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Social Stratification

SEMESTER II
SOCIOLOGY

BLOCK: 1



KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

The first course of Second Semester of M.A Sociology Programme of KKHSOU is titled “Social Stratification”. It is designed to help the learners to have a deep understanding about various concepts, theoretical dimensions and bases or forms of Social Stratification. For a learner of Sociology, the understanding of society is incomplete without understanding social stratification. Accordingly, the course begins with a very basic discussion on the meaning and concept of Social Stratification in **Unit 1**. **Unit 2** familiarises the learner with the important concepts of Social Stratification. **Unit 3** discusses the relationship between Social Stratification and Social Inequality. **Unit 4, 5, 6, 7** explains the different theoretical perspectives on Social Stratification. The arguments of the Functionalists thinkers and the criticisms to their perspective is elaborated in **Unit 4**. Similarly, the views of Marxist thinkers regarding social stratification is discussed in **Unit 5**. **Unit 6** deals with the Weberian perspective on Social Stratification and **Unit 7**, explains the Feminist Perspective on Stratification. **Unit 8-13** familiarises the learner with the different bases of social stratification or the different forms in which stratification becomes operational in society. **Unit 8** discusses Caste as a form of social stratification and how caste status is accorded differently to different groups of people. Similarly, **Unit 9** explains to the learners how different groups of people in our society are stratified into different classes. **Unit 10** discusses about Race and Ethnicity as forms of Stratification and **Unit 11** discusses gender as another form of social stratification. **Unit 12** makes the learner understand about some other important bases of stratification such as Tribe, Region etc. **Unit 13** discusses about some of the emerging forms or dimensions of stratification such as deviance, disability so on and so forth.

Thus the course on 'Social Stratification' is developed in such a way that the learner understands the important concepts, theoretical perspectives, and also the different bases or forms of social stratification.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the first block of the course titled 'Social Stratification' offered in M.A. Second Semester Sociology Programme of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. The block consists of seven units (Unit 1-7) of the course and mostly deals with the basic concepts and theoretical perspectives on Social Stratification. **Unit 1** of the course introduces the learners to the concept of Social Stratification in Sociology. After reading the unit, the learner shall be able to understand the meaning of social stratification, its characteristics, its relationship with social mobility so on and so forth. **Unit 2** intends to explain the meaning of the basic concepts like hierarchy, caste, varna etc., that a learner must understand in order to proceed further. **Unit 3** gives a deeper explanation of Social Stratification and Social Inequality and discusses issues like the problem of ethical neutrality, the structuring of inequalities etc. **Unit 4** discusses the Functionalist perspective on Stratification where views of thinkers like Parsons, Kingsley Davis and Moore are explained. **Unit 5** deals with the views of the Marxist thinkers like Marx, Tumin, Lipset and Bendix on Social Stratification. **Unit 6** explains Weber's understanding of Social Stratification and his concept of Class, Status and Party. **Unit 7** discusses the views of the Feminist thinkers on Social Stratification. In this unit an attempt has been made to familiarise the learner with the ideas and views of Radical Feminist thinkers, Liberal Feminist thinkers and Socialist feminist thinkers on Social Stratification.

While going through the units of the block, you will find that unit is further divided into certain sections and sub-sections, wherever necessary, for your better understanding. Again, the units carry certain *activities* after a particular section where needed. These "ACTIVITIES" will provide you the opportunity to practically apply your own thoughts based on the knowledge gained from reading the text in a particular section. Besides, in order to give you additional information on certain relevant topics, you will find a category called "LET US KNOW" after the sections in each unit. Another category that has been included at the end of each section of a particular unit is "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS". The purpose of this category is to help you to assess for yourself as to how thoroughly you have understood a particular section. You may then match your answers with "ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" given at the end of each unit. The section "FURTHER READING" in each unit contains the names of a few books which you might want to consult if you are interested in learning more elaborately about the concepts discussed in a particular unit. Furthermore, the category called "POSSIBLE QUESTIONS" is intended to give you a hint of the type of questions you are likely to get in the examination.

UNIT 1: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION- AN INTRODUCTION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Learning Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 The Concept of Social Stratification in Sociology
 - 1.3.1 Characteristics of Social Stratification
 - 1.3.2 Dimensions of Social Stratification
- 1.4 Social Mobility and Stratification
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Further Reading
- 1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 1.8 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- I know the meaning and basic concept of social stratification
- I understand the meaning of social mobility and its significance in Sociology
- I understand that the intensity and rigidity of the different forms of Stratification vary from society to society
- I explain how social mobility is possible between different strata's in society.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

In common parlance the word stratification simply refers to the division of people into different groups. It is a very well known fact that the earth crust naturally consists of different layers, one above another. Like the earth crust, we have layers in human society where one group of people have been placed above another. However, it is not natural formation like earth crust. It has been socially constructed in due course of time and is known as social stratification. For example caste is one form of social

stratification. The word social stratification encompasses both inequality and difference. The issues in the Sociology of Social Stratification relates to questions of theory, structure and processes of social stratification. Here we must mention about three well known orientations in the studies of social stratification i) Functional theory and its critique (Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis and Moore) ii) Conflict theories (Karl Marx) iii) Weberian theory (Max Weber). However all these theories are not free from criticism. We will discuss in detail about all these perspectives and their critique in the following units.

Social stratification is a very interesting subject in sociological discourse. It is as old as human civilization and is an unavoidable feature of all human societies, though found in different degrees and forms. In every society 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, whether measured in yams, land etc. Unequal distribution of all these scarce resources, whether in a complex or simple society results into inequality, difference and hierarchical division within a society. Social stratification encompasses both inequality and difference, which we will discuss in detail in the next unit. A hierarchy is a set of ranked statuses from the highest to the lowest. Because both the most- and least valued traits are likely to be relatively rare, status hierarchies tend to be diamond shaped, narrow at the very 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 a hunting and gathering society all members are equally valued and rewarded, it is a rare phenomenon. Once the division of labour expands beyond gathering some tasks will be considered more important than others, and the people who perform such tasks will be 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 there are to judge people differently- by what they do (achieved status) or by what they are (ascribed statuses). In this unit, we will discuss in details the concept of Social Stratification in Sociology.

1.3. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN SOCIOLOGY

Lets us begin our discussion with some definitions. According to Melvin M Tumin social stratification is the arrangement of any group or society into hierarchy of positions that are unequal with regard to power, property, social evaluation and psychic gratification. Talcott Parsons regards social stratification as the differential ranking of the human individuals who comprise a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior in relation to one another in certain socially important respects. According to P.A Sorokin , social stratification means the differentiation of a definite population into hierarchically superposed classes. Stratification therefore refers to unequal distribution of rights, duties, priviledges and responsibilities among the members of a particular society (Sharma, 1994,2010).

Thus, Social stratification is the ordering of social differences with the help of a set of criteria or a single criterion. 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 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 based on physical ability or intelligence but on '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 their principles



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How has Talcott Parsons defined Social Stratification?

.....

Q 2: Name the author of 'Homo Hierarchicus'

.....

1.3.1. Characteristics of Social Stratification

According to Melvin M Tumin the phenomenon of Social stratification has commanded much attention from sociologists because of the following characteristics:

Ø **Antiquity:** According to historical evidence stratification was present even in the small wandering societies. However, its form and base was different than present days. In those primitive societies age, sex, physical strength etc were important criteria of social stratification.

Ø **Ubiquitous:** Social stratification is universal. It is found in each and every society whether it is traditional or modern, literate or illiterate, with some variations in terms of its form and dimension.

Ø **The Social Patterning of Stratification:** Norms, values, sanctions etc determine the dimensions, base or criteria of a particular type of stratification. As norms, sanction, value are not uniform throughout all societies therefore social stratification varies from society to society. For example in some societies, physical strength is more important while in some societies wealth is more important. Physical strength, wealth, power etc are some important criteria of stratification based on which people are divided into different hierarchical groups. The social-pattern aspects of social stratification suggests that the distribution of rewards in any community is governed by norms, that is conventional rules.

Ø **The Diversity of Form and Amount of Stratification:** It is of utmost importance to mention here that the diversity in the amount of stratification found in societies of the past and present is matched by diversity in form. Terms like Caste, Class and Estate are most appropriate to express the different ways in which strata can be arranged. Significantly all system of the world could be classified under these terms.

Ø **The Consequences of Stratification:** The consequences, which always results from inequalities in the distributions in property, power and prestige, can be divided into four general headings: 1) Life Chance 2) Institutional Pattern of Conduct 3) Life Style 4) Values, Attitudes, and ideologies.

Life chance means the probabilities that one will enjoy or fail to enjoy some opportunities, achievements, and satisfy experience during the course of one's life. For example a person from a higher strata whether it is class or caste will have more chance to go for higher education. The institutional patterns of behaviour refers to patterns of behaviour of everyday life in all the basic institution of society: the economy, the political system, the family etc. The inequalities in property, power and prestige influences the pattern of behaviour of people. Life style refers to the ways in which people use their disposable energy, time and resources to lay claim to certain levels of honour, that they believe are due to them and that they consider desirable and acceptable. The terms values, attitude and ideologies refers to sets of beliefs about and orientations to questions like what defines a good society, what are the ingredients of a good personal life etc. (Tumin, 1985).

1.3.2 Dimensions of Social Stratification

Social stratification refers to the unequal distribution of power, prestige, and property. In many ways, there is a basic unity to these three hierarchies: 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: Class refers to the people at the same economic level, who may or may not be aware of their common interests. Status groups are based on prestige, whose members share a common lifestyle. Which qualities earn respect will vary from one society to another. Parties are political groupings that may or may not be organised around class interests.

Ø **Power:** 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.

Authority refers to power that belongs to a socially recognised status, such as president, police officers or employer and, therefore, they are 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.

Ø **Prestige:** 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 respect from others is 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. Thus, the higher the social value of the occupation, the more justified to do high income jobs. Prestige judgements are also affected by whether women or men dominate the occupation, with women's work being rated lower.

Ø **Property:** Certain objects of a society signify the material success of a society. In the United States for example, wealth is 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. Whereas, in a village property includes movable and immovable goods and services. It also includes the pets and domesticated animals and birds.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Is social stratification a universal phenomenon?
.....

Q 4: What are the different dimensions of social stratification?
.....

1.4 SOCIAL MOBILITY AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social mobility refers to the movement of people from one strata to other strata. However, social mobility of people depends upon the particular type of stratification. Some forms of stratification like caste, estate etc. are very rigid where mobility or change of one's own strata is not easy and it takes time. On the other hand some form of stratification like Class is not very rigid. A stratification system, which provides little opportunity for social mobility, may be described as closed type of social stratification. In a closed system boundaries between the strata are rigid and people's position in the stratification system are set up by their ascribed status. Social position is hereditary and individual ability and efforts generally do not count. Therefore, caste system can be considered as closed type of stratification.

Stratification systems with relatively high rate of social mobility are termed as 'open'. In open type of social stratification, the boundaries between the levels or strata are relatively more flexible and may be influenced by people's achieved status. For example, class.

It is important to mention here that three grounds could be mentioned with regard to social mobility: merit, egalitarianism, and historicity. Those who have requisite abilities would change their status and can move upwardly. Secondly, when all people have equal access, no hindrances may be there in their way to a higher status. Thirdly historicity, the human history shows that over a period of time economic and demographic factors would force a rearrangement of individuals, families and society in general.

P.A Sorokin (1964) in his work *Social and Cultural Mobility* has discussed in detail about the concept of social mobility and its various types. According to him, social mobility is any transition of an individual or social object or value-anything that has been created by human activity. He has divided the phenomenon of mobility into two major types: i) Horizontal and ii) Vertical

Horizontal social mobility refers to the transition of an individual from one social group to another situated on the same level. It implies a very high degree of dynamism. It does not affect the system of social stratification. It is intra systemic: Change within the system not of the system. For example if a peon is transferred in the same rank from one office to another office.

Vertical social mobility, on the other hand, refers to the transition of individual or group from one social stratum to another. For example, if a peon is getting promotion in the same office where he is working or getting transferred and promoted into another office. This mobility is highly valued and it occurs over a long period of time, often inter-generationally. Vertical social mobility can be sub-divided again into two type:

- I Upward or ascending or climbing, which has two forms a) as an infiltration of the individuals of a lower stratum into an existing higher one. b) the insertion of a group into a higher stratum.

- I Downward or descending or sinking which has also two forms: a) dropping of individuals from a higher social position into a lower one. b) degradation of a higher social group as a whole , in an abasement of its rank among other groups.

Sorokin has also distinguished between the intensiveness and generality of the vertical mobility. Intensiveness refers to the vertical social distance or the number of strata (conomic, political, or occupational) crossed by an individual in his upward or downward movement in a definite period of time. Generality means the total number of individuals who has changed their position in vertical direction over the period of times. By observing all these dimensions we can know about a particular society and the kind of stratification practised by that society.

Sorokin has put forth the following principles of vertical mobility:

- I There has scarcely been any society whose strata were absolutely closed or in which vertical mobility in its three forms -economic, political and occupational, was not present.
- I There has never existed a society in which vertical social mobility has been absolutely free and transition from one strata to another has had no resitance.
- I The intensiveness and generality of the vertical mobility varies from place to place and society to society and fluctuates within same society in different times.

Vertical mobility functions to some degree in any society. There must be some thin layers between the strata which allows individuals to move up and down. The most important channels of social circulation are :

- I Army
- I Church

- I School
- I Family
- I Political, Professional and Economic organizations.

In addition to the above-mentioned types of social mobility, we have two other forms: Intergenerational and Intragenerational. Intergenerational mobility is the movement in the socio-economic ladder, experienced by family members from one generation to the next. For example son of a worker achieving the position of a manager in a company. On the other hand when people move or change their social strata within their own life time then it is known as intragenerational. For instance if one accountant got promotion to the post of manager during his lifetime. These are vertical form of mobility. Therefore, movement may take place either in ascending order or in descending order.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Give an example of Closed stratification.

.....

