid). Generality can also be further categorised as *absolute* or *relative* depending on whether it is looked in terms of an absolute number of mobile individuals or the proportion of the given individuals to the total population, respectively (ibid).

Sorokin has also given certain general principles when it comes to vertical mobility. These are:

- i. We do not find any society whose strata are absolutely closed or in which vertical mobility in its three forms – occupational, economic and political – are absent (Sharma 2013: 167).
- ii. We do not find any society where vertical mobility has been absolutely free and the movement or transition from one social layer to another has no resistance (ibid).
- iii. There is always a variation from society to society when it comes to intensiveness and the generality of vertical mobility (ibid).

- iv. And when it comes to one society, the intensiveness as well as the generality of the vertical mobility – the economic, the political and occupational – fluctuate from time to time (ibid).
- v. We do not see a definite perpetual trend toward either an increase or a decrease in the intensiveness and generality of vertical mobility as far as historical and other materials show. This is valid for the history of a country, or a large social body and can be said to be valid for the history of mankind (ibid).

Horizontal social mobility, according to Sorokin, refers to the transition of an individual or a social object from one social position to another situated at the same level (Sharma 2013: 165). So basically, this refers to a sideways or a horizontal movement, and not a vertical movement. There are many examples of horizontal mobility. Thus, according to Sorokin, territorial circulation of individuals, intra-occupational circulation of individuals, inter-family circulation, changing citizenships among individuals, inter-religious circulation among individuals, and inter-political party circulation are some of the examples of this kind of mobility in Western societies (Sharma 2013: 169). In horizontal mobility, the socially stratified structure as such remains unaffected and only signifies a positional change of the individual. An example here will help explain this. A person working in a factory as a worker and moving to a new job as a construction worker in another factory can be cited as an example of horizontal mobility. In this case, there is no vertical movement, it is a sideways movement and it is only a positional change of that person. The overall stratified system remains the same in this case. On the other hand, in the case of vertical mobility, there is real upward or downward mobility of the individual. In the above example, if the person who works in the factory becomes a manager of the factory, it would be counted as vertical mobility.

2.3.3 Structural and Circulation Mobility

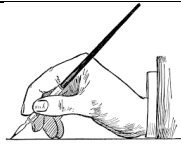
Another way of looking at mobility is to make a distinction between mobility that is due to the changes in the division of labour and labour supply and the mobility that arises because of genuinely new opportunities for people who did not have such opportunities in the past (Tumin 1985: 138). Therefore, we can say that there is a difference between structural mobility and circulation mobility.

Structural mobility is also sometimes called forced mobility. “When there is movement in and out of occupational categories or change in the number of people in those categories that result from the change in the occupational structure itself,” then we may call it as structural mobility (Tumin 1985: 138). Thus, in this case, there is a change in the structure itself and individuals are forced to move to other categories, hence the term forced mobility. For example, there might be a change in the ratio of blue to white collar jobs. These changes may result due to many factors such as economic expansion and developments in technology that make manual labour no longer required (ibid).

Circulation mobility, which is also sometimes called true mobility, means “movements that occur as a result of the opening up of opportunities in the system to kinds of people who did not have such opportunities before” (Tumin 1985: 138). There might be many factors due to which such opportunities may arise and facilitate such movements. Factors such as laws that reduce discrimination against members of various groups, be it religious, racial and others; new educational opportunities, natural crises that require new and more kinds of labour etc. are all examples of such factors (ibid). We can say that “anything that makes it possible for people to move into jobs from which they or their ancestors were barred or limited because of prejudice or lack of opportunities is called circulation mobility” (ibid).

Now that we have a fair understanding of the various forms of social mobility, let us try to understand the significance of social mobility focusing on why it is such a crucial concept for sociologists.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Define Circulation Mobility.

2. What is meant by Horizontal Social Mobility?

2.3.4 Significance of social mobility

As you might have realised, social mobility signifies how open or closed a society is. An analysis of social mobility allows us to see the level of openness in a society. When we say an open society, by that we mean a society in which it is possible for people to rise higher or fall lower in the socio-economic ladder as compared to their parents (Tumin 1985:132). In such open societies, status is acquired by individuals by achievement (ibid). An example of such a society is a modern Western industrial society. On the other hand, a closed society is one in which most children end up in the same positions where their parents were (ibid). In such societies status is acquired by inheritance. Examples of such societies are caste-based societies as in the case of India or estate societies such as those characterised by feudalism.

Traditional societies or pre-industrial societies, in general, are less open as compared to modern industrial societies. It is agreed that in industrial societies, the rate of social mobility is significantly higher compared to pre-

industrial societies (Haralambos 1980: 82). They are therefore sometimes described as 'open' which means that they have a relatively low degree of 'closure' (ibid). Of course, no society is completely open or completely closed; there is always some movement one way or the other and at the same time there are also barriers that come in the way of that movement. Even in an extremely so-called closed and rigid society like the caste-based Indian society, there are ample shreds of evidence of mobility as shown by the field-based studies. Between the two extreme types of societies, one extremely fluid and another extremely rigid, there lies many middle or intermediary types of stratified societies.

Thus, we see that social mobility is a very crucial aspect of any given society. The phenomenon reflects how dynamic a society is. Apart from the significance of social mobility which reflects the level of openness or closeness of a society, sociologists are interested in the phenomenon for a few more reasons. These are:

- (i) The rate of social mobility is related to class formation. According to Anthony Giddens, if the rate of social mobility is low, class solidarity and cohesion will be high (Haralambos 1980: 83). This would explain why in industrial societies where there is considerable social mobility, class solidarity is quite low.
- (ii) Social mobility also indicates the life chances of the members of the society (ibid). For example, we can see how much an individual's social position influences his/her chances of obtaining a high-status position.
- (iii) Sociologists are also interested to know how people respond to the experience of social mobility (ibid). People's perspectives are important as to how they perceive their upward or downward mobility.

2.3.5 Social Mobility in India

When it comes to social mobility in the Indian context, certain differences are observed as compared to Western societies. Most of the theoretical tools that are available to study social mobility are derived from the West and hence are not always useful in studying the Indian society. As you have seen in the previous sections, whether we talk about inter-generational and intra-generational mobility, vertical and horizontal mobility or structural and circulation mobility, they are mostly focused on western societies and most of the examples are based on class-based occupational categories. Of course, as India too, becomes industrialised and modern, these forms of social mobility are definitely helpful, but they don't always show the entire picture.

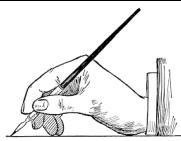
As mentioned previously, the traditional Indian society is a caste-based society and hence might be called a closed society. But this is only true for Hindu society. The overall Indian society, however, has many other components apart from the Hindu religion. There is a multitude of communities, religious groups, linguistic groups and so on. Here, Dipankar Gupta's conceptualisation of *hierarchy* and *difference* in the context of stratification is quite useful. Gupta (1991) says that in a stratified system, both hierarchy and difference are important. According to him, hierarchy is only one kind of stratification where the strata are arranged vertically (Gupta 1991: 8). Difference, on the other hand, is when the strata are not arranged vertically, but rather horizontally. For example, when it comes to language, religion, etc, these are different groups that are not arranged in any hierarchical manner. However, when it comes to caste, caste groups are arranged in a hierarchy. Therefore, to get a complete picture of stratification, both hierarchy and differences must be taken into account.

Once we are conceptually clear about stratification, then we can easily discuss social mobility. In the Indian society, we see both vertical movements as well as horizontal movements. Inter-religious conversion can be cited as one example of horizontal movement. In the case of the

caste system, a phenomenon called *Sanskritisation* is seen in many cases where lower castes or even tribes are seen to emulate the rituals of the upper or dominant castes, thereby seeking upward mobility. In many cases, tribes have converted into castes and lower castes have successfully claimed higher caste status. These are some of the examples of mobility in the case of the Indian society. One thing, however, must be remembered is that no single variable operates alone. In the case of India, it is often seen that caste and class are both important. A person's mobility, therefore, has to be analysed across multiple variables and not just one.

This section just gives a glimpse of social mobility in India. In actuality, the Indian society although it is perceived as less open, is a very dynamic society and we see many instances of social mobility. And as India becomes modernised, such opportunities have increased manifold.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Write briefly about Dipankar Gupta's concept of *hierarchy* and *difference*.

