

**RESEARCH PAPER****Social Stratification: The Concept, Form and Functions****Chinmayee Das¹, Sanjeet Kumar Tiwari² and Jubraj Khamari¹**¹ Department of Education, Sambalpur University, Odisha² School of Education, MATS University, Raipur, ChhattisgarhCorresponding Author's Email: sanjeetstiwari@gmail.comReceived: 2nd May 2018, Revised: 19th June 2018, Accepted: 22nd June 2018**ABSTRACT**

Social stratification is a structural function which argues that social inequality plays a vital role in the smooth operation of the society. So before going to discuss about social stratification we have to focus on Marx conflict theory and Weberian perspective. The status of people is often determined by how society is stratified– the basis of which can include gender, wealth & income, social class, political strata, religion & ethnicity. Hence, social stratification assigns the people to understand the values & interests of the society and to make a country successful.

Key words: Social Stratification, Marxist Perspective, Weberian Perspective

INTRODUCTION

All societies exhibit some system of hierarchy whereby its members are placed in positions that are higher or lower, superior or inferior, in relation to each other. Apart from this, individuals are differentiated according to socially approved criteria. So, socially differentiated men are treated as socially unequal, with respect to the enjoyment of societal rewards like status, power, income, etc which results in social inequality. The term social inequality refers to the existence of socially created inequalities and social stratification is a particular form of social inequality.

CONCEPT OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The word stratification is taken from the root word "Stratum" which means layers. Basically, stratum is a geological term which refers to horizontal layers present in rocks. Likewise, society has social layers which are abstract but are visibly meaningful in social stratification.

The concept of social stratification is made use of to refer to the classification or gradation and placement of people in society. According to great sociologist Lundberg, social stratification is the division of population into two or more layers or classes, each of which is relatively homogenous and between which there are differences in privileges, restrictions, rewards and obligations. In the words of Young and Mark, in most societies, people classify one another into categories, and rank these categories from the higher to lower. The process of defining such category is called "social stratification".

Definitions:

Social Stratification refers to the division of society into layers or strata, in terms of gender, age, wealth & property. ---Anthony Gidden

Stratification is the process of interaction or differentiation which places some people higher than others. ---Sutherland and Maxwell

Stratification is a system through which resources and rewards are distributed and handed down from generation to generation. ---William J. Goode

The process by which individuals and group are ranked in a more or less enduring hierarchy of status is known as stratification. ---Ogburn and Nimkoff

Social Stratification refers to the arrangement of any social group or society into a hierarchy positions that are unequal with regard to power, property, social evaluation, and/or psychic gratification. ---Melvin Marvin Tumin

Social Stratification is a horizontal division of society into 'high' and 'lower' social units.

---Raymond W. Murry

THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The theories concerning the origin of "social stratification" can be explained by various perspectives of different sociologists on social stratification-

1. Marxist Perspective or the Conflict Theory:

According to Marxist perspective, there are two major social groups a ruling class and a subject class. The power of the ruling class comes from its ownership and control of the means of production (land, capital, labour, etc). The ruling class oppresses the subject class. As a result, there is a basic conflict between the two classes.

And this conflict introduced Marxian Theory i.e. the Conflict Theory, which is also known as theory of economic determinism of Karl Marx. According to Marx, economic factors are also responsible for the emergence of different social strata or social classes. Therefore, social classes are defined by their relation to the means of production (i.e., by their ownership or non-ownership).

Thus, there are, in every society two mutually conflicting classes – the class of the capitalists and the class of the workers or the rich and the poor. Since these two classes have mutually opposite interests, hence Marx maintained that conflicts between the two are inevitable.

2. Weberian Perspective or the Three- Component Theory:

The work of the German Sociologist, Max Weber represents one of the most important developments in stratification theory, since Weber believed that social stratification results from a struggle for scarce resources in society. Although, he saw the struggle as being primarily concerned with economic resources, it can also involve struggles for prestige and for political power.

So, Max Weber formed a three-component theory of stratification in which social difference is determined by class, status and power.

- **Class** is a person's economic position, based on birth and individual achievement.
- **Status** is one's social prestige or honor, which may or may not be influenced by class.
- **Power** is one's ability to get one's way despite the resistance of other.

