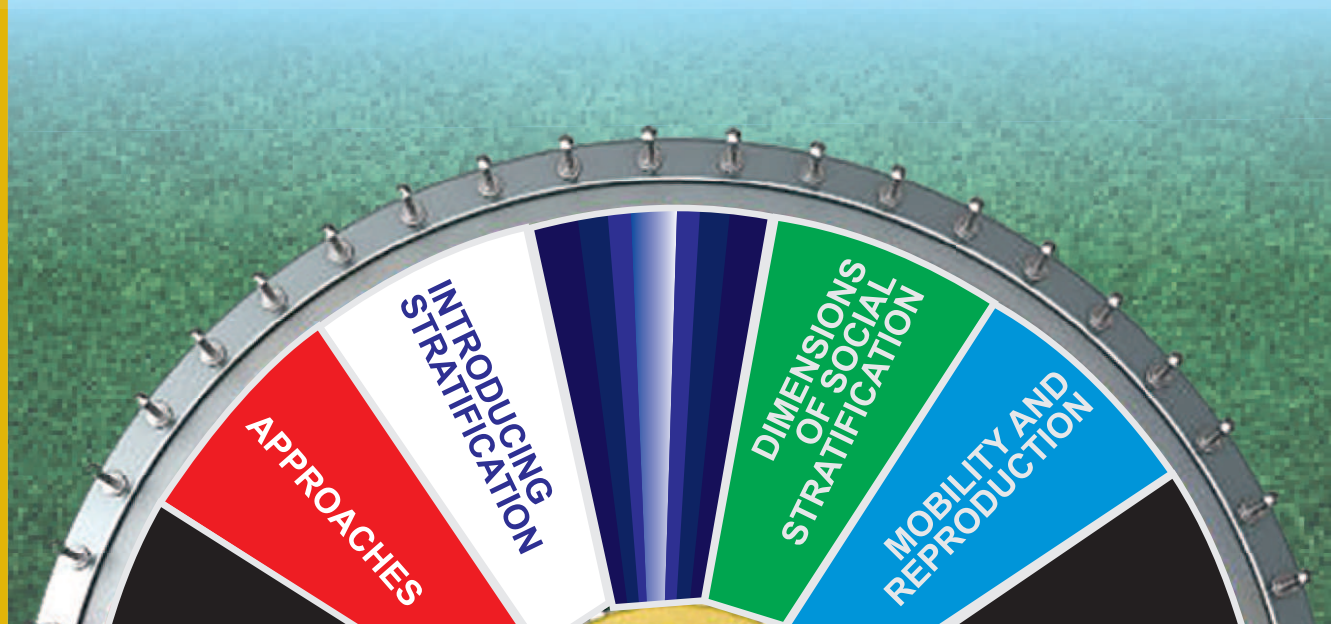


BSOE - 148
SOCIAL
STRATIFICATION

***SOCIAL
STRATIFICATION***

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“शिक्षा मानव को बन्धनों से मुक्त करती है और आज के युग में तो यह लोकतंत्र की भावना का आधार भी है। जन्म तथा अन्य कारणों से उत्पन्न जाति एवं वर्गगत विषमताओं को दूर करते हुए मनुष्य को इन सबसे ऊपर उठाती है।”

– इन्दिरा गाँधी



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“Education is a liberating force, and in our age it is also a democratising force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances.”