2. Give examples of Vertical Mobility and Horizontal Mobility in the context of India

2.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we learned about the concept of social mobility and its various forms. We learned that there are different ways of looking at social mobility and that they may be classified as inter-generational and intra-generational mobility, vertical and horizontal mobility and structural and circulation mobility. In the case of vertical mobility, we learned that it can be either ascending or descending mobility. Apart from this, we also learned about the significance of social mobility and how it signifies the level of openness of a society. Based on the rate of social mobility of a society, we can predict how open or close a society is. And finally, we learned how social mobility in India is different from that of the Western countries.

2.5 QUESTIONS

1. How does Sorokin define social mobility?
2. What is the difference between vertical mobility and horizontal mobility? Explain using Sorokin's model.
3. Why structural mobility is called forced mobility?
4. Circulation mobility is true mobility. Explain.
5. What is the significance of social mobility to sociologists?
6. With the help of examples, explain social mobility in the Indian context.

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MODULE II: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT 3: FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 3.1. Introduction
- 3.2. Objective
- 3.3. Functional Necessity of Stratification
- 3.4. Two Determinants of Positional Rank
 - 3.4.1. Differential Functional Importance
 - 3.4.2. Differential Scarcity of Personnel
- 3.5. Davis-Moore Theory of Social Stratification
 - 3.5.1. Functional Necessity of Stratification
- 3.6. Critique
- 3.7. Functionalist Perspective on Indian Studies
- 3.8. Summing Up
- 3.9. Questions
- 3.10 Recommended Readings and References

3.1 INTRODUCTION

By now, you must be already familiar with the functionalist perspective in sociology. In this Unit, we are going to discuss the functionalist perspective in terms of stratification. The main idea behind this perspective is that the social system changes and the changes have functional importance. In the following sections, we will learn the salient points of the Functionalist approach to social stratification.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable the learners to:

- Describe the functionalist perspective of social stratification;

- Explain the functional attributes of social stratification in the social system;
- Analyse the functional importance of certain social positions in a social structure;
- Analyse the functional perspectives put forward by different scholars.

3.3 FUNCTIONAL NECESSITY OF STRATIFICATION

Every society requires individuals who can be placed and motivated for specific tasks. There are social positions and duties attached to them. Individual members in a society are assigned work in a specific position based on their eligibility and ability. People are motivated at two levels:

- 1) The need to fill certain positions;
- 2) The need to perform the duties attached to certain positions.

This is true of all systems, whether they are relatively static or somewhat dynamic. This goes on as a process. This is prevalent in both competitive and non-competitive system. Motivation may vary depending upon the nature of the system.

If all positions are equal in their significance for the society, then people may not bother about their preferred choice for particular positions. But, the reality is who gets into which position? This question is often raised. Since positions are not the same, therefore some positions require special training, and some are functionally more important than the others. Duties attached to given positions must be performed with the diligence required for those. On the basis of such a functionalist logic, a society thus has some kinds of rewards as inducements and these rewards are distributed based on one's social position. Therefore, a social order is created which constitutes of rewards and distribution pattern followed by the foundation of the stratification system in the society.

Rewards in a society are distributed to its members for securing essential services for things that contribute to the provision of comfort, honour and amusement, self-reverence and ego-expansion.

Usually, there are three kinds of rewards in any social system given according to the positions. These rewards in return are built into position. Rewards are associated with positions, accomplishment and pre-requisites. We can say that a society is stratified when the rights and pre-requisites are different and not equal according to position. This is how we can define stratification. Social inequality also emerges at this stage. Social inequality is thus unconsciously evolved, which is clear from the above explanation that the most qualified persons occupy the highest position in the social ladder. In every society, whether it is complex or simple, every individual is differentiated on the basis of her/his self-esteem and prestige. So, a society is characterised by inequality and the intensity and type of such inequality vary from society to society.

3.4 TWO DETERMINANTS OF POSITIONAL RANK

The best reward and highest rank are awarded to those positions which - a) is very much important for the society, b) require the greatest exercise or talent. The first factor is related to the functional importance and is a matter of relative importance, and second is related to the scarcity of resource in terms of personnel.

3.4.1 Differential Functional Importance

It is usually seen that the positions which are less significant do not compete with more important ones. It is not necessary for the society to reward the position which is easily filled, even though it seems to be important. In order to fill a very important position which is again scarce, the highest reward is attributed to the position. Therefore, functional importance is necessary but not a sufficient cause for high rank to be assigned to a position. If a position is functionally unique, it is highly

rewarded. This position may be such that other positions are dependent on it.

3.4.2 Differential Scarcity of Personnel

An individual occupies certain positions in the society on the basis of the skills and the capacity of the individual to perform a certain task. The incumbent of a given position must accomplish certain things. A person gets qualified in two ways- either through inherent capacity or through training. Both are always necessary. It is sometimes seen that an individual might not have the inherent capacity to accomplish a certain task. And again, the individual might fail to get it done through training. Thus, there seems to be a scarcity of filling such positions requiring both the qualities. It is rare to have both the qualities to accomplish a certain great task. In some other cases, training takes a long time and the cost of such training is very expensive. Only very few can qualify such training bearing the cost and time. In that case, there is a scarcity of personnel too. Medical education, for example, is a long-drawn training and it is expensive too. In case of an abundance of talents and easy training, not much reward would be there and vice versa.

Every society need not necessarily accept the same position to be important, because the conditions at which certain position occupy higher or lower status differ in terms of internal development. The major societal factors of stratification are religion, government, wealth, property and labour, and technical knowledge. Religion is necessary for human society because its members have unity by sharing certain ultimate values and ends in common. The values and ends may be subjective, but they influence the behaviour of the people to unite them as members of a system. Religion creates an institutional structure conforming to the ultimate ends and values. The highest religious functionaries enjoy special rewards and privileges. Therefore, they are also associated with the highest position of power.

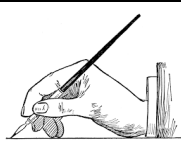
The government organises society in terms of law and authority. Unlike religion, it orients the society to the actual rather than the unseen world. Internally, the government enforces norms, arbiters conflicting claims and interests, and provides planning and directions to society. Externally, it handles war and diplomacy. The government also acts as the agent of the entire population to carry out these functions. It enjoys a monopoly of force and controls all individuals within its territory. Authority and citizens have command-compliance relationships, hence stratification based on political relationships. Political inequality becomes at times an all-encompassing inequality. However, the political authority cannot have an absolute character as it represents people and their interests and welfare.

Besides, religious and political dimensions of stratification, economic rewards are also an important criterion. Unequal economic returns are principal means of controlling the entrance of persons into positions stimulating the performances of their duties. The amount of the economic return, therefore, becomes one of the main indices of social status. The primary source of power and prestige is not income, but the ownership of capital goods. Consumer goods are not a cause of social standing. The ownership of goods for production is a source of income, and the latter is thus only an index and not a determinant. However, income induces people to compete for the position. Income made from one position may be transformed into making another position. But even then, the initial economically advantageous status remains the key factor. This can also give rise to inheritance, pure ownership and reward for the same. Stratification emerges out of such a process of income generation and its management.

The position which requires great technical skill receives a fairly high reward. This is to draw talent and motivate training for highly skilled positions. However, the technical position is subordinate to religious,

political and economic positions because it is concerned solely with means, and it is not so great for integration of societal goods. The distinction between expert and layman in any social order is fundamental. Methods of recruitment and reward acquire importance in all societies based on technical know-how. There is always a wide range of technical positions. Specialisation is the key to such a differentiation.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What are the major societal factors of stratification?

2. What are the two determinants of positional rank?

3.5 DAVIS MOORE'S THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The functionalist perspective on social stratification proposes that social stratification is inevitable in society and is therefore universal. Generally, functionalist scholars have argued that stratification is both necessary and desirable to ensure that difficult and important positions will be filled by individuals capable of fulfilling the duties associated with such positions. Thus, social stratification according to the functionalist perspective is a hierarchical ranking system often represented as a ladder in which there are differences in access to social resources. Individuals at the top rank have more access, while those at the bottom lack social resources, which can be termed as structured inequality.