Q 6: Name the author of 'Social and Cultural Mobility'

.....



1.5 LET US SUM UP

- I The phenomenon of social stratification encompasses both social inequality and social difference.
- I The issues in the Sociology of Social Stratification relates to questions of theory, structure and processes of social stratification.
- I Social stratification is as old as human civilization and an unavoidable feature of all human societies.

- I Unequal distribution of scarce resources whether in a complex or simple society results into inequality and difference and hierarchical division in a society.
- I Stratification systems thus, are both a cause and consequences of inequality.
- I According to Melvin M Tumin social stratification is the arrangement of any group or society into hierarchy of positions that are unequal with regard to power, property and social evaluation and psychic gratification.
- I Talcott Parsons regards social stratification as the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior as relative to another in certain socially important respects.
- I Social stratification is the ordering of social differences with the help of set of criteria or a single criterion.
- I Social Stratification deals with the ways in which human population is socially differentiated i.e. differentiated publicly and demonstrably.
- I According to historical evidence stratification was present even in the small wandering societies.
- I Social stratification is universal.
- I Social stratification varies from society to society.
- I Social stratification refers to the unequal distribution of power, prestige, and property.
- I Social mobility refers to the movement of people from one strata to another strata.
- I Stratification system, which provides little opportunity for social mobility is known as closed type of stratification.

- I Stratification system with relatively high rate of social mobility are termed as 'open' type of stratification.
- I Merit, egalitarianism, and historicity are three important ground for mobility.
- I Sorokin has divided the phenomenon of mobility into two major types:
i) Horizontal and ii) Vertical.
- I Vertical social mobility can be sub-divided again into two type: i) Ascending and ii) Descending.
- I Intensiveness refers to the vertical social distance or the number of strata.
- I Generality refers to the total number of individuals who have changed their position in vertical direction over the period of times.
- I In addition to the above mentioned types of social mobility we have two other forms : Intergenerational and Intragenerational



1.6 FURTHER READING

- 1) Gupta, Dipankar; 2010; Social Stratification, Oxford University Press: New Delhi
- 2) Ghurye, G.S. 2004: Caste and race in India. Bombay:Popular Prakashan.
- 3) Louis, Dumont 1998. Homo Hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications, Delhi: Oxford university Press.
- 4) Sharma, K.L,1994: Social Stratification and Mobility. Banglore, Hyderabad and Guwahati: Rawat Publications.
- 5) _____,2010: Perspective on Social Stratification. Hyderabad and Guwahati: Rawat Publications.

- 6) Saikia, Jyotiprasad and H. Buragohain, 2016: General Sociology, Vidya Bhawan, Jorhat.
- 7) Tumin, Melvin M ,1985: Social Stratification: The forms and Functions of Inequality; Printice Hall.



1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Talcott Parsons defined social stratification as the differential ranking of the human individuals who comprise a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior in relation to one another in certain socially important respects.

Ans to Q No 2: Louis Dumont

Ans to Q No 3: Yes, social stratification is a Universal phenomenon.

Ans to Q No 4: Power, Prestige and Property

Ans to Q No 5: Caste is an example of closed stratification.

Ans to Q No 6: P. A Sorokin



1.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

- Q 1:** Explain the concept of Social Stratification.
- Q 2:** Explain the characteristics of Social Stratification.
- Q 3:** Distinguish between open and closed type of stratification with suitable examples.

Long Question (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

- Q 1:** Discuss the various dimensions of Stratification.
- Q 2:** Define social mobility. Illustrate the various forms of mobility as put forth by P.A Sorokin.

UNIT 2: BASIC CONCEPTS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Hierarchy and Difference
- 2.4 Varna and Caste
- 2.5 Class
- 2.6 Power
- 2.7 Ethnicity
- 2.8 Let Us Sum up
- 2.9 Further Reading
- 2.10 Answers to Check your Progress
- 2.11 Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- I know about the meaning of Hierarchy and Difference
- I understand the concept of Varna, Caste, Class, Power and Ethnicity.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Stratification has been the hallmark of human societies all around the world. Stratification has been derived from the word 'stratum' which means hierarchical arrangement of layers so that one is distinct from the other just like the earth's crust. In the previous unit, we have learned that Social Stratification refers to the hierarchical ranking and ordering of social structures like caste, class, ethnicity and people into groups according to social values, wealth, status, prestige, power and privilege in society. This unit will help to understand some of the basic concepts of social stratification like hierarchy, difference, varna, caste, class, power and ethnicity.

2.3 HIERARCHY AND DIFFERENCE

Hierarchy is a defining and pervasive feature of stratification. Hierarchy implicitly or explicitly orders individuals and groups on the basis of social values, wealth, status, power, religious purity and privilege in society. Hierarchies are explicit when they are stated in terms of rules and consensually agreed upon whereas hierarchies are implicit when they are subjectively understood and taken for granted. Louis Dumont defines hierarchy as an ordering phenomenon on a constant scale which measures the elements of the whole in relation to the whole. Hierarchies thus encompass the differentiated strata within the hierarchy into a unified system through a defining criterion. Hierarchy with its principle of encompassing the elements of the whole signifies continuity, order and conformity rather than conflict. Conflicts can occur only when there are differences in the system of stratification. For example, class conflict occurs as there are differences between the castes which are encompassed within the caste system. Conflicts arise in caste society as there are not one but multiple caste hierarchies which are separate and equivalent and their positions are supported by their caste ideologies. Hierarchy is one manifestation of stratification where the strata or layers are arranged vertically along a variable measured on a continuous scale. For example, people's income can be arranged in a hierarchical scale in ascending or descending order to form a system of stratification based on income. Dipankar Gupta says that not all systems of stratification are hierarchical; some are based on difference where hierarchy may or may not feature. In hierarchy the layers are arranged vertically whereas in difference the layers are arranged horizontally or separately. For example, India is a secular country constituted by the major religions of the world which are not hierarchically privileged by law but exist by acknowledging the intrinsic horizontal differences among them. Moreover, in hierarchy, the criterion of stratification is quantitative or quantifiable, i.e. it can be expressed in more or less certain properties whereas in difference the criterion of stratification is qualitative.

Difference is another feature of social stratification which suggests that individuals and groups are ordered in terms of a criterion or set of criteria like possession and access to resources, skills, education, status, power so as that the differentiated stratas constitute a unified system. According to Dipankar Gupta, social stratification does not only mean differentiation but differentiation, made socially visible leads to social stratification. He says that there are certain criteria and social markers acknowledged within society which separate people and form the basis of differentiation. He adds that the criteria of difference may be one but the social display of differentiation may include a number of factors. For example, superiority in caste is in terms of natural purity which is socially displayed in the form of rituals, taboos, customs, social practices, occupations and style of life. So, social stratification is not satisfied by biological difference per se but with the social amplification of the biological differences in the form of occupation, dress, food practices, residence, mobility and a combination of all these factors and more. Dipankar Gupta says that difference is not naturally visible to the naked eye. The observer or the analyst has to make a deliberate attempt to link the manifest differences to construct a particular system of stratification. He says that difference is on the basis of a criterion which unites to form a system of stratification. For example, if we take occupations, then we can include people who have certain occupation that is socially recognized like teacher, doctor, scientist, lawyer, engineer and so on. We are not interested here in knowing their religion, language, sex and ethnicity but are only concerned with the criterion of occupation which differentiates people into various strata and unites them to form a system of stratification based on that criterion. Hierarchy and difference are manifested in all forms of stratification like varna, caste, class, power, ethnicity and so on.

2.4 VARNA AND CASTE

Varna literally means colour. Varna referred to the distinction between Arya and Dasa, referring to fair and dark colours respectively. The Satapatha Brahmana, a part of Yajur Veda, describes the four classes as four varnas.

The origin of the varna model is in the Rig Veda where along with the distinction between Arya and Dasa, there is a division of society into three orders, viz. Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vish. It was later in Purusasukra hymn, that reference was made to four orders of society as emanating from the creator-Brahmins (traditionally priests, teachers, scholars and healers) from the mouth; Rajanya or Kshyatria (rulers, warriors and soldiers) from the arms; Vaishya (merchants and traders) from the thighs; and Shudra (peasants, labourers and servants) from the feet of the creator. The particular parts of the body associated with these divisions and the order in which they are mentioned determine their status in society. Each varna is located at a specific position in hierarchical order and allocated certain duties for the functioning of society. In this varna model there is no place for untouchables or 'Harijans' a name given by Mahatma Gandhi to the group of people who were beyond the confines of varna model. However there are references in Vedic literature to groups such as the Ayogava, Chandala, Nishada and Paulkasawho were despised. Varnamodel gives us the origin of four orders with Brahmins at the top of the hierarchy. However, there are other tales of origin like the jatipuranas where the Brahmins are not at the top and which captures the essence of difference among the castes. There are some castes which even consider the Brahmins to be defiling. Though varna and caste are used interchangeably but caste should be distinguished from varna.

Caste is one of the bases of stratification and an important organizing principle of Indian society. Caste is relatively a closed system of stratification in comparison to class. Caste is derived from the Portuguese word 'casta', meaning race or breed. Caste divisions, which are viewed as, divinely ordained and graded hierarchically are an imposition of the foreign scholars to understand Indian society, which is divided into various jati and sub-jati. Jati is derived from Sanskrit, meaning 'to be born'. Jati is an endogamous, hereditary social group that has a name and a combination of attributes, which are to be followed by its members sharing the jati's status in the social hierarchy of one's village.

Caste determines the functions, occupation, status, available opportunities, but sometimes even handicaps the individual. But due to the processes of modernization in India, Yogendra Singh (1973) says that there are structural changes in caste. Some of the characteristics of caste are as follows:

- I **Ascribed Category:** Caste is ascribed at the time of one's birth and remains unchanged for the rest of the life. However, one can elevate one's position in the caste hierarchy through Sanskritization .
- I **Hierarchy:** Caste is based on a hierarchical relationship, which is ascertained at the time of birth. However, there are regional variations in the hierarchical relationship between the castes. Sometimes the same jatis are ranked higher in one region than in another.
- I **Traditional Occupation:** Caste fixes one's traditional occupation at the time of birth. The division of labour ascertained by traditional occupation which helps in functioning of the Jajmani System, which is based on the symbiotic relationship between jajman or patron and kamin or client. The services provided by the kamin to jajman can be remunerated in cash or kind on daily, monthly, quarterly or yearly basis. The Jajmani System regulates economic and socio-religious interdependence of the castes. However, the traditional occupations on the basis of one's caste are no longer strictly followed.
- I **Endogamous Group:** Castes are endogamous groups. Matrimonial alliances have to be formed within one's caste group but outside one's gotra. Inter-caste marriages are forbidden but it is relaxed now a days.
- I **Social Restrictions:** Caste decides from which particular caste one can accept what kind of food (cooked or uncooked). It also determines the choice of utensils to offer food. Caste governs one's physical contact, social distance and social interaction. Caste determines the location and type of house in the village. These restrictions are now removed through legislations.

In spite of the structural changes in caste, in contemporary period caste consciousness is increasing due to caste associations, positive discrimination and politicization of castes. Thus, we can aptly say that caste continues to be an important principle of stratification in Indian society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Distinguish between hierarchy and difference.

.....

Q 2: Mention the origin of the varna model.

.....

Q 3: What is Jati?

.....

2.5 CLASS

Class is an important basis of stratification and organizing principle in modern complex societies. The word class is derived from the Latin word 'classis' which refers to a division of Roman people, a class of learners or a grade. Class refers to the socially significant economic situation, economic advantages or disadvantages enjoyed or suffered by a homogeneous group of people. Class, unlike caste, is relatively open as social mobility is permitted and it is linked with achievement criteria. According to Karl Marx, class is the basis of social stratification. He said classes emerge when the society extends and increases its capability of production beyond the requisite level of existence. He defined class in terms of group of persons sharing same relations to means of production. The relation to means of production leads to two types of classes in society not just two classes as there were other social classes also in each epoch like the journeymen, guildmaster, apprentice, petit bourgeoisie and freeman. But these social classes are

descriptive classes as social change does not centre on them. Analytically Marx identified two classes in all epoch as the contradictory relationship between them defined the epoch and resulted in social change-the haves, who own and control the means of production and the have-nots, who own labour and do not own and control the means of production. The haves are the minority of population in society owning and controlling majority of the economic resources and constituting the ruling or dominant class whereas the have-nots who are a majority of population in society do not own or control the means of production and are looked down upon as the subject class. The haves and have-nots are known by different names in each epoch such as the master and the slave in ancient or primitive society, the lord and the serf in the feudal society and the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the capitalist society. Thus, Marx aptly says that the history of all existing society is the history of class struggle and this class struggle will end with the formation of Communist society where there would be no classes or divisions in society and equality will prevail. According to Max Weber, class refers to a group of people sharing similar economic situation with regard to their life chances in the market place. Unlike Marx, Weber does not only restrict class to ownership and control of means of production but also includes services one could offer in the market place. He stresses that class is only one dimension of the complex stratification structure of society and that status and party (or power) are the other dimensions of stratification structure of society. His understanding of social stratification was based on three axes of stratification which reflected economic, social and political aspects of society which were often interrelated: Class centred on life chances and rewards in the market place; status centred on social prestige and honour; and party centred on power. He said that the place of class was within economic order of society i.e. within the sphere of distribution of economic rewards in the market place; the place of status was within social order of society i.e. within the sphere of distribution of honour and prestige; but the place of party was within the house of power. Status refers to the process of ranking individuals or groups on the basis of

prestige elicited by their roles they fulfil in a given society. Status is the honour or prestige accorded to an individual or group by a community on the basis of birth, family background, ethnicity, occupation, livelihood, education, property, income, contribution to society, lifestyle and so on. The criterion on which status is determined and specified differs from society to society. Status can be acquired either through ascription or through achievement. However, societies vary in terms of comparable importance they give to ascription or achievement criterion of status. Weber says that differences on the basis of prestige and honour create status groups. He adds that status groups are groups of people sharing similar lifestyles and same prestige and honour. Status group, unlike class, constitutes those people whose fate is not dependent on the life chances in the market place. He says that people belonging to the same class may not belong to the same status group. Class is determined in terms of owning and controlling of means of production whereas status is determined on the basis of their consumption of goods and services. Party (or power) is another dimension of the complex stratification structure of society. Weber defined party as a political group or association of people where the members participate and exercise power for their own benefit. He said that just as status groups can divide and cut across similarly parties can divide and cut across status groups and classes. Thus, we can say that Weber defined social stratification on the basis of class, status and party which, though interrelated, operate separately from one another.