- Indira Gandhi

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

**School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University**

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Dr. R. Vashum
Sociology, IGNOU

COURSE COORDINATOR

Prof. Rabindra Kumar, Discipline of Sociology , SOSS, IGNOU

EDITOR

Prof. Rabindra Kumar, Discipline of Sociology , SOSS, IGNOU

COURSE PREPARATION TEAM

BLOCK 1	INTRODUCING STRATIFICATION	
Unit 1	Basic Concepts	Adapted from ESO14
Unit 2	Bases of Social Stratification	Adapted from ESO14
BLOCK 2	APPROACHES	
Unit 3	Marxian	Adapted from ESO14
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Unit 8	Race and Ethnicity	Adapted from ESO14
Unit 9	Gender and Inequalities	Adopted from ESO14
BLOCK 4	MOBILITY AND REPRODUCTION	
Unit 10	Concept and Forms of Mobility	Adopted from ESO14
Unit 11	Factor and Forces of Mobility	Adopted from ESO14
Unit 12	Cultural and Social Reproduction	Dr. Karunakar Singh, Assistant Professor, University of Rajasthan

PRINT PRODUCTION

Mr. Tilak Raj
Assistant Registrar
MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi

January, 2022

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ISBN: 978-93-5568-007-5

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Further information on the Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi -110068 or visit our website: <http://www.ignou.ac.in>

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, by Registrar, MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi

Laser Typeset by: Tessa Media & Computers

Printed at : Aravali Printers & Publishers Pvt. Ltd., W-30, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-II, New Delhi-110020

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

The most parts of course BSOE 148: Social Stratification has taken from BSOC-110. It introduces the student to various ideas of social inequality and their sociological study. The different forms and institutional manifestations of social stratification are explored here both theoretically and through case studies. This course is divided into four thematic blocks.

Block 1 **Introducing Stratification** comprises two units. Unit 1 is Basic concepts. This unit focuses on various aspects of social stratification including the evolutionary process. It also introduces the organizing principles of status, wealth and power. The unit also introduces caste and class in India and Indian social structure.

Unit 2 is Bases of Social Stratification. In this unit we introduced various dimensions or bases of social stratification i.e. class, power and status, and natural inequalities when it have some social meanings race and ethnicity, age and sex.

Block 2 **Approaches** comprises four units. Unit 3 is Marxian and unit 4 is Weberian. These units provide material on what these thinkers wrote on division of labour, meaning of class, growth of class, classes and life chances, status and so on. Unit 5 focuses on functionalist. It goes on to describe the Davis-Moore, its basic propositions and its criticism. It, thus, provides a holistic view of the functionalist. Unit 6 focuses on interactional and attributional. This unit goes into the early explanations of caste and differentials between the religion and sociological explanations. It then examines in details attributional approaches of Ghurye, Hutton and Srinivas. Following this interactional approaches of Bailey, Marriott, Mayer and Dumont are presented. The unit finally appraises the attributional and interactional approaches.

Block 3 **Dimensions of Social Stratification** comprises three units. Unit 7 is race and ethnicity. In this unit sociologists talk about race relations as forms of stratification. These are characterized by unequal access to wealth and power on the basis of physical characteristics. Sociologists also point out that disappearance of ethnic identities through the process of assimilation is often hampered when the dominant groups do not allow the flow of social benefits to certain groups, deemed to be powerless ethnic minorities. This situation gives rise to ethnic conflicts.

Unit 8 is Caste and Class: It understands the jati model and explains the role of class in social stratification. Several analysts popularized the view of Indian society as a caste society ignoring the dynamics of existing conditions. They perceived caste to be logical opposite of the class system which was associated along with individualism and particularly with the west.

Unit 9 is Gender and Inequalities. In this unit we have seen how there is gender bias or subtle discrimination against women in various fields in the different parts of the world mainly in patriarchal societies which serves the interest of the male sex.

Block 4: **Social Mobility and Reproduction** consists four units. Unit 10 deals various concepts and forms of social mobility. Unit 11 informs about various factors and forces associated with social mobility. Unit 12 deals cultural and social reproduction. It tries to analyse the idea of cultural and social reproduction through the prism of Marxist tradition; Durkhemian tradition; Ethnomethodological tradition; Structuralist tradition and most exclusively and comprehensively through Bourdieu's prism.