The functional perspective explains social structures in terms of the consequences of a given arrangement: what does it do for the collectivity and for the individuals? The classic expression of this view, by Davis and Moore (1945), goes like this: Not all persons have the same abilities. Some will have qualities that are most needed and valued at a particular historical moment, such as physical strength, wisdom, or artistry. The other side of the equation is that desired rewards are always limited in quantity, either naturally or artificially (if everyone or anyone has it, “it” loses its value as a symbol of superiority). Therefore, it is in the interests of the society that those with the most ability use their skills for the well-being of all. In return, they deserve greater rewards in respect, power, and material goods—than do people of lesser talent.

In this view, inequality is functional for collective survival. As elaborated by Talcott Parsons, the functional perspective fit the mood of prosperity, social order, and celebration of the individual achievement of the 1950s (Grimes, 1991). It was assumed that the resulting hierarchy of talent, called a meritocracy, was best equipped to lead the nation, and it was taken for granted that these leaders would be white, middle and upper middle class. Kinsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore attempt to show the relationship between stratification and social order. Their major proposition is that no society is ‘classless’ or ‘unstratified’. Both of them attempt to explain the kind of stratification with the distribution of prestige between different kinds of positions. Attention has also been drawn to the different kinds of social inequality and the factors that gave rise to them. They stressed on the system of positions and not on the positions occupied by individuals. So, their main aim is to find why different positions carry different prestige and how certain individuals get into those positions.

3.5.1. Functional Necessity of Stratification

The main functional necessity of social stratification is that the social requirement of the society to place and motivate the individual in the social structure. The society must thereby assign certain duties and distribute its members the social positions to perform such duties.

Motivation must be at two levels: i) desire to fill certain positions, ii) the desire to perform the duties attached to the positions. The social position is supposed to be very much static. There is also, the process of metabolism, that is, new individuals are born into the structure, shift with age and die off. But the system must be somehow arranged into the positional system and thus motivated. Motivation to achieve position and motivation to perform the duties are the characteristics of a competitive system. But both types of motivation are essential. In this context, it is pertinent to ask: Will there be any difference if all positions were equal?

If the duties associated with the various positions were all equally distributed and all needed equal ability and talent to perform them, then there would not be any difference who got into which positions. The difference lies in the performance of the duties which require special talent and training. It is thus important to reward such positions. The society thus uses certain kind of rewards as inducement and also implements some way of distributing these rewards according to positions. The rewards and their distribution become an important part of the social order which gives rise to social stratification.

The kind of rewards a society has at its disposal in distributing its personnel are as follows:

First, the things which contribute to sustenance and comfort. Secondly, the things which contribute to humour and diversion. Thirdly, things which contribute to self-respect and ego expansion.

These three kinds of rewards are dispensed according to positions. The rewards are built into positions. These rights are often accompaniments and functionally related to the duties of the positions. There are also rights which are not essential for the functioning of the positions but only have an indirect and symbolic connection with its duties. But still, it is considered important. Are the rights equal for all positions? If the rights of different positions are unequal, then the society is stratified and that is what stratification means.

Davis and Moore have suggested certain principles of a stratified system. These are: degree of specialisation, nature of functional emphasis, the magnitude of invidious differences, the degree of opportunity and the degree of stratum solidarity.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is the main functional necessity of stratification?

2. Why do functionalist scholars consider stratification as necessary?--

3.6 CRITIQUE

Although the functionalist notion of stratification introduced in the middle of the twentieth century was immediately accepted as the prevailing theory of stratification, it was not without criticisms. It was chiefly criticised by Melvin M. Tumin. Tumin argued that it was impossible to calculate the functional importance of any position in society objectively. According to Tumin, in his essay “Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis” published in 1953, “to judge that engineers in a factory are functionally more important to the factory than the unskilled workmen involves a notion regarding the indispensability of the unskilled workmen.” In other words, Tumin says that in any given line of production, every position is interdependent and is therefore of functional importance. Tumin also argues that, instead of encouraging the use of talent, a rigid system of stratification may suppress the discovery of new talent. This is particularly salient in the areas of training and education. Tumin states that wealth may determine access to training and education, thus depriving large portions of the population of the opportunity to attain those positions that reward training and education. Based on this thinking, Tumin asserted that stratification is dysfunctional to society. He further argued that it cannot be assumed that people actually make sacrifices to get a greater amount of training and education. Instead, he suggested that one might view the ability that some parents have to support their children through college and medical school as a resource that those parents have as a reward for their high position in the system of stratification.

Ralf Dahrendorf considers that the control of social behaviour based on positive and negative sanctions creates a rank order of distributive status. Conformity is rewarded, deviance is penalised. Thus, stratification lies in certain features of all human societies which are necessary for them. The authority structure of the society sustains its system of norms and sanctions. The functional theory of stratification does not take account of

the crucial issue of the historical reality of the society and its existence as observed by Dahrendorf.

3.7 FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ON INDIAN STUDIES

Most of the studies on the caste system were conducted from the functionalist perspective in the first half of the 20th century, and even after this, in the decades of the sixties and seventies. From Herbert Risley to J.H. Hutton, and then to G.S. Ghurye, M.N. Srinivas, Louis Dumont- all enumerated positive functions of caste system by praising its organic character, Jajmani system, inter-caste relations, intra-caste solidarity, etc. The functional ethos of integration overwhelmed most of the scholars of this period. Congruence between caste, class and power was emphasised. Division of labour among various castes was considered desirable. Inter-caste and intra-caste relations were seen as positive bases of Indian society. In all these studies, caste model was accepted without an iota of doubt. The British proclaimed caste as a useful institution for Hindus in particular. Even some of the scholars claimed secular credentials of the caste system and considered it as a democratic incarnation.

3.8 SUMMING UP

From this unit, we have learnt about functionalist perspective to study social stratification. The functionalist perspective speaks about the functional necessity of society. We have also learned how different positions are occupied by different individuals in the society. The high positions are again occupied by the most skilled person in the society, these skills may be inherent or by birth and by training. These positions, therefore, create inequality in the society. The skills and training are also referred to as specialisation. Specialisation thus creates social differentiation.

3.9 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that stratification is functional to the society? Substantiate.
2. Critically analyse the debate of Melvin M. Tumin and Davis and Moore on the functionalist perspective of Social Stratification.
3. Functionalists argue that they have provided a sociological theory which explains the existence of social inequalities. Justify the statement.
4. What do you mean by 'functional necessity of social stratification for society'?
5. Give a critical analysis on the debate of functionalist perspective of Social Stratification.
6. Give a detailed explanation of the opinions of different functionalist theorists.

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UNIT 4: MARXIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Objectives

4.3 Marxist Approach

4.3.1 Basic Assumption of Marx/Marxist Scholars Towards Social Stratification

4.4 Comprehension About Stratification

4.5 Social Change

4.6 Relevance of Marxist Ideas on Stratification

4.7 Summing up

4.8 Questions

4.9 Recommended Reading and References

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In a very rudimentary sense stratification implies ordering, and when it is added to a society it becomes social stratification that is ordering within a society which is about the positioning of humans in that particular society. If this idea of ordering is natural as well as functional is a matter of further speculation and analysis. In general terms, stratification is visible as a universal phenomenon and therefore seen as a conspicuous feature of all the existing societies. However, the hierarchies associated with this (stratification) make it a subject matter in the discipline of Sociology. Sociological approaches to study stratification attempt to know the underlying cause and its evitability. While the functionalist scholars consider social stratification as inevitable and necessary for the functioning of any social system, the theory proposed by Karl Marx is critical to this and presents a dialectical approach to comprehend social stratification.

Marx considers that there is something more vital and lying at the base of other existing hierarchical realities including social stratification. And the base is economic relationship existing amongst social groups which according to Marx are broadly two in number on the basis of ownership/non-ownership of available economic resources.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Comprehend idea of Social Stratification as propounded by Karl Marx;
- Utilize Dialectical Materialism to explain Social Stratification;
- Articulate critical points for Functionalist approach;
- Review and analyse the idea of Social Change by Marxist Scholars.

4.3 MARXIST APPROACH

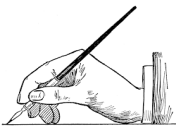
Karl Marx and those who believed in his ideas (Marxists) propose conflict as a distinguishing feature of a stratified society and build arguments to unravel the primary cause along with a probable solution. The conflict, he suggested is there among the two broad strata (with opposite status) over the distribution of available scarce resources with economic value. Scarcity aspect is important here as the value of a resource is directly proportional to the scarcity it has. As a result, ownership of scarce resources yields 'power' while non-owners have a feeling of deprivation and class consciousness which when get accumulated will become instrumental for social change.