2.6 POWER

Power is a significant dimension of stratification in society. According to Max Weber, power is the ability or possibility to exercise and enforce one's will in spite of the resistance of the other. At the root of relations of power lies force and domination. He said that power could be legitimate or illegitimate. Those who have power use certain resources like punitive, restrictive resources consisting of punishments or restrictive materials, encouragement resources consisting of rewards, stimulation or motivation

to fulfil the orders of those in power and certain resource utilizing conviction to convince others to fulfil the objectives of those in power. Power allows people who possess it to dictate rules and acquire a position which benefits them as they have control over the resources. In this way it leads to formation of elites and the ordering of the social strata within a hierarchical social structure. Weber says that the distribution of power not only stratifies society but also creates political associations like parties. He says that economically determined power is not identical with social or legal power. For example, propertied and propertyless people may belong to the same status group. According to Weber (1925, 1946), there are three types of power- economic, social and political. A fourth type of power which is informational was added by Svalastoga (1964). Weber distinguished between power and authority. As the source of the former could be legitimate or illegitimate, the source of the latter is always legitimate. Weber identified three types of authority- traditional authority, charismatic authority and rational-legal authority. Traditional Authority is derived from traditions and customs of a group of people which has been accepted for a long period, for example the traditional authority wielded by a tribal chief over his/her people. Charismatic Authority is derived from the charisma or the personal qualities of the person wielding such authority. For example Napoleon is considered to be a charismatic leader. Rational-Legal Authority is derived from the office, the rules and is not based on the person. For example, the rational- legal authority is vested with the Indian Parliament. Power not only affects personal relations but also larger dynamics like social institutions, organizations and government. The power of the government is not only limited to its citizens but also to migrants residing under its rule. In some instances the power of the government stretches beyond its geographical limits. The power wielded by U.S. government when it invaded Iraq and toppled the rule of Saddam Hussein or when it imposed sanctions on North Korea are examples of this power. The conflict perspective of social stratification centres the division of individuals or groups on the basis of unequal distribution of power and resources. Those in power exploit those

who are powerless to fulfil their objectives. The unequal distribution of power and resources reflect the interests of those in power rather than the societal needs. According to Ralph Dahrendorf (1959) social stratification is the interrelationship of norms, sanction and power.

2.7 ETHNICITY

Ethnicity refers to shared cultural perspectives, practices, values, beliefs, norms and distinctiveness which set one group apart from another. The most common characteristics of ethnic groups are shared cultural heritage, sense of history, language, region, religion, tradition, form of dress, food, shared group identity or we-feeling and sense of belonging to a particular territory/homeland. In large cities one would often find ethnic enclaves which are distinct by dresses, the street signs, ethnic restaurants and types of house or place of worship. The immigrants in an ethnic enclave have a strong we-feeling, act as a local community celebrating festivals which are part of their culture, forming and building social networks in the place of destination. For example, if one visits Kolkata there is an area known as Chinatown where immigrants from China have resided since generations and have carried their culture to Kolkata in the form of Chinese street food, sauces and style of cooking. Ethnic differences are not inherited but are learned through process of socialization. In the United States of America, people from Japan, China, Philippines, Korea and Malaysia are collectively known as Asian American. This process of merging various ethnicities into one is known as pan-ethnicities. When federal funds were made available for social services for Asian Americans or American Indians, these people from different countries began to think as a larger group for gaining political and social benefits like health care services, legal rights and so on. The belief that one culture is superior to that of another ethnic group is known as ethnocentrism. Ethnicity has become an important marker for a tribe when it comes to securing political rights and marking them as distinct from others especially dominant regional community.

In this unit, we learned about features of social stratification and types or forms of social stratification. Each form of social stratification is analytically separate and separable whereas in reality one form of stratification is overlaid by another form of stratification.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Define Status.

.....

Q 5: What is Ethnicity?

.....



2.8 LET US SUM UP

- I Stratification has been the hallmark of human societies all around the world. This unit will help to understand some of the basic concepts of social stratification like hierarchy, difference, varna, caste, class, power and ethnicity.
- I Hierarchy is a defining and pervasive feature of stratification. Hierarchy implicitly or explicitly orders individuals and groups on the basis of social values, wealth, status, power, religious purity and privilege in society.
- I Difference is another feature of social stratification which suggests that individuals and groups are ordered in terms of a criterion or set of criteria like possession and access to resources, skills, education, status, power so that the differentiated stratas constitute a unified system.
- I Hierarchy and difference are manifested in all forms of stratification like varna, caste, class, power, ethnicity and so on.
- I Varna literally means colour. Varna referred to the distinction between Arya and Dasa, referring to fair and dark colours respectively. In

Purusasukra hymn reference was made to four orders of society as emanating from the creator- Brahmins from the mouth, Rajanya or Kshyatria from the arms, Vaishya from the thighs and Shudra from the feet of the creator. Varna and caste are used interchangeably but caste should be distinguished from varna.

- I Caste is one of the bases of stratification and an important organizing principle of Indian society. Caste is derived from the Portuguese word 'casta', meaning race or breed. Caste determines the functions, occupation, status, available opportunities but sometimes even handicaps the individual.
- I Class, unlike caste, is relatively open as social mobility is permitted and it is linked with achievement criteria. The word class is derived from the Latin word 'classis' which refers to a division of Roman people, a class of learners or a grade. Class refers to the socially significant economic situation, economic advantages or disadvantages enjoyed or suffered by a homogeneous group of people.
- I Power is a significant dimension of stratification in society. According to Max Weber, power is the ability to fulfil one's will in spite of the resistance of the other. According to Weber (1925, 1946), there are three types of power- economic, social and political. A fourth type of power which is informational was added by Svalastoga (1964). Weber distinguished between power and authority. As the source of the former could be legitimate or illegitimate, the source of the latter is always legitimate.
- I Ethnicity refers to shared cultural perspectives, practices, values, beliefs, norms and distinctiveness which set one group apart from another. The most common characteristics of ethnic groups are shared cultural heritage, sense of history, language, region, religion, tradition, form of dress, food, shared group identity or we-feeling and sense of belonging to a particular territory/homeland.

- I In this unit, we learned about features of social stratification and types or forms of social stratification. Each form of social stratification is analytically separate and separable whereas in reality one form of stratification is overlaid by another form of stratification.



2.9 FURTHER READING

- 1) Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert E. Moore. (1966). Some Principles of Stratification in Reihard Bendix and Seymour, Martin, Lipset (eds.). Class, Status, and Power Stratification in Comparative Perspective. New York: The Free Press.
- 2) Tumin, Melvin M. (1969). Social Stratification: The Forms and Functions of Inequality. New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India.



2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: In hierarchy the criterion of stratification is quantitative or quantifiable i.e. it can be expressed in more or less certain properties whereas in difference the criterion of stratification is qualitative.

Ans to Q No 2: The origin of the varna model is traced to Rig Veda.

Ans to Q No 3: Jati is an endogamous, hereditary social group that has a name and a combination of attributes which are to be followed by its members sharing the jati's status in the social hierarchy of one's village.

Ans to Q No 4: Status is the honour or prestige accorded to an individual or group by a community on the basis of birth, family background, ethnicity, occupation, livelihood, education, property, income, contribution to society, lifestyle and so on.

Ans to Q No 5: Ethnicity refers to shared cultural perspectives, practices, values, beliefs, norms and distinctiveness which set one group apart from another.



2.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Discuss the characteristics of caste.

Q 2: What are ethnic enclaves? Explain with example.

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Distinguish between Varna and Caste.

Q 2: Compare and contrast Marx and Weber view on class.

** ** *

Unit 3 : UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 3.1 Learning Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Social Stratification: Meaning and Definition
 - 3.3.1 Social Stratification and Social Inequality
 - 3.3.2 The Problem of Ethical Neutrality
 - 3.3.3 Difference, Equality and Inequality
 - 3.3.4 The Structuring of Inequalities: The Significance of Ideas and Interests
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Further Reading
- 3.6 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 3.7 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- I understand the concept of Social Stratification and Social Inequality,
- I understand about the problem of Ethical Neutrality
- I explain how the social structure and its processes contribute to the larger conditioning and facilitating of stratification in multiple forms and ways.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Society is structured in nuanced ways representing diversities and differences of all kinds. The parameters of differences vary across color, creed, sex, economic status etc. Society is thus hierarchised across varying factors and these thereby contribute to inequality and access to resources and privileges enjoyed by people. They perpetuate ideas and belief systems in societies and categorically place individuals in different strata and divisions, segregating them and perpetuating collectively held ideas of

differences. Stratification thus can be found in diverse forms bearing consequences and repercussion that are not necessarily the same across contexts. The manner in which this operates is complex and often the process may be seen as natural, while on the contrary it is very much socially constructed and reinforced. This also further relates to accessibility to power, status, control and authority. Social stratification largely is thus a process that arranges the members of its society in a segregated manner based on certain order of differentiation or hierarchy leading to inequalities of various kinds. For instance the caste system peculiar to India is a perfect way to explain social stratification. It is a system that is based on the idea of 'purity and pollution' and one is ascribed into a certain caste by virtue of one's birth into any of the four caste folds- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The system has strict rules of prescription and prohibition that relates to occupation, marriage, inter-dining etc. In this unit, we shall begin with a brief revision of the meaning and characteristics of stratification that we have learned in previous units. This revision is necessary to contextualize the discussions on Social Stratification and Social Inequality, Problems of Ethical Neutrality and how the social structure and its processes contribute to the larger conditioning and in facility,ating of stratification in multiple forms and ways.

3.3 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: MEANING AND DEFINITION

As discussed in the preceding and also in the previous units, section Social Stratification is a patterned arrangement in society based on certain basis of evaluation that privileges a section over the other leading to differences and inequalities. However, it is also important to note that inequality and difference are not the same and difference necessarily will not always lead to inequalities. The term stratification was borrowed from the science of geology and it is a process that is universal. Examples of forms of social stratification could be- the caste system in India, class, race, gender etc. A few important characteristics of the process are:

- I Stratification is universal
- I It is socially constructed
- I It is hierarchical and preserves the status-quo
- I It is inter-generational in the fact that it is learnt from one generation to the other although the manner of its practice may vary over time
- I Stratification bears consequences and determines accessibility
- I It is not homogenous and is found in diverse forms in all societies.

A few definitions of the term advanced by different thinkers are:

- I **Melvin M Tumin:** "Social stratification refers to "arrangement of any social group or society into hierarchy of positions that are unequal with regard to power, property, social evaluation and psychic gratification".
- I **Sorokin:** "Social stratification means the differentiation of a given population into hierarchically superimposed classes. It is manifested in the existence of upper and lower social layer. Its basis and very essence consists in an unequal distribution of rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, social values and privations, social power and influences among the members of a society."
- I **Karl Marx:** For Marx, the principle form of social stratification is class. For him stratification divides the society into two mutually opposed or contrary social categories where one exploits the other. For him the class that owns the means of production also gains political power.
- I **Max Weber:** While for Marx the principle form of social stratification was class, Weber also sees it in economic terms and mentions that along with class status and power are the two other forms. Unlike Marx's idea, Weber did not believe that the ownership of the means of production always lead to political control.

3.3.1 Social Stratification and Social Inequality

Inequality is a certain distribution of privileges and resources as a consequence of which society get categorically divided or stratified. In theoretical terms while difference between groups may not always lead to inequalities, the existence of inequalities necessarily implies the existence of difference between them where the difference becomes the basis of the inequality. This is exactly where the value attached to the difference becomes a parameter to segregate people and hierarchize one over the other.

Kingsley Davis lays emphasis on the functional necessity of stratification. According to him, a society must provide some rewards which it can use as inducements and have some way of distributing these rewards differently according to position. The rewards and their distribution, as attached to social positions, create social stratification. These rewards may be in the form of economic incentives, aesthetic incentives and symbolic incentives. The differentiation of rewards produces social inequality.

According to Davis, social inequality is an unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons. Hence, every society must possess a certain amount of institutionalized inequality, or social stratification.

This view of Davis has come under criticism and theorists have also forwarded the conflict perspective to explain social stratification. Conflict theorists like that of Karl Marx, although he never directly gave a theory on social stratification, gave a theory of social class on the basis of which we derive stratification or inequality in society. His theory is a radical alternative to the functionalist view and he uses the term class to refer to the main strata of society. According to the Marxian perspective, systems of stratification derive from the relationships of the social groups to the forces of production. Except for in primitive communism- the first stage in history according to Marx, all other societies are stratified, like the master and the

slave in slavery, lord and the serf in the feudal system and the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in capitalism.

For Weber all communities are arranged in a manner that goods, tangible and intangible, symbolic and material are distributed. Such a distribution is always unequal and necessarily involves power. "Classes, status groups and parties are phenomena of the distribution of power within a community".

3.3.2 The Problem of Ethical Neutrality

To maintain objectivity in one's approach to understand human societies has been a very important component of social science and social science research. Weber spoke at great length about maintaining objectivity and being ethically neutral. Objectivity is the capacity to understand and analyse a subject without coloring the same with our own values and biases. Although objectivity is desired, it is not always easily attained like in the case of the natural sciences. In social sciences and in the study of the human world, human beings are subjected to emotions and one always comes from a particular vantage point which often makes it difficult to step back and understand something in an absolutely objective manner.

