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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Meaning and definition of Stratification

Individuals and societies differ everywhere. Differentiation is the central features of human society. No two individuals are similar. Diversity and inequality are inherent in society. Hence human society is inherited everywhere. All societies arrange their members with respect to superiority, inferiority and equality the placement of individuals in strata or layer is called stratification. People on the top stratum have more power, prestige and privileges in comparisons with those who are placed lower therein. Social stratification is omni-present. Every society is divided into more or less distinct groups. No society is unstratified. Stratification involves the distribution of unequal rights and privileges among the members of a society. Stratification is a process of ranking statuses which is found in all societies. This inequality of statuses is the remarkable features of social stratification. Where there is social stratification there is social inequality. For example, in India doctors and engineers are rated higher than the teachers as a class due to high social prestige. Stratification restricts interaction. It may be observed in the matters of marriage alliance, friendship, selection of professions etc. All these are expressions of differentiations in varying degrees.

1. **Ogburn and Nimkeff:** The process by which individuals and groups are ranked in a more or less enduring hierarchy of status is known as stratification.

2. **Raymod and Murray:** Social stratification is a horizontal division of society into higher and lower social units.
3. **Melvin and Tumin:** Social Stratification refer to the arrangement of any social group or society into a hierarchy of positions that are unequal with regard to power, property, social evaluation and psychic gratification.
4. **Lundberg:** A stratified society is one marked by inequality by differences among people that are evaluated by them as being lower and higher.
5. **Williams:** Social stratification is the ranking of individuals on a scale of superiority-equality, according to some commonly accepted basis of evaluation.

CHARACTERSTICS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION:

According to **M.M Tumin** mentioned below are some characteristics of stratification:

1. *It is social:* stratification is social in the sense that it represents socially constructed differentiations rather than biological differences. For example, a professor in the university has a status and social positions which is based on his education, skills and experience and not on his physical features.
2. *It is ancient:* Stratification is ancient because it has been since the advent of humans on the earth. It was found even in the hunting and wandering bands as age and sex were main determinants of differentiations in the then society.
3. *It is universal:* stratification is omni-present. Sorokin says all organised societies are stratified.
4. *It is diverse:* stratification system is found everywhere in different forms.
5. *It is consequential:* The stratification systems have two main consequences namely life chances and life styles.

TYPES OF STRATIFICATION:

The division of society into classes forming a hierarchy of prestige and power is a universal feature of social systems. Sociologists have distinguished four main types of social stratification namely, Slavery, estates, caste and social class and status.

1. **SLAVERY SYSTEM:** In the earliest stages of civilization classes did not exist as the savages were not in position to place their superiority over the others because then the life was very tough and they had a hand to mouth existence. The two sexes enjoyed almost equal rights according to Hobhouse. In other words, equality of ranks prevailed among the ancient tribes. The distinction of rich and poor did not exist as property was too limited to create differences of wealth. But as a savage tribe experienced growth and development and their culture grew especially in military might, the first result was the conquest of enemies. A slave was sold, pawned, exchanged or put to death.

Slavery is an extreme form of inequality wherein some individuals are literally owned by others as property. We have two examples of slavery systems; firstly, the societies of the ancient world especially Greece and Rome and secondly, the southern states of the U.S.A. in 18th and 19th century. A slave had an out and out inhuman existence in this system. Every slave has his master and he has unlimited power over his slaves. The slaves have no political rights and he is socially despised. Slavery has always an economic basis. Nieboer holds that slavery is an industrial system. The emergence of a slavery system is synchronised with the rise of aristocracy which thrived upon slave labour. The reformative steps finally led towards the eradication of the slavery system.

2. **ESTATES SYSTEM:** Estates is a type of stratification that existed in Europe during the middle ages. This system has a long history. They were part of many traditional civilizations. This system consisted of three main divisions namely the clergy, the

nobility, and the commoners. In England and France these three divisions were found. These estates were similar to social classes in two respects. **Firstly**, each estate had a distinctive life-style. Secondly, these estates were hierarchically arranged with clergy at the top, commoners at the bottom and the nobles occupied intermediary position. However, it is important to note that the clergy was called First Estate only with respect to the idea that the church is supreme.

3. **CASTE SYSTEM:** caste is associated with the cultures of the Indian subcontinent and the Hindu belief in rebirth. The Indian caste system is unique among systems of social stratification. Caste is related with economic differences which is reflected by the effective caste groups or four varnas of Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishyas and Sudras.