4.3.1 Basic Assumption of Marx/Marxist Scholars Towards Social Stratification

- a) Every society is having a division into two broad strata with one having ownership of economic resources and the other without the ownership.

- b) The economic aspect is the basis of such a division of society, i.e. stratification.
- c) The status of two strata are unequal in hierarchical terms and therefore holds the seed of conflict which may outbreak as a revolution once it is exacerbated creating unity among the deprived sections.
- d) Modern industrial society has the presence of social stratification in the form of capitalist/bourgeoisie and workers/proletariat.
- e) Communism/common ownership could be the guide for social change in the stratified society.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. What is conflict in social stratification?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
	<p>2. What is the Basic premise of Marxist Scholars for social stratification?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

4.4 COMPREHENSION ABOUT SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Unlike Functionalist scholars, Marxists regard stratification as a divisive and not integrative structure. According to them, there is an existence of social strata with shared interests that may induce and perpetuate social inequality in a system. However, this objectively perceived social inequality is merely a superstructure endorsing the structure at the base

which is economic. The relationship is primarily economic where one stratum owns and controls the forces of production while the other stratum without any such ownership has subjugated status. The former stratum comprises of the one with the analogy of the ruling class while the latter forms the subject class. In this way, the stratification in the society is merely a reflection of economic classes and their status. The broad divisions could be seen in different sectors of the economy in a society. For example, in agriculture the division of people into landowner and landless (tiller), in case of handicraft economy there's division between master and worker while in the industrial economy it is the division into capitalists and working class while all are having an inbuilt hierarchy in it.

Marxist scholars have disapproved of the notion of the Functionalists about the stratification in any society as inevitable and necessary (functional) for the smooth running of society. To explain what appeared to the Functionalists as inevitable and eternal, Marxists have given a historical interpretation on the basis of dialectical materialism. They said, apart from the period of primitive communism (when there was complete equality in the society due to same/limited activity by each individual), there were/are two broad groups existing in society. Important here is the foundation on which such groups were formed. These groups according to Marx were formed around the ownership of the production process where one possessed while the other largely became subject of possession. In the ancient period of time, the classification was of Master and Slave while there were groups of Feudal Lords (owning the land) and Serfs (bonded workers) during the Medieval period of history. These groups were having a classic division into Capitalist (Bourgeois) and Labour (Proletariat) class in the modern period which largely commence after the industrial revolution.

Karl Marx has regarded Primitive Communism as an ideal state of society where the stratification is absent. The reason for its absence was ascribed to the non-existence of classes. This was the period of Hunting and Food

Gathering, and all the fruits of labour were owned/shared communally, i.e. Common Ownership. It also reflected the system of subsistence production where the dependency (on other) could be avoided for the sustenance. However, the period which emerged on the horizon henceforth was of surplus production and exchange within as well as outside the community leading to the emergence of the complex division of labour. Due to the enhancement of exchange, surplus production gained primacy and common ownership as a result was no more a practical/attractive and hence viable option vis-à-vis private ownership. With the assignment of value, Power/Capacity of person to control other(s) was having a directly proportional relationship with the ambit of ownership, i.e. more is the ownership of economic resources, greater will be the power of one who holds the resources.

Power being a relative concept, enhancement of one's power was always at the cost of the other where the latter was controlled/dominated by the former. And as the prime source was economic materialism, ownership of labour was subject to the one who controls it through domination. Gradually, there is the emergence of division in the society into two broad classes, one who controls the other. The relationship was of dependence (of one class over the other) and hierarchical difference as the dependency was unequally accruing to the power of a class. Therefore, the system of exploitation gets manifested and a vicious cycle ensues as the surplus production gets enhanced by the exploitation of labour resulting in more power and hence control to the one who owns it. This process continued since time immemorial.

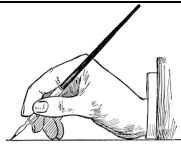
In the post-industrial societies, money was made most fungible for any transaction and considered a source of accumulating ownership of forces leading to production through the investment of capital towards the enhancement of the production process in terms of surplus value/excessive profit. The surplus value is the value which earned over the factor income paid to different factors of production including the wages for labour and is

determined as the value of the difference of total factor income from the price of the commodity produced. It includes profit as a factor income of the entrepreneurship. This surplus value is the source of enhanced ownership (to the Bourgeoisie) and a means for the further exploitation of the Proletariat.

One important aspect which gets revealed in this system of stratification is the class having dominance forms the minority while the subject class is the majority. In all the societies where classes are existing, a system of oppression is visible along with underlying clash of interests among the broad classes of minority and majority, albeit majority is subjugated under the dominance of the minority class.

Giving primacy to economic relationship, Marx considers this to form a Base for any superstructure a society may be ascribing. Therefore, according to the Marxists, any relationship that is existing in a society could be understood comprehensively when it is reduced to its base. For example, the political and legal system of a society is designed in a manner where the domination of the ruling class over the subject class is not challenged. Ruling class which is controlled either directly or indirectly by the Capitalist (Bourgeoisie) class in order to ensure and exacerbate division will propound an ideology with a system of beliefs and values with support for the Bourgeois class. This is actually an instrument to maintain the status quo by creating false class consciousness as functional. In this way, Marxists scholars claim the Functionalists were propounding a theory by which status quo of one class could be assigned the natural as well as legal status. As an outcome, there is a control by the material over the ideal (mind of the people) which can only breed conflict and clash of interests.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is Dialectical Materialism?

2. What is Primitive Communism?

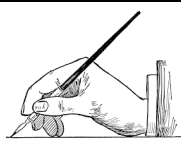
4.5 SOCIAL CHANGE

Social Stratification forms the subject matter of Sociology as it provides a reflection of the existing hierarchical division in the society. In this way, it gives an explanation for this existing reality. However, a mere explanation would be insufficient if there is no linear progression through an attempt for visualizing the change in the existing scenario.

According to the Marxist scholars, (Social) change for betterment will happen with 'Communism' comprising of common ownership of the produce, industrial produce in today's world. This will be possible in a classless society with the downfall of the Capitalist society. The downfall of the Capitalist society, Marx believed, is imminent due to inherent contradictions where the exploitation of one class was legitimized by creating a false class consciousness. As a natural outcome for the increased exploitation by the Bourgeoisie, there will be a revolution (of the masses) that will eventually lead to the dictatorship of the Proletariat. This will lead to an era of a classless society as everything will be owned communally. According to the proposition given by Marx, the Proletariats will overthrow the system of the Bourgeoisie after they become united as a result of:

- i) The mechanisation of all the process turning all the labour into a similar unit can enhance the process of unity after the realisation of the similar fate, and a common responsible cause.
- ii) The relative pauperisation of the Proletariats as the appropriation of the surplus value will increase the level of inequality after the accumulation of capital is concentrated among minority class.
- iii) Increase in the base of the Proletariat class as petty Bourgeoisie may fail to survive in the age of increased competition among the different Bourgeois classes and may fall under the Proletariat class.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Write about the dictatorship of the proletariat.

2. Write about the Social Change proposed by the Marxist scholars.

4.6 RELEVANCE OF MARXIST IDEAS ON STRATIFICATION

Marxist scholars while refuting the Functionalist perspective (Davis and Moore) have given a dialectical approach to comprehend social stratification with 'Material' as the base. Through this, they could explain the stratification in the form of classes during the different periods of time

(its evolution) from the ancient and medieval period to the modern industrial societies. This stratification is the result of the economic system of exploitation which shall enhance with the reckless growth of Capitalism. The growth in exploitation may unite the workers/proletariat who would lead the revolution for the establishment of a classless society with the communal ownership. This is the change anticipated by Karl Marx and the Marxist scholars.

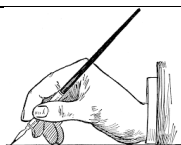
Though the logical criticism of Functionalist scholars was provided through dialectical materialism by the Marxists to explain the social stratification, the shift/change propounded was an example of a simplified proposition as pointed out by many scholars. On the basis of global developments that happened or are happening, it could be said that class-based division of the society is probably not the source of social inequality which happens to be a complex phenomenon. The social classes witnessed over the globe are far more complex than to be classified into two, i.e. proletariat and bourgeoisie as there are several transitional categories in between. This may have happened as beyond the anticipation of Marx towards the development of industrial societies which are far more dynamic than was understood. In this regard, logic cited by Ralf Dahrendorf appears to be convincing. He has regarded that explanation of 'conflict' by Marx may be true but not universal especially in the present period of time. There are varied conflicts happening in different contexts having differing precedence of the cause. It is sometimes so complex and peculiar that economic determinism for the same could be misleading. Further, there are peculiar societies like that of India where social stratification is not derived out of an economic situation. In the case of India, economic situation could merely provide one aspect to the existing division in the society. This is true as here economic situation or status is not the determining source of power, unlike other societies where the approach given by Marx could be true to comprehend the stratification particularly. In Indian society, the power to sanctify the status of reverence/contempt is being assigned to the religion, and thus act as a relatively more important source of determining the social status.