Besides maintaining objectivity, the social sciences must also remain ethically neutral i.e. the researchers must not allow her/his personal feelings or likes and dislikes, idea of the right or wrong to enter into her/his field of investigation. One must remain neutral while studying the social phenomena as it exist in society. According to the critics of objectivity in social research, there are certain influences which prevent the Social Scientist from having an objective perspective. They are as follows:

- o **Personal Motives:** One's personal motives does affect beliefs adversely which may lead the researcher to adopt these beliefs without considering any evidence.
- o **Custom:** Sometimes it is customary to think in a particular way which may affect or prevent the researcher from developing objectivity.

- o **Social Situation:** The social scientist herself/himself is a part. According to the critics a social person or social situation gives rise to certain interests which lead to biases and prejudices and these create an adverse effect on objectivity.

Social stratification as a process clearly hints at the differences that exist in all societies, irrespective of their stages of development. As social science researchers or investigators, one always comes from a certain vantage point and hence it becomes extremely difficult to do away with it while engaging in social enquiry. Maintaining this ethical neutrality by not coloring or fabricating data with one's own values thus often becomes a challenging task to accomplish.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What is Social Stratification?
.....

Q 2: What is Ethical Neutrality?
.....

3.3.3 Difference, Equality and Inequality

There is a group of scholars who use the term social stratification and social inequality synonymously and they donot see any difference between the two. There is yet another group of scholars who argue that a society can exhibit inequality without being stratified. In understanding the nuances within this, one cannot ignore the conceptual understanding of difference, equality and inequality. As it has been mentioned earlier differences by themselves are not necessarily bad and differences only emphasise the fact that the social world is not homogenous in nature. Inequality on the other hand is a further extension where individuals are denied opportunities and access based on certain markers of difference. Inequality is difficult to define because it is an abstract and relative concept. It is a structured and

systematic phenomenon that affects different people in different ways. While the functional perspective views stratification as a necessity to fulfill social needs, the conflict perspective negates this and views that stratification privileges one section by depriving the other. The Davis-Moore thesis, one of the most important functional perspectives on social stratification, asserts that social stratification is a universal pattern because it has beneficial consequences for the operation of society.

The difference between social stratification and social difference is nuanced and complex as they both are sometimes used in an over-lapping manner. Difference refers to the distinction of individuals and groups based on various factors such as biological, socio-economic etc that lead to the allocation of specific roles and statuses in society. Further, social inequality is a state or condition in society where members have differential access to resources, wealth, status and power. It is also important to note here that equality of access to resources will not always yield equal outcome or consequences. People's accessibility to resources and the job market will also be dependent on their intelligence and talents, regardless of social background. Marxists however, argue for a different kind of equality from this. They want resources to be distributed in terms of need rather than competition. Given equal opportunity and support, they argue, many people in low wage jobs could perform in higher level positions. The conflict perspective, therefore, characterizes social inequality as the result of a struggle for scarce resources. For instance- a poor Dalit peasant is not poor because she/he is lazy to work, but because of her/his inaccessibility to the resources to generate income.

As can be understood there is no single cause that produces inequality in society. The belief and value systems attached to certain notions of differences socially constructed in society reproduce and reinforce the practices and processes of social inequality. For instance the caste system in India which is purely based on the principle of purity and pollution, whereby the twice-born or the Brahmins are considered pure and the lower castes

the Shudras are considered pollutants. Discrimination and inequality is also seen in societies that discriminate people on the basis of their skin color and marginalize people racially. Likewise, inequality can be seen in several realms where people are evaluated and categorically segregated on the basis on their gender, sexuality, age, occupation, ethnic background etc. These forms of inequalities incapacitate individuals and dis-privileges them from resources, status, wealth and power. This also relates to the idea of social mobility or movement of people which can be either vertical or horizontal in nature. Differences and inequalities are created also by virtue of the statuses that are ascriptive or achieved. Ascriptive statuses are those that are attained by virtue of one's birth, like that of the status that one gets by being born into a Brahmin or a Dalit family. Ascriptive status determines one's access to resources in life. Achieved status on the other hand are those that are attained by virtue of one's own merit or potential. An example could be someone from a traditional farmer's family successfully becoming a government servant, professor etc on her/his own merit. However, in understanding this one also needs to carefully realize that one's achieved status comes with having access to the resources that facilitate the mobility.

3.3.4 The Structuring of Inequalities: The Significance of Ideas and Interests

As discussed above social inequality as a process is systematic and patterned that structures societies in certain ways in order of ranking and hierarchy. In no society are individuals absolutely equal and differentiation is a key factor of the human world. People differ across height, weight, hair color, skin color, sexual preferences, linguistic backgrounds, ethnicities etc. Human beings, upon deciding what is important to classify, highlight the trait and give it meaning. Therefore, recognized biological, social, or cultural differences become socially meaningful inequalities. How these differences get ranked depends on a number of issues. First, what are the separate categories recognized by the group or society; in other words, how is the difference constructed or the group demarcated? Societies are

thus marked by patterns of difference and the degree and nature of this difference. The significance of the vested interest of those in power in the creation of differences is always complex. Given the various kinds of hierarchies, an individual generally finds that he/she simultaneously belongs to a number of groups, each of which may be in a different position on the various hierarchies. Noted sociologist Talcott Parsons mentions three causal factors of social differentiation:

- o **Possession:** referring mainly to material possessions and the accessibility to the same which largely contributes to producing inequalities
- o **Qualities:** referring to inherent or intrinsic qualities in individuals that are not equally distributed.
- o **Performance:** referring to the enacting out or execution of an assigned task within a specific time and situation.

All of the above factors are inter-related and the standards of evaluation vary from one society to the other.

In order that people's access to resources be limited, there are four broad mechanisms used by groups and societies to ensure inequality. These are exclusion, disabling, decoupling, and creating scarcity. These processes can be found in all systems of inequality and stratification.

Exclusion is the process of keeping the devalued out of the competition or rewarding people unequally for the same performance. Those in the group with access to resources make the rules about what the rules are, who can be admitted to the group, and how rewards will flow. Organizations based on gender, caste, class, or ethnicity have in the past, made rules that limit membership to those with the required characteristics.

Disabling seeks to convince those with devalued characteristics that they do not have the ability to compete effectively. Women, the old, and

blacks were for a long time told that they were not smart enough to succeed in certain professions or indeed do well in higher education.

Decoupling ensures that those who can benefit by certain information or networks are not connected with the requisite group. In a company or organization, the disadvantaged are often not in the know about job opportunities, advancement information, or training program openings.

Finally, resources can be made scarce. Openings at the top can be reduced, available jobs can be decreased, or the number of student scholarships or loans can be cut back.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Are inequality and difference necessarily the same?
.....

Q 4: Does equality of access to resources always yield equal outcome or consequences?
.....

Q 5: What are the two kinds of status?
.....



3.4 LET US SUM UP

- I Society is hierarchized across varying factors and this contributes to inequality and the access to resources and privileges enjoyed by people.
- I Social stratification largely is a process that arranges the members of its society in a segregated manner based on certain order of differentiation or hierarchy leading to inequalities of various kinds. The term stratification was borrowed from the science of geology and it is a process that is universal.

- I Stratification thus can be found in diverse forms bearing consequences and repercussion that are not necessarily the same across contexts.
- I Inequality and difference are not the same and difference necessarily will not always lead to inequalities.
- I Inequality is a certain distribution of privileges and resources as a consequence of which society gets categorically divided or stratified.
- I The rewards and their distribution, as attached to social positions, create social stratification.
- I The functionalist perspective views stratification as a necessity to fulfill social needs.
- I For conflict theorists, systems of stratification derive from the relationships of the social groups to the forces of production.
- I The conflict perspective, therefore, characterizes social inequality as the result of a struggle for scarce resources.
- I Objectivity is the capacity to understand and analyse a subject without coloring the same with our own values and biases.
- I Social inequality is a state or condition in society where members have differential access to resources, wealth, status and power.
- I Difference refers to the distinction of individuals and groups based on various factors such as biological, socio-economic differences, leading to the allocation of specific roles and statuses in society.
- I People's accessibility to resources and the job market will also be dependent on their intelligence and talents, regardless of social background.
- I There is no single cause that produces inequality in society.

- I Differences and inequalities are created also by virtue of the statuses that are ascriptive or achieved.
- I Ascriptive statuses are those that are attained by virtue of one's birth.
- I Achieved statuses on the other hand are those that are attained by virtue of one's own merit or potential.
- I How differences get ranked in society depends on a number of issues.
- I Societies are thus marked by the patterns of difference and the degree and nature of this difference.
- I The significance of the vested interest of those in power and in the creation of differences is always complex.
- I Given the various kinds of hierarchies, an individual generally finds that he/she simultaneously belongs to a number of groups, each of which may be in a different position on the various hierarchies.



3.5 FURTHER READING

- 1) Davis, K. & W. E. Moore. 1945. Some Principles of Stratification. American Sociological Review, 10(2):242
- 2) Tumin, M. M. 1987. Social Stratification: the forms and functions of inequality. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India. [pp. 1-7]



3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Social stratification is largely a process that arranges the members of its society in a segregated manner based on certain order of differentiation or hierarchy leading to inequalities of various kinds.

Ans to Q No 2: Ethical neutrality is where researchers must not allow her/his personal feelings or likes and dislikes, idea of the right or wrong to enter into her/his field of investigation.

Ans to Q No 3:Inequality and difference are not necessarily the same.

Ans to Q No 4:No, equality of access to resources will not always yield equal outcome or consequences.

Ans to Q No 5:The two kind of statuses are- Ascriptive Status and Achieved Status



3.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q1: Briefly explain the concept of Social Stratification. How is it different from Social Inequality?

Q 2: Highlight the challenges in maintaining objectivity.

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Write a note on Structuring of Inequalities with example.

Q 2: How is the concept of inequality similar/different from the concept of difference? Elaborate with example.

** ** *

Unit 4 : FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Functionalist Perspective on Stratification
 - 4.3.1 Parson's Approach to Stratification
 - 4.3.2 Davis and Moore's Approach to Stratification
 - 4.3.3 Criticisms of Functionalist Perspective on Stratification
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Further Reading
- 4.6 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 4.7 Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- I know about the basics of the functionalist perspectives on stratification
- I be familiar with the scholars associated with this perspective
- I explain the perspectives of the different functionalist thinkers on social stratification
- I discuss the criticisms to the functionalist perspectives on stratification.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units, we have learned about the meaning of Social Stratification and how it is conceptually different from Difference and Inequality. Social Stratification is viewed differently by different scholars and therefore there are different perspectives to understand it. In this unit we shall discuss about the Functionalist Perspective Social Stratification and the views of the thinkers associated with this perspective. But before

going into that let us first understand about Functionalism as a Theoretical Perspective.

Structural functionalism, or simply functionalism focuses on social structures, which are theorized to shape society as a whole. Functionalism considers society as a system consisting of a set of interconnected parts which function together in order to form a whole. Functionalism, which developed in the works of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and was carried forth in the works of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Robert Merton (1910-2003), became one of the dominant perspectives in American Sociology. The classical functionalists viewed society and biological organisms as analogous and thus the concept of social function developed by them were derived to a great extent from the models of biological functions available at the time. The scientific method is very integral to functionalism since society is perceived as an integrated organic entity and functionalist scholars stressed on the importance of studying society scientifically in the same way that organisms are studied.

We can summarize the main principles of structural functionalism as follows:

- I Societies are complex systems, which are constituted of many parts that could be both interrelated and interdependent. Each of these constituent parts influences each other and thus, influences society as a whole.
- I Each of the constituent parts of the social system has its own specific function. The performance of this vital function particular to each part is essential for maintaining the stability and harmony of the system. Thus, the functionality of a part explains its existence. In other words, it is the function of a part or a structure or what it does that gives meaning to why it exists.
- I The tendency of social systems is to strive towards equilibrium or balance. Thus, societies are self-regulated systems where all the

constituent parts work together in order to maintain integration and harmony.

- I Overall, the assumption of functionalism is that all social structures contribute to the maintenance of the system and each structure's function is 'beneficial function' which leads to maintenance of social order.

In very simple terms, functionalist perspectives on stratification stress on the functional necessity for the existence of inequality in society. The central tenet of functionalist perspective on stratification is that individual actions become integrated in the values, which are entrenched in the social structures where they exist. Inequalities among people arise because of how society deems different societal roles to be valuable, according to their importance and the talent and resource required to be able to fulfil these roles. Thus, inequality in society is inevitability in light of how different rewards are available in society for different positions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does Functionalism view society?
.....

Q2: What is the relationship between classical functionalists and biology?
.....

4.3 FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ON STRATIFICATION

From the above discussion we have learned that functionalism views society as a system of inter-related parts, each part having their own specific function, which is very vital for the survival of the society as a whole. We have also understood that Social Order and Harmony are key elements of Functionalist theory. In the following subsection we shall try to understand

how Functionalism views Social Stratification. We shall get to know from the views of the functionalist's thinkers like Parsons, Davis and Moore how according to them Social Stratification too serves a societal function and helps in maintaining social order. Let us first begin with Parson's approach to stratification in the next subsection.

4.3.1 Parson's Approach to Stratification

Talcott Parsons was one of the first scholars to pose the central question of 'freedom' and 'order' to the discipline of sociology. Parsons' contribution to sociology can be located as a mediating ground between classical thought in sociology and the more contemporary line of theorisation. He was in Harvard and was instrumental in the formation and growth of the department of sociology there. His works which have deeply influenced American society and thought, have also been widely influential through the decades of 1940s and 50s, and continue to have a lasting effect till today.