FOUR UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

Four principles are posited to underlie social stratification-

1. *First*, social stratification is socially defined as a property of a society rather than individuals of that society.
2. *Second*, social stratification is reproduced from generation to generation.
3. *Third*, social stratification is universal (found in every society) but variable (differs across time & place).
4. *Fourth*, social stratification involves not just quantitative inequality but qualitative beliefs and attitudes about social status.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

According to M.M. Tumin, an American Sociologist, the main attributes of stratification are as follows-

1. It is Social:

Stratification is social in the sense; it does not represent biologically caused inequalities. Biological traits (age, sex, strength) do not determine social superiority and inferiority, until they are socially recognized and given importance.

2. It is Ancient:

The stratification system is quite old. According to historical and archaeological records, stratification was present even in the small wandering bands. Age & sex were the main criterion of stratification then. Difference between the rich & poor, powerful & humble, freeman & slaves was there in almost all the ancient civilization.

3. It is Universal:

The stratification system is a worldwide phenomenon. Difference between the rich & poor or the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is evident everywhere. Even in the 'non-literate' societies, stratification is very much present.

4. It is in Diverse Forms:

The stratification system has never been uniform in all the societies.

- a. The ancient Roman society was stratified into 2 strata: the patricians and the plebeians.
- b. The ancient Aryan society into 4 varnas: the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras.
- c. The ancient Greek society into freemen & slaves.
- d. The ancient Chinese society into the mandarins, merchants, farmers and the soldiers, so on.

Whereas class, caste and estate seem to be the general forms of stratification to be found in the modern world.

5. It is Consequential:

The stratification system has its own consequences. The most important, most desired and often scarcest things in human life are distributed unequally because of stratification. The system leads to two main kinds of consequences: (1) Life Chances & (2) Life Style.

1. Life chances refer to such things as infant mortality, longevity, physical & mental illness, childlessness, marital conflict, separation & divorce.
2. Life styles include such matters as- the mode of housing, residential area, one's education, means of recreation, relationships between parents and children & so on.

CAUSES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

There are five basic points which give clear idea about the causes of social stratification-

1. Inequality:

Inequality exists because of natural differences in people's abilities.

2. Conflict:

Stratification occurs due to conflict between different classes, with the upper classes using superior power to take a larger share of the social resources.

3. Power:

Power influences one's definition of self and the importance of ideas in defining social situations.

4. Wealth:

Difference in the wealth is also one of the causes of social stratification.

5. Instability:

Instability in the society being the cause of social stratification enhances stability and induces members of the society to work hard.

FORMS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification is based upon a variety of principles. So, we find different type or forms of social stratification. The major types of stratification are:

1. Caste:

According to Giddens, the word caste is originated from the Portuguese word "*castas*" meaning race or pure stock. Caste is a hereditary endogamous social group in which a person's rank and its accompanying rights and obligations are ascribed on the basis of his/her birth into a particular group. For example - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudra Caste.

2. Class:

Stratification on the basis of class is dominant in modern society. In this, a person's position depends to a very great extent upon achievement and his ability to use to advantage the inborn

characteristics and wealth that he may possess. Sociologists like T. B. Bottomore and Anthony Giddens talk of the four major classes in modern world: upper class, middle class, working class and peasantry. Peasantry is found to exist mainly in developing countries like India. It consists of group of peoples engaged in agriculture and allied activities. The other three classes are found in industrialized and industrializing societies.

3. Slavery:

Slavery is an extreme form of inequality, where some individuals (masters) own others (slaves) as their property. It had economic basis. In slavery, every slave had his master to whom he was subjected. The master's power over the slave was unlimited.

4. Gender:

Gender or the differences between male and female has been an important basis for social inequality. The concept of gender goes beyond biological differences between men and women and refers to socially constructed differences between them in term of attributes, role and relationship.

5. Ethnicity:

Ethnicity is derived from the Greek word *ethnikos*, the adjective of *ethnos*. *Ethnos* refers to a people or nation. The term, ethnic group, describes a group possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity, composed of people who are aware of having common origin and common interests. Ethnicity thus means people-hood.

FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The glimpse of the culture of the world reveals that no society is 'classless' i.e. unstratified. So, all known societies of the world are stratified in one way or the other way. According to Wilbert Moore & Kingsley Davis, stratification system came to be evolved in all the societies due to the functional necessity. These "functional necessity" of class stratification system were analysed by H. M. Johnson, which are as follows:

1. Encourages Hard Work:

One of the main functions of class stratification is to induce people to work hard to live up to values. Those who best fulfill the values of a particular society are normally rewarded with greater prestige and social acceptance by others.

2. Ensures Circulation of Elites:

To some extent class stratification helps to ensure what is often called the "the circulation of elites". When a high degree of prestige, comforts and other rewards are offered for certain positions, there will be some competition for them. This process of competition helps to ensure that the more efficient people are able to rise to the top, where their ability can be best be used.

3. Serves an Economic Function:

The competitive aspect has a kind of economic function in that it helps to ensure the rational use of available talent. It is also functionally necessary to offer differential rewards if the positions at the top are largely ascribed as it is in the case of caste system. Even in caste system the people at the top can lose their prestige if they fail to maintain certain standards. Hence, differential rewards provide the incentives for the upper classes to work at maintaining their positions.

4. Prevents Waste of Resources:

The stratification system prevents the waste of scarce resources.

For Example, it would be a waste to pour the resources of society into the training of doctors and engineers, and then making them to work as peons and attendants. When once certain individuals are chosen and are trained for certain difficult positions it would be dysfunctional to waste their time and energy on tasks for which there is enough manpower.

5. Stabilities and reinforces the attitudes and skills:

Members of a class normally try to limit their relations to their own class. More intimate relationships are mostly found between fellow class- members. Even this tendency has its own function.

It tends to stabilize and reinforce the attitudes and skills that may be the basis of upper-class position. Those who have similar values and interests tend to associate comfortably with one another. Their frequent association itself confirms their common values and interests.

6. Helps to pursue different professions or jobs:

The values, attitudes and qualities of different classes do differ. This difference is also functional for society to some extent. Because society needs manual as well as non-manual workers.

Many jobs are not attractive to highly trained or 'refined' people for they are socialized to aspire for certain other jobs. Because of the early influence of family and socialization the individuals imbibe in them certain values, attitudes and qualities relevant to the social class to which they belong. This will influence their selection of jobs.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN INDIAN SOCIETY

Social stratification in India can be seen through its caste system. The system has actually no legality in the country and discrimination based on the caste system is prohibited by Article 15 in its constitution. However caste related discrimination is still being reported.

Indian society is characterized by its strong stratification and distinguished from other societies. In Indian society, stratification may be mentioned along 3 lines:

1. Stratification on caste basis.
2. Stratification on religion basis.
3. Stratification on socio-economic class basis.

All the three aspects of stratification are more or less due to ascribed social position. The religion & caste stratification are purely due to a person being born in a particular religions or caste group. The socio-economic class destinations are also based on positions at birth. In Indian society, the occupations were distributed on caste basis.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

7. Education has also consistently been seen as a means of equalization. Universal education, it has been argued, will help reduce disparities of wealth and power by providing able young people with skills to enable them to find a valued place in society.
8. Though education does not guarantee high status and positions to all people, yet it plays an important role in equalizing opportunities by making it possible for all those who have the desire to be educated and the ability to benefit by that facility.
9. A boy or girl from upper class or higher middle class, compared with a working class (SC, ST), has more chance of entering school and university.
10. Thus, the educational system helps perpetuate social and economic inequalities across generations.
11. In current decades, the expansion of education among girls has registered a considerable improvement in the condition and status of women in our society as 33% of jobs are now reserved for women. As a result, more and more women have started working in the office, industrial concerns and even in the police, defense & space.
12. Education has bridged the gulf of differences between touchable and untouchables in Hindu society.
13. Education has brought people from rural areas to urban areas to work in offices, industries business concern, etc. As a result, the process of urbanization has been accelerated.

CONCLUSION

At last, it is concluded that social stratification helps a person to understand the society easily and through this people know the task they should perform towards the development of the society. If

we discuss about a multicultural and multiracial country like India, social stratification is not a hurdle but a blessing because stratification binds India in a bonding though it has different constitutions, religions, caste, colour & creed.

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