

Social Stratification

Lesson No.	Title	Activity
16	Social Stratification	Prepare a report identifying how caste has significance in Indian society in contemporary times.

Summary

All human societies from the simple to the most complex have some form of social inequality. In all societies there are social differentiations of age, Sex and personal characteristics, and on the basis of these, they have a life style and identity. Social stratification implies unequal distribution of power and privilege in society. Caste and class are the major system of stratification in India.

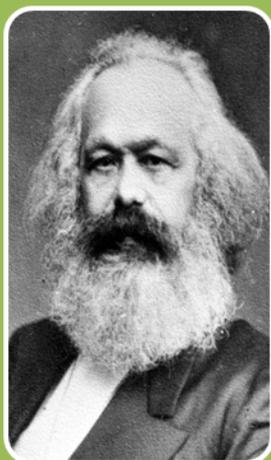
Concepts related to Differences, Inequality and Stratification

- Sociologists make a distinction between **differences** and **inequality**. Differences refer to existence of dissimilarities between the objects or units under consideration. These dissimilarities are complementary. E.g. Men and Women. Inequality refers to unequal distribution of privileges and resources.

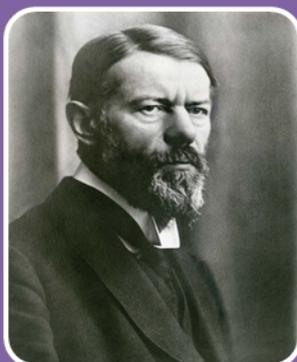
Differences and inequality are universal and interconnected. One often understands the distinction between Natural inequalities and social inequalities. Natural inequality refers to biologically based inequalities for e.g., age, health, bodily goals, and qualities of life. Social inequalities refer to socially created inequalities.

- **Social stratification** is a system by which people rank categories of people in a hierarchy. The term stratification deals with the different strata that exist in society. It has to do with division of society into strata. It implies unequal distribution of power and privilege in society. Although social inequality may be found in all societies, social stratification may not be universal. All those who belong to a particular group or stratum will have some awareness of common interest and common identity. They share a similar life-style which to some degree will distinguish them from members of other social strata.

Some important Concepts and Ideas on Stratification



- According to **Karl Marx** society is divided into two mutually opposed classes i.e. those who own and control the means of production (technology and valued things) and those who do not own or control the means of production
- A class is a social group whose members share a similar relationship to the means of production.
- Those who own the means & modes of production also dominate in other aspects of society like politics. The ideas prevalent at a given time in society are the ideas of the dominant class. They control power and ideology.
- The various stages that Marx spoke about were: Primitive Communism; Ancient Mode of Production; Feudal Mode of Production and Capitalist Mode of Production
- In the capitalist mode of production the classes are: Bourgeoisie & Proletariat



- Unlike Marx, Weber believed that the basis of stratification is not just class.
- For him the basis of stratification were: Class, Status and Party
- Wealth: includes property such as buildings, lands, farms, houses, factories and as well as other assets – Economic Situation
- Prestige: the respect with which a person or status position is regarded by others – Status Situation
- Power: the ability of people or groups to achieve their goals despite opposition from others – Party

Status

Status implies “social position” defined as a “Specific position” or “social estimate or honour”. To each social position, you play a role, where status refers to a “position” role refers to the “behaviour” expected from that position.

Status is of two types: Ascribed Status & Achieved Status (Statuses are ranked for e.g., Caste System)

- Ascribed status is given to an individual because of the facts related to his/her birth.
- Achieved status is the status that an individual achieves in society.

Statuses are ranked. The principle of ranking varies from society to society

Caste

- It is a characteristic of Indian society but is also found in many parts of South Asia.
- Elements of caste are also seen in non-Hindu communities as well.
- Caste system derives its basis from Hinduism.
- There are four varnas: Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras
- Each of these is further divided into sub castes or *jatis*.
- The system is based on the concept of purity & pollution. Each is associated with an occupation and a style of living. It is endogamous

Caste and Class

- A class is defined in economic terms.
- A class is achieved unlike caste which is ascribed by birth.
- Caste is based on religion unlike class.

Significance of Caste

In contemporary times, caste is also playing an important role in the manner such as:

- Many studies show that caste is important in matters of marriage.
- Caste also specifies the rituals people perform.
- Associations are formed on the basis of caste.
- The caste associations are establishing banks, schools, colleges, rest houses and hospitals, etc. in the name of their castes.
- In the field of politics, caste is a significant factor in the mobilization of votes. The members of a caste may constitute what has come to be known

Evaluate Yourself

1. Describe views of Marx and Weber on stratification.
2. Do you think that caste as a phenomenon is still relevant in contemporary India? Justify your answers with examples
3. Discuss the difference between class and caste.