A central question that drove Parsons was how society and social order came into play. The question that followed this was about the norms and values that made it possible for American society to have maintained equilibrium and order. With his model of structural functionalism Parsons aimed to develop a grand theory, which would explain social behaviour. Parsons' focus was on social order and the central functional role that stratification played in order to maintain social order. The works of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx had a very deep impact on the nature of scholarship produced by Parsons, which critiques as well as extends and adds on to the theories of these classical thinkers. Durkheim's concept of 'social facts' was a deviation from the understanding of society that was devised by the likes of Hobbes and Rousseau as 'contractual'. According to Durkheim, "[social facts] consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him." Parsons reconciled Durkheim's view of society as external and constraining with Weber's theory of action, whose focus is on how human beings attach subjective meanings

to their actions. By involving elements from these classical ideas in sociology, Parsons developed what is known as his Action Theory. Values remain at the core of Parsons' structural functionalism since for him it is values that provide meanings to people's actions and how people live and co-exist in society.

For an action system to exist, it has to fulfil four functional prerequisites, according to Parsons. This is also called Parsons' AGIL Paradigm. These prerequisites are:

- Ø **Adaptation:** The capacity that a system should have to be able to adapt to the environment.
- Ø **Goal Attainment:** The capability of a society to be able to set goals for the future and work towards attaining them.
- Ø **Integration:** This means that the society should be able to converge on a consistent and harmonized idea of the values and norms to be followed for that society. At a basic level, this also refers to a common language.
- Ø **Latency:** This refers to the society's need to maintain latent patterns or integrative elements, such as societal beliefs and norms.

According to Parsons "...a social system is only one of the structuring of a completely concrete system of social action. The other two are personality systems of the individual actors and the cultural system which is built into-their action. Each of the three must be considered to be an independent focus of organization of the elements of the social system in the sense that no one of them is theoretically reducible to terms of one or a combination of the other two." Parsons defines the actor as "an empirical system of action. The actor is an individual or a collectivity which may be taken as a point of reference for the analysis of the modes of its orientation and of its processes of action in relation to objects." Again, action itself is "that part of the external world which means something to the actor whose

behavior is being analyzed...Specifically, it is that part to which the actor is oriented and in which the actor acts."

Parsons defines social stratification as "the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in certain socially important respects". Thus, for Parsons, the dominant values in the society are central for people to be evaluated, rated and thereby stratified in the given society. In order to determine which people are ranked higher or lower in the society, Parsons provides a theory of the way in which a society ranks roles or tasks according to the dominant value system in the society.

To perform the functional prerequisites outlined in the AGIL paradigm, a given society has four major subsystems comprising of people and facilities. Thus, corresponding to the four functional prerequisites, the four functional subsystems are:

- ∅ Adaptive subsystem: the economy
- ∅ Goal-attainment subsystem: the government
- ∅ Pattern-maintenance subsystem: familial and educational structures
- ∅ Integrative subsystem: police, courts, and religious structure

Which of these four subsystems (with their corresponding institutional apparatus) would be considered primary would differ in different societies. Again, these different institutions would rank different values differently according to the tasks that are considered important there. Thus, the common value system in a society would be more favorable towards the values ranked higher in the primary subsystem in that society. Therefore, the individuals who best possess the values upheld by primary institutions will be ranked higher than individuals who embody the same value to a lesser extent.

Stratification, according to Parsons, is "the ranking of units in a system in accordance with the standards of the common value system", and the fundamental core of stratification is the interplay between common values and evaluation which is necessary for judging any actor. This judgment on ranking is not done on the whole actor itself but rather on certain properties possessed by the actor. These, according to Parsons are: qualities (which refer to characteristics like beauty, intellect, kinship ties etc.) performances (which refers to the way in which the persons do things), and possessions (which refers to objects which are tangible and which can be transferred).

We can summarize Parsons' theory of stratification as:

- Ø The evaluation of other determines a person's rank in the society or in the stratification system.
- Ø This evaluation is done on the basis of a common value system that exists in the society.
- Ø The common value system in turn is shaped by the functional subsystem that is provided primary stress in a given society.
- Ø People who best live up to the values upheld by the primary subsystem receive higher status, as well as other rewards such as wealth and income.

4.3.2 Davis and Moore's Approach to Stratification

Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore first published their famous paper on principles of stratification in 1945 and, since then, it has come to represent the functionalist school of thought. This scholarly work has generated wide-ranging debates and remains a piece of academic literature which is still relevant in stratification studies. The central idea of Davis and Moore's thesis is that a well functioning "society must somehow distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions". The dominant argument of their work is: "Social inequality is thus an unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most

important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons. Hence, every society, no matter how simple or complex, must differentiate persons in terms of both prestige and esteem, and must therefore possess a certain amount of institutionalized inequality."

Here we can distilled, Davis and Moore's ideas into the following points:

- Ø There are many positions to be filled in society, where the functional importance of some positions are more than others and the people talented enough to fill these positions are not easily available due to the scarcity of such talented people or due to high level of skills required or because of the resources and sacrifices (such as training time etc.) involved with acquiring such necessary talents and qualifications.
- Ø For talented people who want to spend resource and time in order to acquire such skills, society provides the inducement value of a differential reward in the future, which can be categorized into: scarce and desired goods that contribute to comfort, things providing humour and lastly, things that add to self-respect and ego-expansion.
- Ø Thus differential access to scarce and valued goods and differential rewards are functional necessities in order to ensure that different positions in society are filled by the people who have the most talent for performing in those positions. The social inequality or social stratification arising due to this is a functional necessity in any society, and it is an inevitable feature of social order.

According to Davis and Moore "two factors...determine the relative rank of different positions. In general those positions convey the best reward, and have the highest rank which (a) have the greatest importance for the society and (b) require the greatest training or talent." In a sense, Davis and Moore's model is a labour market model, where the supply and demand of skilled labour in the market can determine the rewards related to certain work. They contend: "If a position is easily filled, it need not be heavily rewarded even though important. On the other hand, if it is important but hard to fill, the reward must be high enough to get it filled anyway".

One of the most important critiques to Davis and Moore's thesis comes from Tumin, who in his critical analysis of their paper (1953) shows how inequality need not be a functional necessity for a well functioning social order. In fact, "Social stratification systems function to limit the possibility of discovery of the full range of talent available in a society because of unequal access to appropriate motivation, channels of recruitment, and centers of training." Much of the criticism against Davis and Moore follow from Tumin. In reality, there might be a lot of people who have the talent or would be able to acquire the talent for highly rewarded positions, but are constrained by a variety of factors. Along with this, what would constitute as more important positions of society actually cannot be objectively determined, and usually it is people already in power positions who influence which positions are considered for accruing higher rewards compared to others. Tumin states further that, "Social stratification systems function to provide the elite with the political power necessary to procure acceptance and dominance of an ideology which rationalizes the status quo, whatever it may be, as 'logical,' 'natural,' and 'morally right.' In this manner social stratification systems function as essentially conservative influences in the societies in which they are found."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Who are some of the scholars who influenced Parsons' work?
.....

Q 4: What is Parson's definition of stratification?
.....

Q 5: What are Parson's four major subsystems?
.....

Q 6: Who provided the strongest critique to Davis and Moore's thesis in stratification?
.....

4.3.3 Criticisms of Functionalist Perspective on Stratification

Functionalist theorists have been criticised by many scholars belonging to a variety of schools of thought. The biggest criticism levelled against functionalist perspectives on stratification is the underlying assumption it propagates about the existence of a social consensus about how different roles and positions are to be valued and the rewards that are to be accrued to it. In other words, the hierarchy that leads to some position being deemed above others in society is not as objectively given as the functionalist way of thinking makes it appear. Pitting some roles above other happens due to social, historical and economic contexts which functionalist theorists does not account for.

Continuing with the above arguments, functionalists also do not take into account how acquiring talent and ability to perform certain roles are not available to everyone due to a variety of structural barriers. Thus, there is no level playing field in society that can truly allow for a situation in which only the best individual for a role ends up acquiring that role. There might be a lot of people who are suited for positions that they cannot access due to a variety of structural barriers to entry.

Thus, the argument that Tumin implies in his critique of Davis and Moore, that social stratification serves to maintain status quo through the dominance of ideology of the elite, has been extended by detractors of the functional school, to state that functionalist school of thought appear as apologists for maintaining the persistence of such inequality in society by misreading it as an objective inevitability. According to critiques functional account of stratification also suffers from a tautological fallacy (or fallacy of circular reasoning) in its argument, since it first theorizes that the social positions that are important for society are highly rewarded, and then uses the occurrence of these high rewards as evidence of their importance.

Again, the idea of what constitutes 'important' in a society itself remains to be explored within the functionalist school. The idea of scarcity of reward in society, which leads to some people being rewarded at the cost of others deemed to be in positions of less value, is purported to be natural in a society. But in fact, scarcity of reward is artificially created and thus, the forces and factors that lead to such scarcity must be investigated and cannot be left unaddressed, as has happened in functionalist accounts of stratification. The functionalist ideas of stratification, particularly that of Parsons was also found to be theoretical and abstract, which meant that it could not be empirically tested. Due to all these criticisms and shortcomings, by the late 1970s the functionalist school of sociology was no longer the dominant paradigm but this still remains very influential on account of the ideas and concepts that it introduced to study society, actors and social functions.



4.4 LET US SUM UP

- I Functionalism focuses on social structures which, according to the functionalists, shapes society as a whole.
- I Functionalism considers society as a system consisting of a set of interconnected parts which function together in order to form a whole.
- I Functionalism developed in the works of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and was carried forth in the works of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Robert Merton (1910-2003)
- I Parson's focus was on social order and the central functional role that stratification played in order to maintain social order.
- I The works of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx had a very deep impact on the nature of scholarship produced by Parsons
- I The four functional prerequisites according to Parsons are: adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency (AGIL).

- I Parsons defines social stratification as "the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in certain socially important respects".
- I To perform the functional prerequisites outlined in the AGIL paradigm, a given society has four major subsystems comprising of people and facilities. These are: adaptive subsystem, goal-attainment subsystem, pattern-maintenance subsystem and integrative subsystem.
- I Under Parsonian theory of stratification, the individuals who best possess the values upheld by primary institutions of the subsystem will be ranked higher than individuals who embody the same value to a lesser extent.
- I The central idea of Davis and Moore's thesis is that a well functioning society must somehow distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions".
- I One of the most important critiques to Davis and Moore's thesis comes from Tumin, who in his critical analysis of their paper (1953) shows how inequality need not be a functional necessity for a well functioning social order.
- I The biggest criticism levelled against functionalist perspectives on stratification is the underlying assumption it propagates about the existence of a social consensus about how different roles and positions are to be valued and the rewards that are to be accrued to it.
- I Functionalists also do not take into account how acquiring talent and ability to perform certain roles are not available to everyone due to a variety of structural barriers.



4.5 FURTHER READING

- 1) Hess, Andreas. (2001). Concepts of Social Stratification European and American Models. New York: Palgrave.
- 2) Davis, K and Moore, W.E. (1945). Some Principles of Stratification. American Sociological Review, 10(2), pp. 242-249.
- 3) Parsons, Talcott. (1937). The Structure of Social Action. New York: The Free Press,
- 4) ----- (1963). Toward a General Theory of Action. Mass.: Harvard University Press
- 5) ----- (1954). A Revised Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification in Talcott Parsons, Essays in Sociological Theory. Glencoe: Free Press, pp. 386-439.
- 6) Tausky, Curt. (1965). Parsons on Stratification: An Analysis and Critique. The Sociological Quarterly, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 128-138
- 7) Tumin, Melvin M. (1953). "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis." American Sociological Review 18(4): 387-393.



4.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The classical functionalists viewed society and biological organisms as analogous and thus, the concept of social function developed by them were derived to a great extent from the models of biological function available at the time.

Ans to Q No 2: In very simple terms, functionalist perspectives on stratification stress on the functional necessity for the existence of inequality in society.

Ans to Q No 3: The works of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx had a very deep impact on the nature of scholarship produced by Parsons,

which critiques as well as extends and adds on to the theories of these classical thinkers.

Ans to Q No 4:Parsons defines social stratification as "the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in certain socially important respects".

Ans to Q No 5:To perform the functional prerequisites outlined in the AGIL paradigm, a given society has four major subsystems comprising of people and facilities. These are: adaptive subsystem, goal attainment subsystems, pattern maintenance subsystem and integrative subsystem.

Ans to Q No 6:One of the most important critiques to Davis and Moore's thesis comes from Tumin



4.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

- Q1:** Briefly state Davis and Moore's argument?
- Q2:** What are some of the main principles of structural functionalism?
- Q 3:** Discuss Parson's AGIL paradigm?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

- Q1:** Discuss Parson's approach to Social Stratification.
- Q2:** Discuss Davis and Moore's understanding of Social Stratification.
- Q3:** Explain the main criticisms of functionalist perspectives of stratification?

** ** *

Unit 5 : MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 5.1 Learning Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Karl Marx's Theory of Inequality and Stratification.
- 5.4 Seymour Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix's Ideas on Stratification
- 5.5 Melvin Tumin's Ideas on Stratification
- 5.6 Criticisms of the Marxist Perspectives on Stratification
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Further Reading
- 5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 5.10 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- I know about the theoretical contribution of Karl Marx
- I become familiar with the Marxian school of thought
- I understand the contributions of the main advocates of Marxian thoughts
- I explain the criticisms that have been levied against the Marxian theorisation on inequality and stratification in society.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Marx's materialist conception of history and theory of labour is one of the most important theoretical ideas that have brought about profound cultural, political and economic changes in the way in which society, materiality and history are articulated, and the way in which social stratification and inequality are understood. 'Marxism' refers to critiques, theories, political ambitions that are evolved from or are inspired by the theoretical and political work of Karl Marx (1818-1883). The Marxist theory

of class and class struggle probably has impacted the world we live in more deeply than any other theory in history. Scholars and activists belonging to the Marxist tradition have been at the forefront of inequality studies and have spearheaded social and political movements against inequality in the world. The central idea in Marxist scholarship holds that capitalism or capitalist production leads to exploitative social relations. Marxist scholars view socialism as the social order where capitalist conceptions such as private property and exploitation would be eradicated. Lastly, such a transition from capitalist to socialist system would be achieved through revolution.