G.S Ghurey gave the following salient features of caste system;

- **Segmental division of society:** a caste is a complex social world in itself. Each caste has its peculiar customs and traditions and pursues a different occupation from other castes.
- **Hierarchy:** castes are ranked in according to the principals of purity and pollution and the occupation which they pursue.
- **Restriction on dining together and social intercourse's:** At the time of social occasions usually the caste members intermingle. They take food together and these are strict rules regarding taking food with what type of people and the quality of food.
- **Civil and religious disabilities and privileges of different sections:** various civil privileges and disabilities are associated with different castes on the basis of there positions in the hierarchy of castes.

- **Specific occupations:** every caste has got a specific occupation to pursue. According to the ideal type of caste, every caste has to follow the same occupation as is prescribed to them by traditions. However, this is changing due to impact of modernisation and westernisation.
- **Fixed rules:** caste is an endogamous group. No person of a caste is allowed to marry outside his or her caste. However, according to Hindu laws monogamy is practised and hypogamy is prohibited.

4. CLASS:

A Social class system is radically different from other systems of stratification. Social classes are de facto groups. They are relatively open and closed. Classes are more economic groups. Classes features the industrial societies which develop since 17th century. Class differs in many respects from slavery, estates and castes. We can define a class as a large-scale grouping of people who share common economics resources and this typically influences their life-styles. The major bases of class differences are wealth and occupation. Classes differ from earlier versions of stratification in many ways—

1. Classes are not established by legal or religious provisions. Memberships to classes is not hereditary. In comparison with other types of stratification class systems are more fluid/ open and the boundary between classes are never clearly defined. There are no formal restrictions on inter-marriage between people belonging to different classes.
2. Contrary to the other type of stratification an individual's class is achieved and not ascribed one. Here social mobility is much more common in comparison

with other systems. In the caste system individual mobility from one caste to another is impossible.

3. Different classes of individuals differ from one another with respect to their possession of material resources. Here economic inequality predominates. In other types of stratification system, non-economic factors as religion in the case of Indian caste system, are generally more important.
4. In other types of stratification system inequalities find expressions in personal relationships of duty and obligation between slave and master; serf and lord or lower and higher caste individuals. By contrast class system operates mainly through large scale connections of an impersonal type.

THEORIES OF STRATIFICATION: (KARL MARX & MAX WEBER)

KARL MARX

Marx theory is mentioned as two class theory. In all stratified societies there are two major social groups: a ruling class (bourgeoisie) and subject class (proletariat). The power of the ruling class derives from its ownership and control of the forces of production (**forces of production**: raw materials that are required to produce goods such as land, money, energy, labour etc.). The ruling class (bourgeoisie) exploits and oppresses the subject class (proletariat). As a result, there is basic conflict of interests between two classes. From a Marxian perspective, systems of stratification derive from the relationships of social groups to the forces of production. According to Karl

Marx in feudal system (agriculture system) there were two main classes distinguished by their relationship to land. The feudal nobility owns the land and the landless serfs who work in the land. Similarly, in the industrial society capitalist class (bourgeoisie) owns the forces of production (raw materials) and the proletariat (working class) only sell their physical labour in return for wages.

According to Marx western society had developed through four main ages:

1. **Primitive communism-** Society was based on a socialist mode of production (equality). They communally owned everything men used to hunt and the women were gatherers of fruits and roots. Classes did not exist since all the members of the society shared the same relationship to the force of production. Every member was both producer and owner.
2. **Ancient society:** There were two classes master and slaves. In this society slaves produce for masters.
3. **Feudal society:** The society where agriculture became dominant mode of production. It divided society into two class lords and serfs.
4. **Capitalist society:** there were two classes bourgeoisie and proletariat.

The improvement in agriculture results that only sections of society is needed to produce the food requirement of the whole society. Thus, many individuals are freed from food production and are able to specialize in other tasks. For example, full time producer of pottery, clothing's etc. As agriculture developed, surplus wealth was produced. This was accompanied by the development of a system of private property. In particular, they provide the conditions for the emergences of a class of producers and class of non-producers. This result into a class of non-producers (bourgeoisie) which own the forces of production and class of producers which owns only its labour power.

According to Marx relations between these two classes is one of mutual dependence and conflicts. In capitalist society bourgeoisie and proletariats are dependent upon each other. The proletariats must sell his labour power in order to survive since he does not own the forces of production. The bourgeoisie are dependent on the labour power without it there will be no productions. Instead it is a relationship of exploiter and exploited. According to the Marx bourgeoisie invest his capital (money) in the production of goods. Capital is accumulated by selling those goods at a value greater than their cost of production. Which leads to production of “surplus value”. The main producers of wealth are proletariat but they are getting less wage as what they have produced. According to Marx power of the bourgeoisie therefore originate from its ownership and control of the forces of production. Since the superstructure of society- the major institutions, values and beliefs systems- is seen to be largely shaped by economic infrastructure. According to Marx only when the forces of production are communally owned will class disappears, thereby bringing an end to the exploitation and oppression of some by others. The capitalist systems create tremendous inequality. the process of exploitations is such that the rich becomes richer and the poor becomes poorer. Marx named this process as “pauperisation”.

