



Social Stratification

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Semester I Hons, Paper – CC 1

Semester I General, Paper – CC 1A / GE 1

Key Points

- ❑ **It is a particular form of social inequality**
- ❑ **It is a form of social interaction or differentiation**
- ❑ **Social stratification means division of society into different strata or layers**
- ❑ **It involves a hierarchy of social groups**
- ❑ **Modern stratification is different from traditional stratification**
- ❑ **Social stratification involves two phenomena**

(i) differentiation of individuals or groups on the basis of possession of certain characteristics whereby some individuals or groups come to rank higher than others,

(ii) the ranking of individuals according to some basis of evaluation.

Definition

Orburn & Nimkoff, “The process by which individuals and groups are ranked in more or less enduring hierarchy of status is known as stratification”

- 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”.
- Gisbert, “Social stratification is the division of society into permanent groups of categories linked with each other by the relationship of superiority and subordinations”.
- Lundberg, “A stratified society is one marked by inequality, by differences among people that are evaluated by them as being “lower” and “higher”.

Origin of Stratification

- (i) According to Davis, social stratification has come into being due to the functional necessity of the social system.
- (ii) Professor Sorokin attributed social stratification mainly to inherited difference in environmental conditions.
- (iii) According to Karl Marx, social factors are responsible for the emergence of different social strata, i.e. social stratification.
- (iv) Gumplowicz and others contended that the origin of social stratification is to be found in the conquest of one group by another.
- (v) According to Spengler, social stratification is founded upon scarcity which is created whenever society differentiates positive in terms of functions and powers.
- (vi) Racial differences accompanied by dissimilarity also leads to stratification.

Characteristics

- 1. **It is Social:** It is true that biological qualities do not determine one's superiority and inferiority. Factors like age, sex, intelligence as well as strength often contribute as the basis on which statues are distinguished? But one's education, property, power, experience, character, personality etc. are found to be more important than biological qualities. Hence, stratification is social by nature.
- 2. **It is Universal** There is no society on this world which is free from stratification. Modern stratification differs from stratification of primitive societies. It is a worldwide phenomenon. According to Sorokin "all permanently organized groups are stratified."

Characteristics

- ⚡ **It is Ancient:** Stratification system is very old. It was present even in the small wondering bonds. In almost all the ancient civilizations, the differences between the rich and poor, humble And powerful existed. During the period of Plato and Kautilya even emphasis was given to political, social and economic inequalities.
- ⚡ **It is in diverse forms:** The forms of stratification are not uniform in all the societies. In the modern world class, caste and estate are the general forms of stratification. In India a special type of stratification in the form of caste is found. The ancient Aryans were divided into four varnas: the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The ancient Greeks were divided into freemen and slaves and the ancient Romans were divided into the patricians and the plebeians. So, every society, past or present, big or small is characterized by diverse forms of social stratification.

Characteristics

- ❖ **Social stratification is Consequential:** Social stratification has two important consequences one is “life chances” and the other one is “life style”. A class system not only affects the “life- chances” of the individuals but also, their “life style”.

The members of a class have similar social chances but the social chances vary in every society. It includes chances of survival and of good physical and mental health, opportunities for education, chances of obtaining justice, marital conflict, separation and divorce etc.

Life style denotes a style of life which is distinctive of a particular social status. Lifestyles include such matters like the residential areas in every community which have gradations of prestige-ranking, mode of housing, means of recreation, the kinds of dress, the kinds of books, TV shows to which one is exposed and so on. Life-style may be viewed as a subculture in which one stratum differs from another within the framework of a commonly shared overall culture.

Overview

Generally, four social processes are identified to shape and maintain stratified order of the society, these are

1. Differentiation
2. Ranking
3. Evaluation
4. Rewarding

Social stratification is a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy. Four basic principles may define social stratification:

1. Social stratification does not reflect individual differences, it is rather a trait of society
2. Social stratification continues over generations
3. Social stratification is universal but nature and extent of stratification may always vary
4. Social stratification involves beliefs in inequality

Rank Societies

- It is a characterised by social group
- It indicates unequal access of prestige or status
- In rank societies chief occupies his position as a hereditary right
- Usually eldest son get the position of his father
- There are clear differentiation between the position of chief and commoners
- The position of the chief can be attained only by being his genealogical heir
- The superior ranking in the social sphere is expressed in the chief's elaborate regalia including clothing and ornamentation.
- A chief is addressed with extravagant titles and is treated with respect.
- Those of the inferior ranking are dressed in simple clothing.
- According to their relationship to the chief the other members of the society are ranked in descendent order

Class Society

- ❑ Class societies categorize their people into different groups or strata.
- ❑ The term class refers to a stratum in a hierarchically ordered social system.
- ❑ Membership in a class is defined by the criterion of economy or property.
- ❑ The greater the accumulation of wealth, the higher the position in the hierarchical rung.
- ❑ An individual's class position correlates quite closely with his social status and political power.
- ❑ The upper classes thus have the greatest access to property; prestige and power while the lower classes have the least access to the above three.
- ❑ The membership to the social class is achieved and thus theoretically open to all.
- ❑ There are no known societies that have completely open classes.
- ❑ An individual can become a member of higher class by fulfilling certain pre-requisite conditions like earning greater income, holding a particular position in an office, obtaining a degree or paying an admission fee.

Class Society

- ❖ Class societies offer opportunities to people to acquire political rights and equal standing before the law.
- ❖ According to Marx, class was the only social grouping that reflected politico-economic reality.
- ❖ Class societies have developed certain concomitant features such as class-consciousness, class solidarity and class conflict.
- ❖ Class-consciousness refers to the recognition by a class of its inevitable role in the productive process.
- ❖ This consciousness also involves an awareness of the extent to which the upper classes exploit the lower classes.
- ❖ The unity in consciousness and the unified action of the people in order to achieve their goals is an expression of class solidarity.
- ❖ Class divisions are more predominant only in the advanced agricultural societies and industrial societies.
- ❖ The classes tend to emerge generally in societies that are sufficiently developed technologically to produce a surplus because it is this surplus that makes possible the accumulation of private wealth leading to the formation of wealthy classes and the precipitation of poor classes.

**THANK
YOU**