Marxist class analysis considers a relational approach to social inequality, whereby classes are understood conceptually as developing because of particular historical circumstances. This historical understanding of the creation of class also takes into account the how classes themselves relate dynamically to each other. Thus, Marxist perspectives on stratification go against the previously established simplistic notion that inequality of income or wealth is the indicator of the advent of class and the boundary between classes, and Marxist scholars bring to light the idea that social inequality is not the reason for class formation, rather it results from class structures. These class structures themselves arise under historical circumstance, which needs to be investigated and understood.

In the previous unit, we have discussed the Functionalist perspective on Social Stratification. In this unit, we shall discuss the approaches of Marxist Scholars towards social stratification.

5.3 KARL MARX'S THEORY OF INEQUALITY AND STRATIFICATION

Karl Marx (1818-1883) has been instrumental in effecting wide reaching and quiet fundamental changes in not only academic analysis but even more so in political practice. Marx was a political activist first and foremost but his contribution has left a lasting impact on how scholars approach

economy, society and history. Marx considered inequality as arising out of economic divisions between groups, but his aim was never to investigate or inquire how income or wealth gets distributed. Rather, Marx's object of inquiry was, the reasons that led to such unequal income distribution. In Marx's conception of inequality and stratification, the economic sphere is considered the most fundamental and pivotal since this is the domain where all production activity, the most basic human activity, takes place.

Marx "historical materialism" or the "materialist conception of history" is based on Hegel's ideas that history forms due to an opposition or conflict between two opposing forces. Marx adopted the idea of the dialectics but unlike Hegel's idealism, Marx considered real forces of history to have emerged from materiality of the real world. For Marx, material circumstances determine consciousness, rather than the other way round: "The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist".

According to Marx, Western societies had been through four main periods in time governed by four main modes of production. These are: primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society and, lastly, capitalist society. By modes of production, we can refer to the economic system. The specific mode of production in a society gives rise to specific relations of production and forces of production. The relation of production refers to the entirety of all the relations that human beings enter into in order to fulfill the functions for necessities and amenities of life. Some examples of relations of production are employer-employee work conditions, the technical division of labour, and property relations etc. (so factors such as private property, petty bourgeoisie, proletariat). Forces of production refer to the elements and processes involved in production where raw materials are transformed into products (such as tools, machines, factory, raw materials).

The mode of production of a given society is constituted of two parts: the base and the superstructure. The economic base of the mode of production is constituted of the sum total of the forces of production and

relations of production, while the superstructure of the mode of production of a given society is shaped by the political ideological and other institutional apparatus. It is Marx's contention that the superstructure grows out of the economic base, and the base is more dominant. On the other hand, the superstructure creates the conditions that provide legitimacy to the base through norms, values, beliefs, and ideologies permeated in the society. Thus, in a given society, this economic base reflects the interest of the ruling class that controls this base, which would always be in dialectical opposition of the interest of the working class, which is much bigger in number, but without power over the base.

Marx states that except in the first mode of production i.e. primitive communism, social stratification arising out of difference in class position is found in all other epochs. In ancient society, the class distinction was between master and slave, while under feudalism, this changed to lord and serf. According to Marx, even the 'modern bourgeois society' or the capitalist society "has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in places of the old ones." In fact, Marx further states, "Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie (the ruling class) and proletariat (the working class)."

The relationships between the ruling class, which owns the means of production and the working class, which provides wage labour, is essentially dialectical because it is one of conflict as well as dependence. The ruling class requires people to work for them while the working class requires the former for their survival. Classes emerge with the extraction of surplus value by the proletariats. Surplus value is the central concept in Marx's theory of political economy, which he distinguishes from the exchange value or use value of a commodity. Surplus value is the excess value generated by the proletariat as profits, which are created by the workers working in excess

of their labour cost but which are wholly appropriated by the proletariat or the capitalist. Marx says, "The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labor is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relations of rulers and ruled...Upon this is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows out of the conditions of production itself, and this also determines its specific political shape."

The proletariat exists in a state of 'false consciousness' about their position in society and class relations due to the ways in which the ideological, political and social apparatus of the ruling class permeate the superstructure. This false consciousness eventually transforms to class consciousness. Class consciousness arises from the working class transforming from a "objective class" or a "class in itself" to a "subjective class" or a "class for itself". This means that the working class becomes aware of their material conditions of its existence as more than an objective reality, and this forms a reason for the members of the proletariat class to form a solidarity in order to improve their conditions and change the exploitative dynamics they have been forced into and come together to struggle against the other class. Marx states, "These relations change from forms of development of the productive forces into their fetters. There then begins an epoch of social revolution."

Marx in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), expresses that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, that each time ended, either in the revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."

At the heart of Marx's writing, he accords the concept of a "classless society". This according to Marx was the ultimate end of social organization where man can finally become "fully human". Marx believed that it was the proletariats under the capitalist mode of production who would finally

overthrow the ruling class through revolution and usher in the new era of socialist mode of production, which would then transition to the classless society of communism. As Marx says about the inevitability and necessity of a proletariat revolution. In this context he said, "the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."

Thus, we see that though Marxism evolved as a theory of political economy, it is a rich site for theorizations and philosophy on history, human materiality, radical human action and, most importantly, on human freedom and liberation. Marxism has inspired numerous working class movements across the world and Marx's writings and enormous contributions continue to have a deep impact on almost all arenas of social, political and economic life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is Marxism?

.....

Q 2: What are the central ideas of Marxists?

.....

Q 3: What are the four main modes of production discussed by Marx?

.....

Q 4: What is the difference between relations of production and forces of production?

.....

5.4 SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET AND REINHARD BENDIX'S IDEAS ON STRATIFICATION

Both Bendix and Lipset, individually and together, have made stellar contributions as Marxists scholars studying inequality and stratification. Bendix and Lipset's reader *Class, Status and Power: A Reader in Social*

Stratification (1953) remains an excellent source for anyone interested in stratification in general and Marxist perspectives on stratification in particular. This volume includes a co-authored paper by Lipset and Bendix on Marx's theory of class, which remains a great resource to clarify and better understand the fundamentals and criticisms to Marx's conceptualizations. However, here we would discuss another book they co-authored, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (1959), where they delved into questioning of the nature of occupational mobility and introduced a new turning point in the way in which class mobility studies should evolve. The scope of Lipset and Bendix's social mobility research is global and they approach it with a historical perspective. In this book, they include data from the field study conducted by them in Oakland, USA as well as including data from other empirical studies on stratification and social mobility. They define social mobility as "the process by which individuals move from one position to another in society- positions which by general consent have been given specific hierarchical values."

They begin by stating that sociological research had begun to question the validity of three notions that were widely accepted during that time: "that there has been substantially less mobility in Europe than in the United States; that social mobility tends to decline as industrial societies mature; and that opportunities for entrance into the business elite become more restricted with mature industrialization." They then go on to identify and espouse upon different social and psychological causes that have led to occupational mobility and the consequence of such inequality in society and economy.

The most important conclusion that Lipset and Bendix arrived at in their work is that, "the overall pattern of social mobility appears to be much the same in the industrial societies of various Western countries.... Further, although it is clear that social mobility is related in many ways to the economic expansion of industrial societies, it is at least doubtful that the rates of mobility and expansion are correlated." From these they offered

their tentative interpretation that "the social mobility of societies becomes relatively high once their industrialization, and hence their economic expansion, reaches a certain level." Thus, in other words, Lipset and Bendix find that once countries reach a certain level of industrialization, their rates of social mobility show uniform increase.

One of the main criticisms of Lipset and Bendix's theoretical offerings is that they use categories that are very general and excessively broad in nature. The data that have been used in the book along with the interpretation of the available statistics have also come under critical scrutiny. Lipset and Bendix's central proposition that social mobility rates in different industrial societies are uniformly high, has also been criticized for not being able to account for the significant variations that exists between countries in social mobility patterns. Despite the book being controversial and divisive, it remains very challenging and relevant to the study of social mobility.

5.5 MELVIN TUMIN'S IDEAS ON STRATIFICATION

Tumin described social stratification as "the arrangement of a social group or society into a hierarchy of positions that are unequal with regard to power, property, social evaluation and psychic gratification." The functionalist school of stratification has received a lot of critique from the Marxist as well as other schools of thought. One of the most important debates that took place between the functionalist understanding of inequality and stratification and the Marxist understating of the same, was between Davis and Moore's scholarly work exemplified by their essay "Some Principles of Stratification" (1944) and Tumin's refutation of their arguments on stratification in his essay "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis" (1953) which was published in the American Sociological Review.

Davis and Moore approach inequality as being functionally necessary in a society. How society rewards positions is proportional to how important the position is deemed for society and how scarcely available are the people to fill certain positions. Thus, if factors such as inherent ability,

resources needed for training or sacrifices needed for certain positions are scarcely available in people and the position itself is important for society, the rewards associated with said position would also rise proportionately. So since in society positions are filled according to who is deemed the most qualified, there is the existence of functional inequality.

Tumin argues very strongly against Davis and Moore's thesis. The first important point that he makes is that there is no way to compare the functional value of one position over another in society. Tumin's assertion against Davis and Moore's functionalist arguments can be expressed by his now famous question, "Are engineers functionally more important to a factory than unskilled workers?" Davis and Moore's notion on scarcity and talent that "Only a limited number of individuals in any society have the talents that can be trained into the skills appropriate to these positions" is dismissed by Tumin since there is no evidence in any system of stratification which displays that at a given time, only a limited number of individuals are talented enough for certain positions.

Lastly, for Davis and Moore, the relationship between reward and position based on 'inherent ability' in people is direct and simple. But Tumin raises the point that such an understanding of reward and scarcity does not take into account the control of assets by power groups and other impediments to training, education and access, which would leave a huge pool of talent unutilized in society. Tumin further states: "Social stratification systems function to provide the elite with the political power necessary to procure acceptance and dominance of an ideology which rationalizes the status quo, whatever it may be, as "logical," "natural," and "morally right." In this manner, social stratification systems function as essentially conservative influences in the society in which they are found." Most importantly, Tumin asserts strongly that just because stratification is universal, it does not imply that stratification itself is of any functional necessity to a society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is the conclusion arrived at by Lipset and Bendix regarding social mobility in industrialized societies?

.....

Q 6: How did Tumin define Social Stratification?

.....

5.6 CRITICISMS OF THE MARXIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

Due to the huge impact of Marxist perspectives on almost all arenas of social life, there have been many criticisms levied against these theories. Some of the criticisms view Marxism's stress on communism and the working class' revolution as problematic since this can lead to a violence and suppression of individual agency and personal rights. Again, Marxism is found to be deterministic and to be afflicted by truisms by some detractors.

One of the central criticisms against Marxists understanding of stratification is that, Marx's focus on the two classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat is viewed to be challenged by the existence of the middle class. Critiques view the marginal position of the middle class as evidence of the inability of Marxian understanding of class to be sufficient.

A lot of feminists have criticised Marxist theory of production and capital, which leaves many facets of women's world and work outside of its theoretical domain. Marx's theories have been found inadequate in addressing the inequality that arises from arenas outside the wage-labour relationship and outside the economic sphere. However, many Marxist feminist scholars have addressed these shortcoming by building on these limitation and evolving Marxist theorisations by applying it to issues pertaining to women's inequality and gender relations. Along with

downplaying the importance of gender, Marx has also been accused of upholding economic stratification at the cost of other forms of decision such as race. Weberian scholars have critiqued Marx's theorizations as not taking into account the intersubjective dimension of social relations, where people engaged in social relations and actively participate in consciously attaching meanings to their social interactions.

Marx's theory is widely considered as an all-encompassing theory that can be used to explain a variety of phenomena and social problems. However, there are a lot of scholars who have pointed out that Marx's concept of economic base and class can be insufficient and unequipped to explain many domains of socio-cultural spheres, which could be relatively autonomous from the economy.



5.7 LET US SUM UP

- I Marxist class analysis considers a relational approach to social inequality, whereby classes are understood conceptually as developing because of particular historical circumstances.
- I Marx's "historical materialism" or the "materialist conception of history" is based on Hegel's ideas that history forms due to an opposition or conflict between two opposing forces. Marx adopted the idea of the dialectics but unlike Hegel's idealism, Marx considered real forces of history to be emerged from materiality of the real world.
- I The mode of production of a given society is constituted of two parts: the base and the superstructure.
- I The economic base reflects the interest of the ruling class that controls this base, which would always be in dialectical opposition of the interest of the working class, which is much bigger in number, but without power over the base.

- I Surplus value is the excess value generated by the proletariat as profits, which are generated by the workers working in excess of their labour cost but are wholly appropriated by the proletariat or the capitalist.
- I According to Marx, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."
- I At the heart of Marx's writing is the importance he accords to the concept of a "classless society". This, according to Marx, was the ultimate end of social organization where man can finally become "fully human".
- I The most important conclusion that Lipset and Bendix arrived at in their work is, "the overall pattern of social mobility appears to be much the same in the industrial societies of various Western countries"
- I Tumin raises the point that Davis and Moore's understanding of reward and scarcity does not take into account the control of assets by power groups and other impediments to training, education and access, which would leave a huge pool of talent unutilized in society.



5.8 FURTHER READING

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- 2) Davis, K and Moore, W.E. 1944. Some Principles of Stratification. *American Sociological Review*, 10(2), pp. 242-249.
- 3) Grusky, David B. (2014). *Social Stratification: Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective* (4th edition). Boulder: Westview Press.
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- 6) Marx, Karl (1867) 1965. Capital: A critical analysis of Capitalistic Production. Vol. 3. Progress Publishers
- 7) Marx, K. and Engel, F. (1848). The Communist Manifesto. Moscow: Progress Publishers
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5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: 'Marxism' refers to critiques, theories, political ambitions that are evolved from or inspired by the theoretical and political work of Karl Marx (1818-1883).

Ans to Q No 2: Some of the central ideas in Marxist scholarship are: that capitalism or capitalist production leads to exploitative social relations. Marxist scholars view socialism as the social order where capitalist conceptions such as private property and exploitation would be eradicated. Lastly, such a transition from capitalist to social system would be achieved through revolution.