Therefore, the economic situation suggested by Marx as the base for other societies may become merely a superstructure in a society like that of India while the religion shall become the base for any other superstructure.

Lewis Coser tries to elaborate on conflict theory and suggest for two possible consequences, i.e. integration and disintegration within the group. The integration or disintegration as an outcome happens when the basic assumption of the group is challenged. There are different levels of conflict, one lying at the internal level while other at level external to the group. And it is being observed that violent external conflict leads to enhanced internal solidarity. Therefore, it becomes functional in some cases while dysfunctional in others, and thus drawing one generalization as was proposed by Marx for the social change may not be sufficient enough.

Dahrendorf extended the idea of Marx by giving a pivotal role to 'Power' in shaping the norms, culture and beliefs of any society. It is the powerful class whose views becomes primary while those of others (non-powerful groups) becomes non-primary. However, this can be clearly understood with the help of comprehension towards latent and manifest interests which are found existing in the dynamic fashion, i.e. sometimes your interest becomes manifest while in another situation they are latent. In this way, the conflict will not be universal in nature and thus it is not necessary that all the conflicts will induce a change in the society. The change will be a dependent factor on the nature of the conflict. To Dahrendorf, the intensity and violence involved in the conflict may become a deciding principle. By intensity, he implied the cost and associated involvement of the group in it. Thus, more of these shall become instrumental in initiating as well as consolidating the change in any context.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is Power?

2. What do you mean by Latent and Manifest interests?

4.7 SUMMING UP

- Social Stratification is not inevitable and necessary as proposed by the Functionalists
- Dialectical materialism forms the basis of Marxist understanding for social stratification
- Stratification into two groups has historical origin and continuity where conflict is the distinguishing feature
- According to the Marxist scholars, the present form of stratification could be seen as Capitalists/Bourgeoisie and worker/Proletariat class
- Clash between two classes is inevitable and would become instrumental in social change (Communism) through the dictatorship of the proletariat
- There are limitations to the perspective given by Marxist scholars in the wake of dynamic modern societies around the world.

4.8 QUESTIONS

Short Questions

- 1) Is social stratification a superstructure according to Marx? Reflect.
- 2) Why primitive communism was assumed as an ideal society by Marx?
- 3) What are the broad divisions in modern society as per the understanding of Marxist scholars?

- 4) What are the basic assumptions proposed by Marxist scholars towards the comprehension of social stratification?
- 5) Stratification projected as inevitable and necessary serves the status quo. Comment

Essay Type

- 1) Trace the historical evolution by Marx for stratification.
- 2) In what way the downfall of capitalism shall become inevitable? Explain utilizing the Marxist perspective.
- 3) Is Indian society a peculiar example and an exception to the Marxist view of social stratification? Explain.
- 4) With the help of contemporary example write a critical appraisal for the Marxist understanding of social stratification and change.

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UNIT 5: WEBERIAN PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives
- 5.3. Weber's Class, Status and Party
 - 5.3.1. Class
 - 5.3.2. Status Group
 - 5.3.3. Class Interest and Communal Action
- 5.4. Guarantees of Social Stratification
 - 5.4.1. Power
- 5.5. Weberian Perspective on Indian Studies
- 5.6 Summing Up
- 5.7. Questions
- 5.8. Recommended Readings and References

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Max Weber's formulation of social stratification can be taken as a critique of the Marxian concept of class and stratification. Power is the keynote of the Weberian theory of social stratification. Weber draws a clear distinction between three orders of society, i.e. economic, social and political. He observes that the distribution of power is seen in classes, status groups and parties within a community. Such a distinction drawn by Weber makes his theory multidimensional as against the unidimensional theory of class propounded by Marx.

Regarding Class Weber writes,

1. A number of people have in common a specific contributory factor of their life chances.
2. This contributory factor is the economic interest of the people in possessing goods and opportunities for income.

3. Further, the economic interest or life chances are determined by the market situation.

These three points put together refer to “class situation”. This situation is determined by the “market situation”. The term class refers to any group of people found in the same class situation. The basic groupings of the class situation are the propertied class and the non-propertied class. Competition eliminates some players in the market situation and patronizes others. Class situation is thus ultimately market situation. The kind of chance in the market is the decisive factor.

For Weber, the social honour assigned to different people in the society defines the social order. The social order constitutes the economic order and legal order. Economic order and legal order act concurrently. However, the two are not identical. The economic order has a greater role in determining the social order. Here, we find a skilful application of Marxist ethos in Weber’s understanding of class. H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills have observed that a part of Weber’s work supplements Marx’s materialism. However, Weber makes it explicit that status group and classes are not reducible to each other. The status groups obstruct the severe application of the market principle. Status groups are in general communities, generally of a nebulous kind. Like class situation, there is a status situation characterised by social estimation of honour, shared by plurality. It may be interwoven to a class situation and vice versa. It is always not necessary to link status honour with class situation. But status honour may not necessarily be linked with class situation. In fact, it itself sometimes stands in opposition to property as people with property and without property might belong to the similar status group. However, such an equality of status between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is unthinkable in the Marxist paradigm. The two are polar opposites, being class enemies, and their status would differ in view of their antagonistic positions in the system of production.

Weber uses the expression guarantee of status stratification in the context of status honour, expressed by a specific style of life. The most important point here is that there are restrictions on social intercourse, and this is not subservient to economic status. The status circle is evident through marriages. Visits to streets, neighbourhoods, groups, temples, specific places, etc. are examples of encircling of the status group. Ethnic segregation and caste are best illustrations of status circles. Stability of a system of status stratification comes from both legally sanctioned social order as well as conventions and rituals. Stylisation of life originates from status groups. Consumption of goods and styles of life are indicators of stratification of status groups.

The most crucial element in Weber's formulation of social stratification is power. Power is defined by Weber as "the chance of a man or of a number of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others, who are participating in the action". There can be economically and socially determined power. However, power as such is different from the economically and socially determined power. One does not strive for power in order to enrich oneself economically. Economic power may be valued for its own sake. Quite often, in order to achieve social honour, one strives for power. But all power does not entail social honour. The economic power cannot be recognised as the basis of social honour. Rather, social honour can be the basis of political or economic power. Thus, we can say that power and honour can be ascertained as the legal order, but normally it is not always the same. The legal order is an additional source, and it cannot always secure power and honour.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the Weberian idea of social stratification;

- Analyse the different concepts of class, power, status and their relationship to one another;
- Analyse the relation between class and market situation;
- Compare and contrast Marxian and Weberian perspectives of class analysis.

5.3 WEBER'S CLASS, STATUS AND PARTY

In the famous essay 'Class, Status, and Party', Weber states that 'parties live in the house of power'. Parties act in such a way that it persuades communal action. Power exists in any organisation or in a given contest in relation to the actors who are participants and therefore have interaction therein. Parties always mean a socialisation, aiming at a goal, mostly based on a personal reason. Class situation and status situation may determine parties. But parties may not be either classes or status groups. They are partially 'class parties' and partially 'status parties'. Parties reflect the structure of domination within the community. Power is attained through various means like communal action leading to violence, campaigning for votes with the help of money, through oratory skill, fraudulent act, and so on.

The pioneering German sociologist, Max Weber thus showed how the many-layered and ranked classes in capitalist Western societies are defined by people's skills, market credential relationships and property ownership and by other determiners of stratification such as status and party. Weber rejected Karl Marx's view that the class conflicts inherent in capitalism were simplistic and could be resolved by socialism.

Max Weber in his essay 'Class, Status, and Party', discusses the importance of power. He describes 'Power' as the ability of a man or a group of men to recognise their will in a communal action even though there is a confrontation of others who are participating in the action. Weber distinguishes between economically conditioned power and power as such (Weber, 1991).