Marx class struggle and social change:

According to Marx with revolution between bourgeoisie and proletariat which would transform the society and private property would be replaced by communally owned property. The communist society will replace the capitalist society.

However, before the drawing of this utopia, certain changes must occur.

- Marx argues that a social group only fully become a class when it becomes “class for itself”. Members must have class consciousness and class solidarity. Members of a class develop a common identity, recognize their shared interests and unite when members realize that only by collective action can they overthrow the ruling class.
- The polarization of the two classes. The competitive nature of capitalism only wealthy companies will survive and prosper. Competition will eradicate petty bourgeoisie; owners of small business, will sink into the proletariat---- Will result in polarisation of the two major classes. Now the battle lines were clearly drawn, Marx hoped that the proletariats revolution would shortly lead to communist society of his dreams would finally become a reality.

Conclusion: Marx’s works on class has been examined in detail for the following reasons. Firstly, many sociologists claim that his theory still provides the best explanation of the nature of class in capitalist society. Secondly, much of the research on class has been inspired by ideas and questions raised by Marx. Thirdly, many of the concepts of class analysis introduced by Marx have proved useful to Marxists and non-Marxists.

MAX WEBER- SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The work of the German Sociologist Max Weber (1864 -1920) represents one of the most important developments in stratification theory since Marx. In his analysis of stratification system weber adopted Marxian analysis. But he modified and elaborated it. Like Marx, weber sees class in economic terms. He argues that class develop in market economies in which individual compete for economic gain. He defines class as a “*group of individuals who share a similar position in market economy and by virtue of that fact receive similar economic*

rewards". Thus, in Weber terminology, a person's "class situation" is basically his "market situation". Those who share a similar class situation also share similar life chances.

Like Marx, Weber argues that the major class division is between those who own the forces of production and those who do not. Thus, those who have substantial property holdings will receive the highest economic rewards and enjoy superior life chances. According to Weber, class divisions originate not only from control or lack of control of means of production, but also from economic differences. Which have nothing directly to do with property. Such resources include skill and credentials or qualifications which affect the types of jobs people are able to get. Weber believed that an individual's "market-positions" strongly influence his or her overall "Life Chances". For example, in capitalist society, managers, administrators, and professionals receive high salaries because of the demand for their services in the market.

Weber distinguished the following class grouping in capitalist society:

1. Propertied upper class
2. Propertyless white-collar workers
3. Petty-bourgeoisie
4. Manual working class

According to Weber, class forms one possible basis for group formation, collective action, and the acquisition of political power. Weber argues that there are other bases for these activities. A particular group forms because its members share a similar status situation. Class refers to unequal distribution of economic rewards; status refers to the unequal distributions of social honour. A status group is made up of individuals who are awarded a similar amount of social honour and therefore share the same status situation. They share a similar life style, identity with, and feel they belong to their status group and often place restrictions on the ways in which outsiders may interact with them.

According to Weber property as such is not always recognized as a status qualification. However, those who share the same class situation will not necessarily belong to the same status group. For example, *nouveaux riches* (newly rich) are sometimes excluded from the status group because their tastes, manners and dress are defined as vulgar. Status groups may create division within the classes.

Weber's observation on status groups are important since they suggest that in certain situations status rather than class provides the basis for the formation of social groups whose members perceive common interests and a group identity.

In modern societies, according to Weber "party" formation is an important aspect of "power" which can influence stratification independently of class and status. Party defines a group of people who work together because they have common backgrounds, aims or interests. Generally, a party works in an organised way towards a specific goal which is in the interest of the party memberships.

Weber has parted company with Marx on number of important issues:

1. Factors other than the ownership or non-ownership of property are significant in the formation of classes. In particular the market value of the skills of the property less varies and the resulting differences in economic returns are sufficient to produce different social classes.
2. Weber sees no evidence to support the idea of the polarization of classes. Although he sees some decline in number of petty-bourgeoisie, the small property owners, due to competition from large companies, he urges that they enter white-collar or skilled manual trades rather than being proletarian class.

3. Weber reject the Marx view of revolution. Weber's suggest that the workers may respond in variety of ways such as strikes, sabotage industrial machinery and collective bargaining.
4. Weber's reject that political power derives from economic power. He argues that class forms only one possible basis for power and that the distribution of power in society is not necessarily linked to the distribution of class inequalities.

Conclusion: Weber's writings on stratification are important because they show that other dimensions of stratification, other than class, strongly influence people's life. While Marx tried to reduce social stratification to class division alone, weber drew attentions to the complex interplay of class, status and party as separates aspects of social stratifications.

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