Ans to Q No 3: The four main modes of production identified by Marx are primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society and lastly, capitalist society.

Ans to Q No 4: The relation of production refers to the entirety of all the relations that human beings enter into in order to fulfill their necessary functions for necessities and amenities of life- such as employer-employee work conditions, the technical division of labour, and property relations etc. (so factors such as private property, petty bourgeoisie, proletariat). Forces of production refer to the elements and processes involved in production where raw materials are transformed into products (such as tools, machines, factory, raw materials).

Ans to Q No 5: Lipset and Bendix found through the countries they included in their study, that once countries reach a certain level of industrialization, their rates of social mobility show uniform increase.

Ans to Q No 6: Tumin defined social stratification as "the arrangement of a social group or society into a hierarchy of positions that are unequal with regard to power, property, social evaluation and psychic gratification".



5. 10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What did Karl Marx mean by 'base' and 'superstructure'?

Q 2: What were the main criticisms against Marxian approach to Social Stratification?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss Karl Marx's understanding on Social Stratification and Inequality?

Q 2: Discuss Lipset and Reinhard Bendix's contribution to the Marxists school of thought?

Q 3: Explain Tumin's approach to Social Stratification.

** ** *

Unit 6 : WEBERIAN PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Learning Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Weber's concept of Class
- 6.4 Weber's concept of Status Group
- 6.5 Weber's concept of Party
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Further Reading
- 6.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 6.9 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- I understand Max Weber's perspective on social stratification
- I describe weber's concept of Class
- I explain weber's concept of Status group
- I discuss weber's concept of Party
- I understand the similarities and differences between Weberian and Marxist perspective of Stratification.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

The work of German Sociologist Max Weber has contributed significantly towards the stratification theory. But unfortunately Weber died before he could complete his work on 'social stratification'. Thus it remained fragmentary, short and unfinished. His concept of social stratification should be understood against the backdrop of Marx's conception of social stratification because much of Weber's account of stratification is the product of a long and intense debate on Marx's view on stratification. Weber's approach is said to be corrective to, or displacement of, Marx's perspective. Therefore his view varies from Marx in several ways. In the previous unit,

we have learned that according to Marx economic dimension is the most significant variable of social stratification. Weber added two more variable to the economic dimension. In this unit, we shall learn that according to Weber there are three dimension of social stratification.viz.power, prestige and property or three separate bases (though interacting) on which hierarchies are created in any society. Social stratification is precisely about the unequal distribution of people's capacity to obtain things, and to prevail over others. Thus social stratification is essentially a phenomenon of the distribution of power (John A Hughes etal, 2003).

Weber maintained that stratification is an organized manifestation of power in society. Power for Weber can be separated into three sphere of activity for analytical purposes: economic, social and political, and within each sphere power is designated according to class, status and power (Weber,1970).Weber has discussed in detail how the unequal distribution of resources results into some groups. Let us begin our discussion with power. The definition of power offered by Weber in his *Wirtschaft and Gessellschaft* is of central importance. Weber distinguishes between power and leadership. In addition, Weber in his essay 'Class, Status Group and Parties' discusses the importance of power. He describes 'Power' as the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action. Weber distinguishes between economically conditioned power and power as such. Man does not strive for power only to enrich himself economically. Economic power may also be valued 'for its own sake'. People strive for power only for the social 'honour'. Power is not the only basis of social honour. It is important to mention here that not all power entails social honour. Social honour, prestige may be the basis of economic or political power. Quite generally 'mere economic' power and especially 'naked' money power is by no means a recognized basis of social honour.Power as well as honour is guaranteed by legal order. Legal order is only an additional factor that enhances the social honour and power but it cannot always secure them. Accoding to Weber class status group and

parties are phenomenon of the distribution of power within a community (Weber: 1946).

Thus the way in which social honour is distributed in a community is called 'social order'. Social order and economic order are related to legal order. Social order and economic order are not identical. Economic order is the way the goods and services are distributed. Social order is determined by the economic order to a high degree and in return reacts upon it. Therefore, class, status group and parties are phenomenon of distribution of power within a community.

6.3 WEBER'S CONCEPT OF CLASS

For Weber, a class is not, by its nature, an actual group; it is only collection of individuals, who occupy comparable economic positions and who need not have any awareness of each other, or even recognition of the fact that they are in the same position (John A Hughes etal, 2003). According to Weber classes are not communities; they merely represent bases of communal action. A class may be defined as a group of people who commonly have a specific casual component of life chances and whose interests are basically economic in nature. The economic interest in the possession of goods and opportunities for income is represented under the conditions of the commodity of labour market. Class situation is determined by the supply of goods and services, external living conditions and personal life experiences which are further determined by the amount of power to dispose of goods and skills for the sake of income in a given economic order. Therefore, for Weber, Class refers to any group of people found in the same class situation(Weber, 1946).

Property and lack of property are the basic categories of all class situations. Within these categories, class situations are further differentiated by:

- I Kind of property that is usable for returns.
- I Kind of services that can be offered in the market.

While defining class Weber says: "We may speak of 'class' when i) a number of people have in common a specific casual component of their life chances, in so far as ii) this component is represent exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and iii) is represented under the conditions of commodity or labour markets" (Weber,1970:181).This passage therefore contains almost the essential idea of Weber's concept of class.

6.4 WEBER'S CONCEPT OF STATUS GROUP

Power in social domain is designated as social status. All persons who are accorded the same estimations of social honour or prestige and who live the same life style generally fall within the same status group of 'status situation'. In contrast to class, status groups as described by Weber are normally communities. Just as class is economically determined by 'market situation', status group is determined by social estimation of honour. Status honour can be knit to class situation as class distinction is linked in with status qualification. Property as such is not always recognized as status qualification. But status honour need not necessarily be linked with a class situation, as both propertied and property less people can belong to the same status group. Status group is made up of individuals who are awarded a similar amount of social honour and therefore share the same status situation and are aware of status situation. They share similar life style, identify and have we feeling, eg caste system. According to Weber status group is more important since they suggest that in certain situations status provides basis for the formation of social groups whose members perceive common interests and a group identity. Status may be conceived as a dimension of stratification which is functionally distinct and separate from class; or, to use Bendix's expression, class and status were defined in terms mutually exclusive" (Bendix,19:153).

Status honour is also determined by the specific life style. People recognize each other as equals on the basis of the kind of life style they lead, feelings that certain pattern of life are to be looked up to or looked down upon. As Weber pointed out, it is not enough to have equivalent wealth to be recognized as someone's equal; it is what one does with wealth which is decisive. Therefore newly rich are often looked down upon and disparaged as *nouveau riche* by those who come from background of longstanding wealth and prestige because they lack the social connections, manners and polish and because the *nouveau riche* consume their wealth in showy and tasteless ways. Cultural activities often mark the difference between inferiors and superiors (John A Hughes et al, 2003). The basis for status difference is not an economic one, and people of status group are seen in the United States out of traditional democracy. Weber gives an example that the residents of a certain street are considered as belonging to society, are qualified for social intercourse and are visited and invited.

Weberian perspectives also discuss how the status structure reaches extreme consequences which are held to be 'ethnic'. The caste is the normal form in which ethnic communities are socialized side by side, as caste system believes in blood relationship and practices endogamous marriages and puts restrictions on social intercourse. Therefore the caste structure transforms the horizontal segregated ethnic group into vertical system of super ordination and subordination.

Thus we can see that the place of class is within the economic order, and the place of status group is within the social order, ie is within the sphere of the distribution of honour. From these spheres, both status group and class influence each other and, in a way, influence legal order. But 'parties' rest in the house of 'power'. In examining the nature and exploring the dimensions of stratification, Weber struck to a three dimensional view of class, status and power. The critics contention of 'two -dimensional' view of class and status is rejected. At the same time Weber treated class status and power as distinct phenomenon and held the notion of disjunction among

them. Both features of Weber's thought on stratification are well expressed in the social bases of choice or preference between alternatives which lead to different types of social action generative of either class or power stratification.

6.5 WEBER'S CONCEPT OF PARTY

Parties are oriented towards the acquisition of social power. Parties may exist in a social club as well as in a state. It may also rest in the actions of classes and status groups. For party actions are always directed towards a goal which is planned. The goal may be personal or a cause. Therefore, parties are possible within communities that are socialised, which have rational order and where a group of people is ever ready to enforce it. By party Weber does not only mean those organizations which are called parties and which are constituents of an electoral system, but any kind of organization which is set up specifically to compete for power, and which organizes primarily in pursuit of this. The basis for party membership is then acceptance of its purpose and a recognition of common interest with other members. The members of a party can, but need not, be drawn from the same kind of social groups.

Parties may also be 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 also differ according to whether or not 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 the parties are confined only to the political community; on the contrary, socialisation goes beyond the frontiers of politics. Parties often represent the interests of classes or status group. In Weber's words parties may represent interests determined through class situation or status situation. In most cases they are the class parties and partly status parties. But sometimes they are neither. Weber's view of parties suggests that the

relationship between political groups and class and status group is far from clear cut.

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

Weber's analysis of classes, status groups and parties suggests that no single theory can pinpoint and explain their relationship. The interplay of class status and party in the formation of social groups is complex .Therefore it must be examined in particular society during particular time periods.

Let us now compare Marxian and Weberian theories of Social Stratification. Weber agrees with Marx that the possession of economic resources is vital for achievement of ends. But Weber does not agree with the Marxian view that class is a real entity; rather he considers class as only a category or collection of individuals who occupy comparable economic positions. He also rejects Marxian view that political power necessarily derives from economic power. He argues that class forms only one possible basis for power and that distribution of power in society is not necessarily linked to the distribution of class inequalities. While class forms one possible basis for group formation, Weber argues that there are other bases for these activities.

Weber rejects the view held by some Marxist as regards the inevitability of the proletarian revolution. He sees no reason why those sharing a similar class situation should necessarily develop a common identity, recognize shared interests and take collective action to further those interests.

Weber breaks away with Marx's unidimensional approach of economic determinism and replaced it with multidimensional approach by giving emphasis on social and political dimension which operates independently of class. Weber replaced Marx's social-structural analysis by social-action analysis and he emphasized on the significance of attitudes, values, and aspirations in his perspectives which were neglected by Marx in laying emphasis on rationality. Weber argued that irrational and non-logical motivation and other attitudes are important considerations for a theory of stratification (Pandey, 1983).

However, Weberian theory is not free from criticism. Marxist argue that Weber's concepts of class and status group lack the close relationship with a theoretical position that Marx's concept of class exhibits. They question Weber's concept of status group, arguing that life chances are primarily shaped by class location more than anything else. The neo-Weberian scholarship has brought out certain important issues with regard to Weber's principles and theory of stratification.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Is Weberian theory of stratification is unidimensional?

.....

Q 2: What according to Weber determines class?

.....

Q3: What does Status Group mean?

.....



6.6 LET US SUM UP

- I Social stratification is precisely about the unequal distribution of people's capacity to obtain things and to prevail over others.

- I According to Weber there are three dimensions of social stratification, viz, power, prestige and property .
- I Max Weber in his essay 'Class, Status Group and Parties' discusses the importance of power.
- I 'Power' is the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.
- I People strive for power only for social 'honour'. Power is not only the only basis of social honour.
- I Weber broke away with Marx's unidimensional approach of economic determinism and replaced it with a multidimensional approach
- I According to Weber class status group and parties are phenomenon of the distribution of power within a community.
- I The way in which social honour is distributed in a community is called 'social order'.
- I A class may be defined as a group of people who commonly have a specific casual component of life chances and whose interests are basically economic in nature.
- I Class is economically determined by 'market situation'.
- I The status groups are determined by social estimation of honour.
- I Status group is made up of individuals who are awarded a similar amount of social honour.
- I Parties are oriented towards the acquisition of social power.
- I According to Weber party means any kind of organization which is set up specifically to compete for power, and which organizes primarily in pursuit of this.



6.7 FURTHER READING

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6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: No, Weber's perspective on Stratification is not unidimensional but it is multidimensional.

Ans to Q No 2:Class is economically determined by 'market situation'.

Ans to Q No 3:Status group is the one, which is made up of individuals who are awarded a similar amount of social honour and therefore share the same status situation and are aware of status situation.



6.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Explain Weber's concept of Class.

Q 2: How does Weber's perspective on stratification differ from that of Marx?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the key feature or features through which Weber has analysed social stratification.

Q 2: Do you think Power has any role to play in social stratification? Substantiate your argument with certain example.

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Unit 7 : FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 7.1 Learning Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 Liberal Feminist Perspective on Stratification
- 7.4 Radical Feminist Perspective on Stratification
- 7.5 Socialist Feminist Perspectives on Stratification
- 7.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.7 Further Reading
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 7.9 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- I know about the basic principles, arguments and criticisms of feminist perspective on stratification
- I understand the differences between different strands of feminist perspective
- I discuss the basic principles of liberal, socialist and radical feminism and their perspectives on stratification.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

The word 'feminism' is derived from the French word *féminisme* and it gained popularity during the 1800s. Since then, feminism has been used to refer to social theories, economic ideologies, philosophy and most commonly political and social movements, all of which operate with the underlying assumption of women's oppression and subjugation in the world and Feminism aim to bring equality, liberation and empowerment to women.

Feminist movements have been divided in three waves, each of which grappled with different issues and ushered in lasting socio-political and

cultural changes in the world, and contributed in shaping the world that we live in right now. The first wave of feminism was around mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth century. The main areas for concern here were education, employment, marriage and political rights, particularly the right to vote. Practices such as sati, child-marriage or purdah, which were backed by religious and cultural institutions, also received widespread backlash by the feminists of this era, who wanted these to be eradicated from society. First wave feminist movement led to movements for equal political participation, symbolized by the right to vote. At this time in history, women still couldn't vote but finally, in 1893, New Zealand became the first country to implement universal suffrage, soon followed by other countries.