Weber says that the way social honour is distributed in a community can be referred to as 'social order'. Legal orders are of two types: social order and economic order. Though both social order and economic order are regarded as legal, they are not identical. Economic order is related to the distribution, production and exchange of goods and services. The social order and economic order are directly related to one another. The economic order determines the social order. And therefore, act and react upon each other. Class, status group and party are the three attributes that distribute power in a community.

5.3.1 Class

Weber identifies class as the foundation of communal action. Therefore, classes are represented as communities. A class is said to be formed "when a group of people commonly have a specific casual component of life chances and their interests are basically economic in nature". The economic interests are represented under the market situation, in the possession of goods and opportunities for income. The supply of goods and services, standard of living, experiences of life determine the class position and class situation. And thus, these class situations further determine how power will be disposed in a social order. So, for Weber, "a Class refers to any group of people found in the same class situation". (Weber, 1991)

The class situation is further distinguished on the basis of property and lack of property. These differentiations are:

The Property that is reusable.

Property that offers service in the market.

5.3.2 Status Group

Status Groups as described by Weber are communities. Like a class being economically determined by 'market situation', a status group is determined by social estimation of honour. Status honour can be interwoven to a class situation as the class division is correlated with status qualification. Property is not always a symbol of status qualification. Both the propertied and non-propertied class can

belong to the same status group. Therefore, it is not essential to link the class situation to status honour always. Status honour is also determined by the specific lifestyle.

Weberian perspectives also discuss how the status structure reaches extreme consequences, which is considered to be 'ethnic'. Ethnic communities are socialised on the basis of caste system. The caste system practices pollution and purity; inherits status by birth; there are restrictions in social intercourse and endogamous marriage is practised. Therefore, the caste structure transforms the horizontal segregated ethnic groups into a vertical system of super-ordination and subordination.

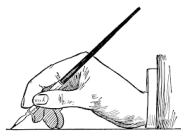
Thus, we can see that class is placed in the economic structure, a status group is placed in the social order within the sphere of distribution of honour. From these spheres, both status group and class influence each other, and, in a way, which influence legal order. But 'parties' rest in the house of 'power'. Parties are oriented towards the acquisition of social power. Parties may exist in a social club as well as in a state. It also rests in the actions of classes and status groups since party actions are always directed towards a goal which is planned. The goal may be a social cause or a personal cause. Therefore, parties are possible within communities that are socialised, which have a rational order with a group of people ever ready to enforce it.

5.3.3 Party

Parties are determined by class situation and status situation. The structure of parties differs in a basic way according to the kind of communal action which they struggle to influence. Parties differ from the way the community is stratified by status or by classes. Thus, for Weber, classes, status groups and parties presuppose socialisation and the political framework within which they operate. It does not mean that parties are confined only to the political community; on the contrary, socialisation goes beyond the frontiers of politics.

It can be said that the Weberian perspective of social stratification is about the unification of the factors that contribute to the formation of social strata in a society. The factors that contribute to the formation of social stratification are economic, social and political and Weber pointed out these factors with the help of class, status and party. Class symbolises the economic factors, status symbolises the social factors and party symbolises the political factors. Weber unites all these factors by giving importance to the concept of power. As power is embedded in all these factors of stratification, which is in a way related to subordination and super-ordination

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



Fill up the blanks:

1. class is placed in the _____ structure.
2. Status group is placed in the _____ order.
3. Parties rest in the house of _____.

5.4 ATTRIBUTES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Status honour is normally expressed by a specific style of life. Linked with this are restrictions on social intercourse, which is not subservient to economic status. A status circle is evident through marriages. Visits to streets, neighbourhoods, groups etc, are examples of encircling of status groups. Further, Weber observes that the development of status is essentially a question of stratification resting upon usurpation. Such usurpation is the normal origin of almost all status stratification comes from legally sanctioned social order.

Weber cites the example of caste as a status group. Status distinctions are guaranteed not merely by conventions and laws but also by rituals. Castes are status groups, and there is a combination of ideal and material factors in caste.

Each caste has a style of life of its own. Weber says that the decisive role of a style of life in status honour means that status groups are the specific bearers of all conventions. Stylisation of life originates from status groups.

Classes are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life. An occupational group is also a status group. For example, Brahmins are a status group as they perform priestly functions. However, technological change and economic transformational threaten stratification by status-pushing the class situation into the foreground.

5.4.1. Power

Classes are found in economic order, status groups are seen in the sphere of the distribution of honour, and these two influences each other, and also the legal order, and are influenced by it. But, parties live in the house of power. Thus, Weber asserts autonomy and interdependence of class, status and power. Action by parties is oriented towards the acquisition of social power which is influenced by communal action, no matter what its contents may be. In principle, parties may exist in a social club as well as in a state. The communal actions of parties always mean a socialisation. They are directed towards a goal, that goal may be the cause of action or may be due to a personal reason. Thus, it is seen that parties are possible in the communities.

Class situation or status situation determine parties. But parties may not be either classes or status groups. They are partly class parties and partly status parties. But sometimes they are neither. Parties may represent ephemeral or enduring structures. Means of attaining power vary from naked violence to canvassing for votes with money, social influence, the force of speech, suggestion, clumsy hoax, etc. Parties differ in terms of the nature of the communal action. The community stratification depends upon the status or class. They are also varied according to the structure of domination within the community. So, history of parties can be seen through the history of society.

5.5 WEBERIAN PERSPECTIVE ON INDIAN STUDIES

Weber's theory of social stratification has influenced several Indian scholars like Andre Beteille, Anil Bhatt, and P.C. Agarwal and so on. Caste was taken as a singular institution of social ranking by M.N. Srinivas, Louis Dumont and several others in the fifties and sixties. Caste was treated as coterminous with the entire gamut of social relations and was thought to be an all-inclusive basis of social stratification. As a reaction to this approach, a multi-dimensional character of social stratification was emphasised. Class and power along with caste were considered economic and political dimensions of social inequality and hierarchy.

K.L. Sharma studied six villages of Rajasthan, in which he applied both structural and cultural perspective to analyse the multidimensional nature of social stratification, mobility and change. To study the caste model of Indian society, the concepts of caste, class, caste and class consciousness, power structure, value orientations were taken as the focal point. In the same way, Andre Beteille also followed Weber's theory of "Class, Status and Party", to make a distinction between caste, class and power in his study of a village in Tamil Nadu. He observes a perceptible differentiation of institutional structure and an absence of summation of statuses can be found due to the factors and forces which were noticed in the village.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Write one definition of power.

2. Name one Indian sociologist who was influence by Weber's theory of social stratification.

5.6 SUMMING UP

Gerth and Mills observe that much of Weber's method is informed by a skilful application of Marx's historical method. Weber used this method as a heuristic principle. He was not, however, in favour of world history based on monocausal factors or a single-factor theorem. He was not for reductionism. Weber's analysis of power and political structures closely parallels the Marxian approach to class and economic structures. Marx was less careful in distinguishing between economic power and political power. But Weber, as a liberal, made clear distinctions between economic, economically determined and economically relevant.

Weber emphasises on the struggle for the means of political rule. The state enjoys a monopoly of power. Like Marx, Weber tries to bring ideological phenomena into some correlation with the material interests of economic and political order. Weber has a keen eye for rationalisation reflected in his concept of ideal type, action, bureaucracy, capitalism, etc. Weber talks of interests and ideologies with equal emphasis. For Weber, Modern capitalism is not irrational but it's an embodiment of rationality.

Thus, Weber's theory of stratification cannot be taken away from Weber's overall approach to society, economy, state, religion, etc. Weber tried to synthesize rationalism, subjectivity and objectification in his method of understanding. Individual, organisation and group occupied their respective space in Weber's study of human society.

5.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the key feature or features through which Weber has analysed social stratification.
2. Do you think Power has any role to play in social stratification? Substantiate your argument with an example.

3. Bring out the difference in the ideas of Marx and Weber in the study of social stratification.
4. Explain the relationship between class, status and power keeping in view how society is stratified on the basis of these postulates.
5. Explain the statement “classes are not communities but bases of communal action”.
6. Elucidate the statement “parties live in the house of power”.