BLOCK 1

INTRODUCING STRATIFICATION

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UNIT 1 **BASIC CONCEPTS: MEANING OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION**

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Evolutionary Process
- 1.3 Organizing Principles
 - 1.3.1 Status
 - 1.3.2 Wealth
 - 1.3.3 Power
- 1.4 Caste and Class in India
- 1.5 Caste and Social Stratification
 - 1.5.1 Demography of Caste
 - 1.5.2 Social Mobility
 - 1.5.3 Principles of Hierarchy
- 1.6 Indian Social Structure
 - 1.6.1 Summation of Status
 - 1.6.2 Marxist Method and Concepts
 - 1.6.3 Service Oriented Economy
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Keywords
- 1.9 Further Readings
- 1.11 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- outline evolutionary processes in societies and social stratification;
- discuss its organizing principles: status, wealth and power;and
- describe social stratification in India: caste and class;

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Social stratification is a process through which groups and social categories in societies are ranked as higher or lower to one another in terms of their relative position on the scales of prestige, privileges, wealth and power. A distinction could be made between the criteria which place emphasis upon the ascribed or innate qualities with which the strata are relatively endowed and those which are acquired by the strata through their own achievement. Ascription and achievement are, therefore, two types of scales which

generally define the normative principles which work as determinants of social stratification in all societies.

Social stratification is also historical process. It emerged as a social institution of societies at a certain level of social evolution and social development. The hunting and food gathering societies had individual levels of social differentiation, for example, a top hunter or shaman acquired higher status due to his personal qualities or skills which society considered to be mystical or divine in origin; or differentiation could be in terms of age and sex of the members of the society. But owing to the limits on the population growth due to less developed production technologies and precarious and often nomadic nature of these societies, their social structure was quite simple endowed as it was with elementary skills among people for communication (limited language vocabulary), simple technologies, elementary forms of belief systems, and rules of social control such societies did not produce any substantial economic surpluses and accumulation of wealth for any member was impossible. Such simpler societies did have social differentiation, but were without the institution of social stratification.

1.2 THE EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

Social stratification as a institution evolved when the technologies of production under went basic changes. Innovations of animal husbandry and agriculture necessitated more complex technologies and settled forms of community life. These economies also began to generate economic surpluses and accumulation of wealth either in the form of cattle or food grains. With assured food resources population began to grow as never before and barter and exchange, or commodities began to take place on a larger scale. In course of time, tools of exchange were invented which could reflect values of commodities in a growth of sections of societies who had more control on wealth and power, with development of relatively complex technologies and division of labour, not only specialized groups emerged but a division between the rural and urban centres also came into existence in course of time. The complexity of social structure necessitated more elaborate institutions of social control over the emerging new social realities, such as institutionalized form of religion, strata of functionaries specialized into different forms of work, culture specialists and the ruling classes etc. The institution of social stratification came into being as a result of an evolutionary functional necessity at such a historical moment.

1.3 ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

There are three major organizing principles of social stratification. These are, status, wealth and power. Sociological observations of many societies over a period of time have revealed some linkages among these principles in any evolutionary process. For example, even in societies which did not have the

institution of social stratification, such as the food gathering and hunting communities, some individuals enjoyed higher social status and were treated as leaders. The magicians (Shamans), persons with exceptional skills in limiting or in any other sphere of social economic and defense were accorded higher status in the community. Yet, it did not result into the arrival of the institution of social stratification because such accrual of individual distinction contributed to social differentiation which could be on the basis of merit, age, gender or any other marker in society. Social stratification comes into being in societies when social gradation or ranking is done on the basis of an entire group of people such as the gradations based on caste and class in our society.

1.3.1 Status

The earliest principle of social stratification is that of status. Status in the language of social stratification means ranking of groups in a society on the basis of their relative position in terms of honour or respect. Honour is a qualitative attribute which members in a status group enjoy by birth. Any such attribute which is inherited by birth is ascribed and cannot be acquired by effort. Therefore, status principle of social stratification is also termed as the principle of ascription. In our country, caste is a very appropriate example of status groups. The qualities which go to make a status groups are related more to values and beliefs, to legends and myths perpetuated in societies over a period of time than to principles which are achievable by efforts, whether economic, political or cultural.