The second wave of feminism began during the 1960s. The main issues that became a rallying point for the feminist protests were issues of unemployment and lack of reproductive rights for women. The issue of sexual discrimination, both at work and in the society at large, came to the fore during this time. However, a lack of consensus among feminists during this era, on issues such as pornography, intersectionalities, between gender and other forms of oppression, such as race and class, led to an inner fracturing between feminists that led to the third wave of feminism. The third wave of feminism wanted to move away from the white middle class-centric feminism of the previous waves and accorded importance to race, class, sexual orientation and other structural bias against women.

Thus, even in Sociology, feminism created a distinct and much-needed change in the tenor of theorizations, which had hitherto placed men at the centre of all theorizations and intellectual investigations. Over the period of time, there have been many different strands of feminisms that have evolved and left their lasting mark on polity, economy and society. Here we would discuss three main feminist perspectives on stratification. It has to be noted here that apart from these there have been many different strands of feminism such as post-modern feminism, transgender feminism, ecofeminism etc., but each of them in some way or the other can be traced

back to these three broad strands of feminist theorisation of inequality and stratification.

In the previous unit, we have discussed about the Marxist approach to Social Stratification. In this unit, let us understand how the Feminist Scholars view or interpret social stratification. Here we shall focus on the Liberal Feminists, Radical Feminists, Marxist and Socialist Feminist perspectives on Social Stratification.

7.3 LIBERAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON STRATIFICATION

As we mentioned above, in the beginning of the feminist movement, the focus of the feminists was on procuring equal legal and political rights for women. Along with this, there was a focus on women being able to access education at par with men (since a lot of respected universities such as Oxford and Cambridge at that time did not allow female students as members until 1920 and 1947 respectively). This tradition of feminism is called the liberal feminist tradition. This feminist strand stresses that women should have equal legal rights at par with men and should have a political voice and participation that is equal to men. Women and men should first and foremost be treated as persons and not reduced to their gender categories and stereotyped into gender roles. The demand for personal autonomy and political autonomy form the core of liberal feminism.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is a pivotal work in the feminist movement since it was the first feminist manifesto and a work of feminist philosophy. This book was influenced by the famous libertarian John Locke, who had argued for men's indelible natural right to life, liberty and possession, which no government should deny. Wollstonecraft argues for women to have the same right to education as men and not to be relegated just to the roles of wives and mothers but be given the opportunity to have the same individual rights as men, since they are human beings as well. She speaks about how women are "indoctrinated

from childhood to believe that beauty is woman's scepter, spirit takes the form of their bodies, locked in the gilded cage, only seeks to adorn its prison." Thus, set free from such indoctrination and the denial of education, women can exert their individuality beyond the beauty of their physical bodies and beyond their roles as wives and mothers. Apart from philosophical treatise, Wollstonecraft also provided a plan for implementing a women inclusive national education in Britain.

John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) also advanced the argument for women's equality. His academic and political contribution is in furthering the movement towards women's right to vote. In fact, during his term as a Member of Parliament of Westminster in 1886, he had advanced a motion to allow for women's suffrage. The motion was defeated but the seed for the women's suffrage movement was sown.

Betty Friedan was one of the main figures spearheading the second wave of feminist movement. Her book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) remains one of the most widely popular texts from this era. This book called on women, particularly suburban women, to move beyond the confines of their home and hearth, and pursue their own careers and demand social and political equality. Over time, there has definitely been an evolution in ideas even within the liberal feminist strand, which has built on the arguments on classical liberal or libertarian feminists. Catharine MacKinnon, Martha Nussbaum and Naomi Wolf are some of the most prominent liberal feminists of contemporary times.

It has to be mentioned here that the divisions of different strands of feminism are not distinct and impermeable. Different strands of feminism have also borrowed from each other theoretically and there are many important feminist works that cannot be clearly categorised into such divisions. One important work in this regard is Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). Beauvoir's stress on how women should be entitled to the same political and social rights as men does place her work within the liberal feminist tradition, but she also deviates from it by maintaining her

firm existential roots, which emphasises that each individual, regardless of age, sex, class should have the freedom to define themselves and be enabled to take the individual responsibility of such freedoms. Beauvoir's philosophical exposition on the construction of women as the 'other' is still instrumental in feminist theorisation and understanding of women's position in the world. Speaking about how women's subordination to men leads to her being othered, Beauvoir says, woman "is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other." This state of being the 'Other' is what feminism grapples with.

Liberal feminist perspectives of stratification were born within the discourse on rights and legality. Thus, the issues that are dealt by feminists also belong to the domain of public life and public institutions. This leaves the domain of private and intimate lives of women and institutions, apart from the legal and political machineries, beyond the reach of critical feminist scrutiny. The distinction between the private and the public is upheld in liberal theory along with an acceptance of existing social structures. The focus here is on making these structures and institutions accessible and equitable towards women. But the other strands of feminism bring light to how private and public domains are all inter-related and how the existing structures of socio-political system themselves can be the reason for women's oppression and subjugation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is feminism?

.....

Q 2: What is third wave feminism?

.....

Q 3: What is the liberal feminist stand on stratification?

.....

7.4 RADICAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON STRATIFICATION

It was the second wave of feminism that led to the rise of the radical feminists during the 1960s. The ideologies of radical feminism emerged from the ideas provided by the New Left and the context provided by the feminist movements of the mid nineteenth century. The liberal feminist understanding of gender inequality was found wanting by the racial feminists while Marxism was found to be too focussed on capitalism and the class question. Radical feminism critiques them and argues that women have been oppressed by men under the patriarchal social structure which inherently is against the ideas of women's liberation, freedom and emancipation. Thus, for women to unshackle the bonds of inequality and subordination to men, the social structure itself needs to be overthrown and changed. Radical feminism provided the base for other factions of feminist groups such as cultural feminism, revolutionary feminism and lesbian feminism.

Radical feminism has been the epicentre of some of the most radical ideas regarding gender, politics, women's sexual autonomy as well as the extent of male domination over women. Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) is a good example of a classic radical feminist text. According to Firestone "sexual class system" predates and runs deeper than any other form of oppression, and the eradication of sexism will require a radical reordering of society". So a feminist revolution should not just aim to eradicate male privilege but remove any traces of the distinction between the sexes. She identifies the patriarchal nuclear family as the locus of the sex-class distinction and calls on women to shed their gendered roles and the burden of reproduction. Firestone points out the possibility of the biological family itself being uprooted through modern reproductive technologies of gestation, which can free women from duties of gestation.

Another book considered a radical feminist classic is *Sexual Politics* (1970) by Kate Millet. This book is one of the first examples of academic

literary criticism by feminists. Millet espouses the inherent sexism and underlying patriarchy of famous literary works by revered and popular writers such as D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Sigmund Freud and Norman Mailer. Susan Brownmiller's 'Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape (1975)' also is noteworthy here; it was one of the first books to deeply engage with the subject of rape and talk about it within the context of patriarchal domination and exercise of male power over women. She described rape as "a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear". This book which has been heavily criticized as poorly researched and limited, remains very controversial. However, it still is a good example of radical feminist literature that created long lasting impact on how certain social problems were viewed and how radical feminists offered new radical frames to understand women's subjugation and inequality.

Some other radical feminists of note are Judith Brown, Andrea Dworkin and Adrienne Riche. The biggest criticism of radical feminist perspective of stratification is that much of their fundamental ideas about gender, class and sex are essentialist. The critics argue that the notion that all women are victims and all men are propagators of violence is flawed and essentialist. Again, 'woman' cannot be understood as a universal category and the experiences of all women cannot be generalized. Thus, in radical feminism as well, there has been the criticism that it hasn't been able to adequately include diversities of race, class and sexual orientations. However, the body of work offered by radical feminists still continues to inspire women's liberation movements around the world.

7.5 SOCIALIST FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATIFICATION

Socialist feminist perspective on women's condition in the world is drawn from Marxist understanding of society and economy and radical feminism's understanding of the pervasiveness of patriarchy and the role of gender. Socialist feminists contend that women oppressions stems from economic

stratification intensified by the production methods inherent in capitalism. Thus, to emancipate women both from the social sphere of work and property relations as well as the private sphere of marriage, the capitalist order has to be systematically overthrown. Thus, while liberal feminists focus on individual rights within the existing social order, socialist feminists recognise the existence of women within a broader community, identifying exploitations that happen due to differences in race, class, religion, sexual identity etc., within the structure of capitalist patriarchy. An important argument underlying the socialist feminist perspective of stratification is that there is a fundamental interconnection between struggle for women's emancipation and class struggle. The liberal feminist movement was critiqued by socialist feminists as being a bourgeoisie movement, which was not representative of the oppressed working class women

Of course, the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels heavily influenced this strand of feminism. In fact, the foundation of Marxist feminism was laid by Engels' book 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State' (1884), where he argued that women's subordinate position in the society arose not from some naturally given biological disposition but was actually a result of social relations whose roots can be traced to modes of production and advent of private property.

One of the most comprehensive treatises on the position of socialist feminism was *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (1978) by Zillah R. Eisenstein. Eisenstein painted a clear picture of how in a capitalist patriarchy there exists "mutually reinforcing dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structuring". She contends that for women to have equality in the real sense of the term, the patriarchal system itself has to be dislodged. Lise Vogel's *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (1983) is another central piece of scholarship among socialist feminist authors. She argued that Marx's views on women are not satisfactory and these have to be built on. Using Marx's concepts such as individual consumption, value of labour

and industrial reserve army, Vogel extends them further and uses these ideas while discussing social reproduction at length. Vogel's work is important as a critique of the scholarship of Marx and Engels, as well as the dual systems theory, which was the focal point for most socialist feminist theorizations at that time. In place of the dual systems theory which saw "two equally powerful motors drive the development of history: the class struggle and the sex struggle", Vogel proposed a unitary theory transcending both production and reproduction.

The biggest criticism against socialist feminism is that since the basis of this strand rests on Marxian ideas of production and class division, gender becomes just an addition to this, instead of being the central concern. We must keep in mind that theorization itself can become a process which is dynamic and which does not remain static in time. This is particularly true in the way in which Marxism and socialist theory has evolved over time in order to capture the realities of an ever-changing world. Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" is one of the most striking feminist narratives of the twentieth century. Here, Haraway attempts to address the interaction of culture and technology in a postmodern world, discussing how the analytical frames of race, gender and class itself are in a process of transition. Using socialist feminist ideas, Haraway develops a critique that stands firmly in a post-modern world. According to Haraway "there is nothing about being female that naturally binds women together into a unified category. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What does the radical feminist strand argue regarding women's inequality?
.....

Q 5: What is the socialist feminist perspective on stratification?
.....



7.6 LET US SUM UP

- I The word 'feminism' is derived from the French word féminisme and gained popularity during the 1800s.
- I Feminist movements have been divided in three waves: first wave, second wave and third wave.
- I In the beginning of the feminist movement, the focus of the feminists was on procuring equal legal and political rights for women.
- I Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792) is a pivotal work in the feminist movement since it was the first feminist manifesto and a work of feminist philosophy. This book was influenced by work of the famous libertarian John Locke.
- I Liberal feminist perspective of stratification was born within the discourse on rights and legality. Thus; the issues that are dealt by feminists belong to the domain of public life and public institutions.
- I The ideologies of radical feminism emerged from the ideas provided by the New Left and the context provided by the feminist movements of the mid nineteenth century.

- I Socialist feminist perspective on women's condition in the world is drawn from Marxist understanding of society and economy, and radical feminism's understanding of the pervasiveness of patriarchy.
- I The divisions of different strands of feminist are not distinct and impermeable. Different strands of feminism have also borrowed from each other theoretically and there are many important feminist works that cannot be clearly categorized into such divisions.



7.7 FURTHER READING

- 1) Beauvoir, Simone de (1949) 1989. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books
- 2) Brownmiller, Susan. (1975) 2005. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975). In R. K. Bergen, J. L. Edleson, & C. M. Renzetti, *Violence against women: Classic papers* (pp. 5-8). Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education New Zealand.
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- 7) Mill, John Stuart. (1869) 2001. *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Edward Alexander. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- 8) Kate Millett, 1970. *Sexual Politics*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday

9) Wollstonecraft, Mary. (1792) 1989. *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus.

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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The word 'feminism' is derived from the French word *féminisme* and gained popularity during the 1800s. Since then, feminism has been used to refer to social theories, economic ideologies, philosophy and most commonly political movements, which operate with the underlying assumption of women's oppression and subjugation in the world, and which aim to bring equality, liberation and empowerment to women.

Ans to Q No 2: A lack of consensus among feminists during the Second Wave Feminist movement, on issues such as pornography, intersectionalities between gender and other forms of oppression such as race and class, led to an inner fracturing between feminists that led to the Third Wave of Feminism. The Third Wave of feminism wanted to move away from the white middle class-centric feminism of the previous waves and accorded importance to race, class, sexual orientation and other structural bias against women.

Ans to Q No 3: This feminist strand stresses that women should have equal legal rights at par with men and have a political voice and participation that is equal to men. Women and men should first and foremost be treated as persons and not reduced to their gender categories and stereotyped into gender roles. The demand for personal autonomy and political autonomy form the core of liberal feminism.

Ans to Q No 4: Radical feminism argues that women have been oppressed by men within the patriarchal social structure, which inherently is against the ideas of women's liberation, freedom and emancipation. Thus, for women

to unshackle the bonds of inequality and subordination to men the social structure itself needs to be overthrown and changed.

Ans to Q No 5: Socialist feminists contend that women's oppression stems from economic stratification intensified by the production methods inherent in capitalism. Thus, to emancipate women both from the social sphere of work and property relations as well as the private sphere of marriage, the capitalist order has to be systematically overthrown.



7.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Mention three feminist scholars and their work.

Q 2: Differentiate between liberal feminist and radical feminist perspectives of stratification?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the liberal feminist perspective of stratification.

Q 2: Discuss the socialist feminist perspective of stratification

Q 3: Discuss the radical feminist perspective of stratification.

Q 4: What is feminism? What are the different waves of the feminist movement?

** ** *



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