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UNIT 6: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Objectives

6.3 Feminism

6.3.1 Malestream Sociology

6.3.2 Contribution of Feminism

6.4 Gender and Social Stratification

6.4.1 Gender Socialisation and Gender Inequality

6.4.2 Gender and Class

6.5 Theories of Gender Inequality: Feminist Approach

6.5.1 Different Feminist Perspectives on Social Stratification

6.5.2 Future of Feminism

6.6 Summing Up

6.7 Questions

6.8 Recommended Readings and References

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Social stratification is a phenomenon that is present in almost all the societies. It refers to the process whereby the society is divided into many different layers based on a wide range of criteria such as age, power, class, caste and so on. One of these criteria of social stratification is stratification based on gender. The process of gender stratification tends to justify the subordinated and dominated position of women in the society. This is evident from the struggles that women had to undergo for years, to achieve rights and dignity.

The position of women in society is better now than in earlier times. However, it is argued that even today, women are likely to be confined to a 'private' space- family, taking care of children, husband and the household.

On the other hand, men live a ‘public’ life and are mostly the earning members and decision-makers of the family. They are active participants in industry and politics.

The feminist perspective on stratification has been, no doubt, helpful in improving the lives of women. It has paved the way for a better understanding of women’s issues and concerns. However, there are lots of works still to be done. Therefore, it is essential to understand the process of gender stratification and the feminist perspectives on it. The better understanding will help to identify the areas that need attention.

6.2 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe feminism and its contribution to sociology;
- Discuss gender stratification as another form of social stratification;
- Discuss and analyse the feminist point of view on social stratification;
- Analyse the future of feminism.

6.3 FEMINISM

The origin of feminist theory is dated back to eighteenth-century England. This was the time when Mary Wollstonecraft appealed for the rights of women.

The feminist perspective aims at understanding gender inequality, discrimination and exclusion based on one’s gender and seeks to promote the interests of women. It shed light on the issues and problems that were otherwise overlooked by other dominant male perspectives. Focusing the attention on the dominated position of women in many societies resulted in the development of feminism. Feminists oppose those laws and norms that

give more power and privileges to men compared to women. For example- Prohibiting widow remarriage but allowing a widower to remarry, prohibition of female education, dowry deaths, unequal pay in jobs and so on.

Stop and Read:

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines feminism as a social movement, combining theory with political practice, which seeks to achieve equality between men and women.

There are different phases of feminism and its progress. Mainly, it has been divided into three:

- **First Wave Feminism:** This was a movement that started during the Enlightenment period and gained momentum in the mid-nineteenth century. It sought voting rights and access to education for women.
- **Second Wave Feminism:** After the achievement of the voting rights and access to education for women, active feminism declined. Its revival in the 1960s is known as the second wave feminism. It was associated with the Civil Rights Movement and Women's Liberation Movement. Women's Liberation Movement formulated four demands- equal pay, equal education and opportunity, 24-hour nurseries and women's right to control their bodies.
- **Third Wave Feminism:** This wave of feminism in the 1990s was influenced by theories of postmodernism and poststructuralism. It recognised that women face discrimination and domination on the basis of many different factors. These factors include caste, class, ethnicity, location, sexual identity, etc.

Therefore, it is clear from the above discussion that feminism has a long history and it emerged in response to many different issues and problems

related to women. In the section below, the advent of feminism in sociology will be discussed along with its contribution.

6.3.1 Malestream Sociology

Many scholars use the term ‘malestream sociology’ to draw attention to the mainstream and male-dominated sociology. Feminists argue that most of the early sociology misrepresented the social world as it was dominated by men. Pamela Abbott, Claire Wallace and Melissa Tyler (2005) identified five main criticisms of malestream sociology argued by feminists:

- Sociology has mainly conducted research about men. For example, most studies of education and work studied all-male samples.
- Even when all-male samples were used, the results were applied to all the people and not just to men.
- Issues concerning women were rarely studied and were not considered important. For example, there were no sociological studies of housework or childbirth before the 1970s.
- If at all, women were included in the research, they were presented in a ‘distorted sexist way’. For example, female criminality studies assumed that there was something very wrong with women who became criminals, as women were considered passive and law-abiding.
- When sex and gender differences were included, they were merely added on while ignoring that the explanatory theories itself justified the subordination and exploitation of women. For example, the functionalist theories of Talcott Parsons have seen the domestic role of women as essential to the functioning of the social system. The conventional sociological theories did not see the possibility of society being male-dominated.

Feminism began to influence sociological writings in the early 1970s. Since then, the drawbacks of malestream sociology have been addressed. At present, less sex/gender-blind and sexist sociology is produced compared to

the one that existed prior to the 1970s. Thus, feminism has contributed a lot in making the lives of women better and also in making sociology a holistic discipline. Its contributions are discussed in the next section.

6.3.2 Contribution of Feminism

Feminist theory helped to understand social stratification from a different angle. It brought to the forefront the existence of gender inequality. Furthermore, it focussed on the discrimination, subordination, domination, exclusion, exploitation of women in the society. Also, it identified the absence of women's issues in the early sociological writings as we have discussed above. The influence of feminism in sociology led to the following:

- Some topics in sociology have been reintroduced and reconstructed from feminist perspectives. For example- sexuality, the body, identity and so on.
- Although in some areas, reconstruction has not taken place, feminism has made a remarkable impact. It involves the sociology of family, health, crime etc.

Apart from these, as Sylvia Walby (2011) argues, feminism has made great progress and has been impactful in advancing women's rights and ensuring greater gender equality. Partly, this has been possible, Walby argues, through gender mainstreaming. It means that feminists are achieving their aims and demands by being active participants in mainstream politics and other institutions of society. Feminists are engaging themselves with those who have power and as a result, have made noteworthy gains. For example, through the efforts of the feminists, the United Nations started paying attention to feminist issues.

Thus, feminism has come a long way since its inception. As time changed, it has undergone changes and modifications regarding its issues and has been influential and impactful.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Fill up the blank:

The origin of feminist theory is dated back to -----

2. What are the aims of feminist perspective?

3. Define malestream sociology.

6.4 GENDER AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

It can be argued that there is rarely any society where men do not enjoy more power, wealth, status and influence than women. This is the base for gender inequalities throughout the society. It is evident from the fact that men are given an excessive share of social, political, economic and cultural resources. This proves that gender itself is one of the significant bases of stratification. Yet, research studies on stratification, as discussed earlier, were gender blind. They were written as if women did not have an existence or as though, for research on power, wealth and prestige, women did not make an interesting or important category.

Stop and Read:

Kate Millet (1968) described women as having a 'caste-like status'. There is no mobility between the sexes and men are rewarded differently from women. She argues that sex is an ascribed status and the relationship between men and women are structured by power relations.

Thus, the studies of gender and stratification are comparatively recent. It developed from the feminist scholarship.

A way to understand the origins of gender inequalities is to study about the process of gender socialization. The same has been discussed below in the next section.

6.4.1 Gender Socialisation and Gender Inequality

Gender socialisation is the process through which boys and girls learn about the behaviours, roles and attitudes expected by the society. It begins during childhood with the help of different agencies such as the family, school, peer group, media etc. The process emphasises on learning those social norms, behaviours, roles that are seen to correspond with one's sex (male/female).

It is argued that gender inequalities are outcomes of men and women being socialised into different roles. For example, boys are usually told since childhood that they have to be the breadwinner of the family while girls are being told to learn how to be a good wife. Furthermore, boys and girls learn about the notions of masculinity and femininity. What guide them in this learning process are the positive and negative sanctions. Positive sanctions are responses by individual or groups that encourage expected behaviours. These include rewards, compliments etc. For example, appreciating that a boy wants a gun toy as it is a marker of masculinity. Negative sanctions are responses by individual or groups that discourage

behaviours which do not conform to expected ones. It includes punishments, frowns, avoidance etc. For example, girls are being denied a gun toy and instead given dolls or cookery set.

Moreover, the portrayal of gender roles in movies has deep impacts on boys and girls. Male characters are shown as active, aggressive and adventurous while female characters are portrayed as passive, submissive and confined to the domestic sphere.

Stop and Read:

The feminists have specifically attacked the media for its portrayal of men and women in their traditional social roles.

Moreover, the socialisation is deemed to be inadequate if an individual develops gender practices which are not compatible with his/her biological sex. Therefore, inequalities result from the fact that gender socialisation teaches men and women their expected behaviours and roles. And since it is a process that begins at childhood and continues later in life, its imprints tend to be permanent.