1.3.2 Wealth

The second organizing principle of social stratification is wealth. Wealth is generated in societies only when technologies advancement takes place and there is a change in the mode of production. Examples are: change from hunting and food gathering economy to settled agriculture, change from agriculture based economy to one based predominantly upon manufacturing and industry. Such changes, not only brought about the institution of social stratification, but in course of time also altered the principles of organization of social stratification. Economic advancement led to generation of more wealth in society, more accumulation of markers of wealth be it in the form of food grains or cattle, or metals and minerals (silver, gold precious stones etc.) or money. At this stage, the groups which had greater control over the economic resources and wealth or which possessed more wealth were ranked higher in society than groups which controlled less of it, or groups which had little or negligible access to wealth (for example, landless workers or industrial workers). The social stratification based on class is its prime example.

1.3.3 Power

The third organizing principle of social stratification is power, unlike status and wealth which can be clearly linked with group characteristics of ranking

the societies, the principle of power is a relatively diffused attribute because it is not exclusive in character. It is always possible that a group with higher status in society or that which enjoys greater wealth, also exercises more power in society. Nevertheless, one could make a distinction between say, principle of privileges where as the latter tends to be based on the group's ability to use coercive means for other group's conformity with actions, values and beliefs determined by it. The concept of power as Max Weber has discussed in his treatment of social stratification rests on the fact that it endows the persons or groups which have power to impose their will on other groups by legitimate use of coercive method. In this sense, state offers us a good example of an institution which has maximum power. It has sovereign authority to impose its will on citizens of the society. When legitimacy of exercise of power, is widely accepted by groups, in other words, when it is institutionalized in society, power becomes authority. Authority as a concept could be defined as legitimate power. Power as a principle also enters into the notion of social stratification when its functions or its social ramifications begin to be influenced by the political processes in society, and when state begins to take more active or direct role in influencing the principles of social stratification. A relevant example of this could be found in the policy of positive discrimination or reservation of jobs, political offices and entry into educational institutions in our country by the state in favour of castes and tribes now declared as 'scheduled' or as 'other backward classes'. Max Weber, in his treatment of power as an element in the formation of social stratification has rightly emphasised the significance of politics, political parties and their role in optimizing their access to power.

Activity 1

Discuss 'status' 'wealth' and 'power' with other students in the study centre. In which way are they related to one another? Put your findings down in your notebook.

1.4 CASTE AND CLASS IN INDIA

We have discussed so far the principles of status, wealth and power as the main determinants of ranking of groups in relative order in societies which lay down the foundation of social stratification. Caste and class are principles of social stratification which illustrate respectively the role of status and wealth in the ranking of groups in societies. Caste is a prime example of a status group. Class, on the other hand, is based on the principle where groups are ranked on their access to wealth or their relative ability to have a control upon the wealth resources in society. There is a greater degree of consensus among sociologists about the processes by which status groups are formed and constitute the rank order in social stratification. But the same degree of consensus does not seem to exist about the processes which contribute to the emergence of classes by their differential access to possession of wealth. The principle of wealth is no doubt, widely accepted as

leading to social stratification. For instance, class is seen as emerging out of the 'market situation' by Max Weber, whereas Karl Marx connects it with the modes of production' which determines access to wealth or its control as well as ranking of groups in society. No doubt, the central role of wealth in determining social stratification is implicit in both formulations. Modes of production vary with the changing forms of capital (wealth invested for production of commodities) as discussed by Marx. So also, market situation is determined by supply and demand of commodities, labour and employment conditions, all of which function within the matrix of available capital or wealth resources in society. Social stratification enters into this process when one section of people in society have or control more wealth or capital than others or when market situation has also to deal with sections of people whom Marx describes as 'proletariat' or working classes who have no wealth and depend upon their physical labour power to survive. The debates among sociologists on these issues are related closely to the various theories of social stratification which will be discussed later.