6.4.2 Gender and Class

Gender, combined with other elements of social stratification such as caste, class, ethnicity, location, etc. forms the basis of social and gender inequalities. Scholars argue that one of the problems posed by the gender and stratification studies is understanding gender inequalities in terms of class divisions. They further argue that the problem seems to be simple but is difficult to sort out. This is because gender inequalities have their roots in history than just class systems. For example, in hunting-gathering societies too, men are considered superior to women; and these societies are classless. But, class divisions are so visible in modern societies that they tend to overlap significantly with gender inequalities. Thus, it is important to understand and explain gender inequalities in class terms.

The 'conventional position' in the class analysis was that the paid work of women is relatively insignificant compared to that of men (Goldthorpe, 1983). Goldthorpe emphasises that the argument is not in favour of the ideology of sexism; rather it recognizes the subordinated position of most women in the labour force. Therefore, the majority of women are dependent economically on their husbands. Thus, women's class position is determined by the husband's class situation.

However, this argument of Goldthorpe was criticised on many levels. Yet, Goldthorpe and others continued to defend the argument while adding new observations. For research purposes, household classification is now determined by the 'dominant breadwinner', irrespective of the gender.

Stop and Read:

Bourdieu's work on class and status has been very influential and many sociologists have drawn on it for their own studies. For example- British sociologist Beverley Skeggs used Bourdieu's account of class and culture and examined the formation of class and gender in her study of north-west England women.

Furthermore, some scholars suggested that class position should be determined from occupation independently for each individual, without referring to the individual's domestic circumstances. Interestingly, the debate still continues due to feminist critiques and undeniable changes in women's economic role.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is Gender Socialisation?

2. What was the 'conventional position' of class analysis?

6.5 THEORIES OF GENDER INEQUALITY: FEMINIST APPROACH

As we have discussed in the previous sections, gender is an important form of social stratification. The opportunities and life chances of individuals and groups are structured by the element of gender. Even though the roles of men and women vary from culture to culture, there is rarely any society where females have more power than males.

It is to the credit of feminist sociologists that theories of gender inequality have been advocated. These theories have been advanced in different realms such as economics, politics, the family and so on. However, we will pay attention to understand and explain the nature of gender inequality at the level of society.

Since the first attempt at developing theories of gender inequality was by the feminist sociologists, we will be discussing their approach.

6.5.1 Different Feminist Perspectives on Social Stratification

There is not one feminist perspective on social stratification. Although the broader agenda of all the feminist perspectives is similar, which is, working towards the upliftment of women and reducing gender inequality, there is disagreement among them about the causes of this inequality and about the steps to be taken to reduce it.

The feminist perspectives have been broadly divided into five categories-

- Radical Feminism
- Liberal Feminism
- Marxist and Socialist Feminism
- Black Feminism
- Postmodern Feminism

All the above perspectives are discussed in detail below.

- **Radical Feminism-** This branch of feminism is concerned with the analysis of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a phenomenon where men possess the power and dominate women. Radical feminists argue that men are responsible for the subordination and exploitation of women and it is men who benefit the most from it. For them, the family is one of the important sources of women's exploitation in the society. They support this claim by suggesting that men exploit women by depending on free domestic labour provided by women at home. Numerous radical feminists argue that male violence is the tool that men use for securing and maintaining power. For instance, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment are all part of the oppression and exploitation of women. Radical feminism does not believe in reforms to liberate women from sexual oppression. According to them, the only way to attain gender equality is by overthrowing the patriarchal order.

- **Liberal Feminism-** One of the important contributions to this branch of feminism was made by philosopher John Stuart Mill. Liberal feminists do not see the women's subordination as part of a structure or social institutions. They see the roots of gender inequalities to be in the social and cultural attitudes. Moreover, they focus on many different factors contributing to gender inequalities. For example, campaigns against sexism, discrimination against women in the workplace, educational institutions and the media. They emphasise pursuing their aims through legislation and other democratic means.
- **Marxist and Socialist Feminism-** This branch of feminism is critical of liberal feminism for its inability to see that there are powerful forces in society opposed to equality for women. They do not only blame men for women's exploitation. For them, capitalism is the principal source of women's oppression and the capitalists are the main beneficiaries. This is because capitalism has its roots in private property. They further argue that capitalism strengthens patriarchy by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of men. Moreover, capitalism depends on the free labour provided by women at home such as caring for the family, cleaning, etc. Socialist feminists argued that the reformist goals suggested by liberal feminists are insufficient. They emphasise a socialist revolution to achieve equality under a state-centred economy.

Stop and Read:

Shulamith Firestone was one of the first to give a radical feminist explanation of female inequality in her book *The Dialectics of Sex* (1970). She argued that sexual oppression was the most fundamental form of oppression.

- **Black Feminism-** Numerous black feminists and feminists from developing countries criticise the other types of feminism. They

argue that main feminist schools of thought do not give adequate attention to the ethnic divisions among women. They only take into consideration the issues pertaining to white women and middle-class women of industrialised societies. They claim that it is not justifiable to apply theories of women's subordination to all the women in general, as those theories are formulated from the experience of a specific group of women. American black feminist scholarship stresses the influence of the powerful legacy of slavery, segregation and the civil rights movement on gender inequalities. Therefore, the black feminists assert that unless a theory of gender equality takes racism into account, it will not be able to explain black women's oppression adequately.

- **Postmodern Feminism-** Like black feminism, this branch of feminism rejects the idea that there is one single theory to explain the exploitation and oppression of all women. Postmodern feminism emphasises accepting different perspectives as equally valid. It celebrates the 'otherness' of different groups and individuals which is a major theme of this branch of feminism. Hence, it symbolises that postmodern feminism recognises plurality, diversity, differences and openness. These feminists emphasised the importance of 'deconstruction'. Specifically, they sought to deconstruct the male language and masculine view of the world. They also argued that men tend to perceive the world in terms of pairs of opposites (example- good/evil, beautiful/ugly, true/false). Men tend to see themselves as normal and women as a deviation from it. Deconstruction involves attacking such a worldview and reinterpretation of the opposites in a positive light.

Therefore, from the above discussion, it can be said that the meaning of feminism is different for different people. For some, it means working to alleviate poverty and changing traditional male attitudes; while for others, feminism means continuing the campaign for equality in jobs, ending of

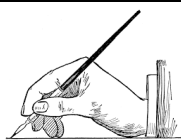
male violence towards women. Bringing together the diverse interests of feminism will be fundamental in shaping the future of feminism.

6.5.2 Future of Feminism

According to Sylvia Walby, the future of feminism is positive as it has been influential in changing the status and position of women in society. Many feminist goals have been accepted as a part of consensus politics in numerous, though far from all, countries (Walby, 2011). Feminism can make great progress by associating itself with other projects in the future. This can be achieved by aligning with state institutions, women's organisations, international organisations. For example, projects aimed at reducing violent crimes can be utilised to protect women from becoming victims of male violence. Moreover, the inclusion of feminism in human rights movements will be helpful in democratic governance and in protecting the rights of women.

Furthermore, the way forward is intersectionality, which means taking into consideration the issues of all women—Black, Whites, poor, rich, Hindus, Christians, tribal women, etc. Feminists should also come up with ways to change the cultural and social attitudes towards men and women. Added to this, the fight for an equal society and toward the betterment of women's position should be a continuous one. It should not die with achieving specific aims.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who is the author of the book 'The Dialectics of Sex?'

2. Name the different types of feminist perspectives on social

stratification.

6.6 SUMMING UP

- Feminism gave a new direction to the study of social stratification by including women's issues.
- For a long time, sociology was male-dominated. Thus, women's issues were seen as unimportant.
- Gender socialisation plays an important role in creating gender inequalities.
- Goldthorpe argued that women's paid work was comparatively insignificant to that of men.
- Different schools of feminism explained gender inequalities through a wide range of factors and social processes such as sexism, patriarchy, capitalism.
- Feminism will be more helpful in explaining women's issues if it includes the element of intersectionality.

6.7 QUESTIONS

Short Questions

1. What is the feminist perspective?
2. Explain the different phases of progress of feminism.
3. Define gender mainstreaming.
4. What was the 'conventional position' in a class analysis?

Essay type

1. Discuss how gender socialisation leads to gender inequality.

2. Explain the contribution of feminism towards making sociology a holistic discipline.
3. “There is not one feminist perspective on social stratification.” Discuss the statement with relevant examples.
4. What do you think is the future of feminism? Elaborate.

6.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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