1.5 CASTE AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The traditional Indian society was organised primarily on the basis of caste stratification. This stratification was such where caste functioned as the central principle in all aspects of social life, such as economy, polity and culture. To understand this, we have to make a distinction between *varna* and *jati* the former being a frame of reference or model for classification and the latter being the specific caste groups ranked in order of social status. The four *varnas* were the *Brahmins*, (priests), the *Kshatriyas* (warriors), the *Vaisyas* (traders) and the *Shudras* (working classes). Later, a fifth *varna*, or the *Panchama* also came into existence. It comprised those who were thrown out of the caste system itself due to their having been judged by society as to have violated some of its basic norms. The *Panchamas* were also declared by the society as 'untouchable', the acutest form of social discrimination imposed on any group in a society. Some of the basic characteristics of the caste system were: membership by birth, hereditary occupation, pollution and purity ascribed to different castes in terms of *varna* hierarchy, endogamy, and mutual repulsion or segregation.

1.5.1 Demography of Caste

The demography of caste or *jati* in India has remained extremely diversified over millennia. Studies show that beyond a radius of 20 to 200 miles, *jati* is not recognized as social group; it is only recognizable with reference to the *varna* model. Hence, the significance of the *varna* as a sociological frame of reference. Also, *jatis* have always existed as regional or sub-regional groups numbering into thousands. The recent survey by the Anthropological Survey of India reports the existence of 4635 communities or caste-like groups in India; it also finds that almost all religious groups are divided into various communities which have *jati*-traits. *Jatis* also bear local and regional

cultural markers based on the ecology, local history or mythology. Traditionally, however, castes both in villages and the urban centres were bound into systemic relationship of reciprocities or work and economic exchange or exchange of services etc. In this sense, caste system functioned on the basis of mutual cooperation and interdependence. It formed an organic system. Both in villages and cities, castes had their panchayat organisations. Even though these had nucleus in a particular village or urban centre, such panchayats or guilds (in the cities) had a network of organization beyond a village or urban centre. If an inter-caste conflict emerged for any reason which violated the caste norms of reciprocity and if dispute could not be settled in the council of the village or the city (comprising elders from various castes) the matter was taken up in the caste panchayats. It functioned both as a body to protect rights and privileges of the caste as well as served as a mechanism for resolution of conflicts.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write a note on caste and social stratification.

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- 2) Pick out the concepts that do not fit in the following list.

- i) Status
- ii) Wealth
- iii) Feudal
- iv) Power
- v) Urbanization

The stability of the caste as a system of social stratification was based on the economy which remained agrarian mercantile or a very long time. This was coupled with the stable population which due to high rate of mortality continued to remain at the level of about hundred millions for several centuries. This spell of stable population was only broken after the industrial revolution which made more advanced life-saving medical aids available to control the death rate rampant through epidemics and natural disasters of the past. The British rule in India on the one hand, destroyed the traditional base of the economy and its integrative relationship with the social structure, particularly the caste system, and on the other, new technologies of medical care were available which brought down the death rate. Thus, population of India began to go up as the Census records from 1931 onwards reveal. The

British colonial policy made India a dependent economy and destroyed the foundation of its traditional manufacturing economy and trade.

Massive de-urbanization and de-industrialization followed and pressure on land in villages increased. The traditional balance of economy and social structure which existed between the rural and urban centres and between agriculture and manufacture and trade, was vitally destabilized. At the same time, the British policy was also geared to continue the use of caste and religion as a frame of reference in the implementation of social and political policies; caste based Census operations conducted by the British made people for the first time conscious of caste as a political phenomenon throughout the country and it led to the growth of public demand by various castes placed lower in caste ranking for being placed into higher caste hierarchy. This triggered the process of not only Sanskritization, that is adopting the style of life, food habits, dress and ways of worship etc. of the upper castes by lower castes and then demanding to be recognized as a higher caste status, but it also contributed to, as described by M.N. Srinivas, to the process of Westernization (adopting the western style dress, way of living and modes of cultural expression etc.)

1.5.2 Social Mobility

This phase of the process of change in the caste system of stratification set into motion the process of new social mobility linked it directly with the state policies and introduced elements of politicization in its social movements from which the system has never turned back. This process with some variation has continued to grow even after Independence.

Independence which resulted from national political movement against the British rule was ideologically against any discrimination in India based on caste, religion or ethnic differences; its normative foundation was located in secularism and citizenship rights equally available to all. The Constitution of India which was adopted, therefore, recognizes for state purposes only the civic status of its citizens and soon after Independence derecognized caste from village and city level civic institutions. The Constitution, however, recognized caste status as a matter of welfare policy for selected castes and tribes who it was felt were exploited over centuries and were unprepared to face up with open competition from well to do sections of other castes; these castes and tribes were listed in the Schedule of Constitution and they were provided reservations, 7.5 per cent for the scheduled tribes and 15.0 per cent for the scheduled castes for entry into government jobs, educational institutions and elected political offices.

Box 1.01

A provision for reservations was made in the Constitution, and its Directive Principles also laid down the desirability to offer the benefits of reservation to the 'socially and educationally backward classes'. Two Commissions were

set up to identify the categories of backward classes, Kaka Karlekar Commission in 1955 and Mandal Commission in 1977. The Karlekar Commission could not arrive at any definitive recommendation, but the Mandal Commission recommended 27 per cent reservation to the backward classes whom it identified through castes. A list of such castes was also given by the Commission. It may, however, be noted that several states of the Union already provided for reservation to the backward classes much before this policy was undertaken by the central government, and -these states too identified backwardness through caste groups which were deprived social and educational opportunities traditionally.

The policy of reservation for castes in employment education and political offices etc. represents the dynamics of social change in India which itself is a product of political, economic and social developments. Democratic employment, increased productivity in agriculture led by the peasant castes in various parts of the country (most of whom comprise backward class category in the centre and the states) and the rise in the aspiration of such castes for social mobility in the fields of education and services have been the factors that have contributed to this policy. The policy of reservation for the backward classes has gained momentum in stages from the states to the centre as a result of the backward class movements gaining impetus due to relative improvement in their economic and political status during the half a century of the history of nations investment in economic and social development as a democratic policy.

1.5.3 Principles of Hierarchy

Caste is also considered to reflect the principle of hierarchy in social stratification. Louis Dumont, a French social anthropologist has sought to position the Indian social structure in contradistinction to that of the west in term of the unique institution of caste which both structurally and as a civilization reflects the principle of hierarchy (in contrast to the principle of equality in the West). Hierarchy is defined by Dumont as the feature of a social system where normative principles govern determine the instrumental or utilitarian principles in the affairs of society. He calls it being encompassed and encompassing, a process by which the values and beliefs traditionally prescribed encompass the rational utilitarian principles. In other words, in a hierarchical system it is not the economic, political and other secular factors which define the standards of evaluation of the normative or value aspects of society, but is it the other way round. So, according to Dumont, the notions of pollution-purity and inequalities existent in the caste system could not be understood when judged from the western secular standards which belong to an altogether different matrix of civilization. Dumont's treatment of caste as hierarchy has led to debate both in India and abroad and has been criticized for neglecting the role of economic and political factors in the formation and perpetuation caste stratification. Evidently, as caste in adapting successfully today to the demands of political,

economic and social modernization and its mobilization is increasingly brought into effect for achievement of higher economic and political goals, it already seems to have lost most of its traditional features located in the principle of hierarchy.

1.6 INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

There are extensive studies of the Indian social structure in terms of its class composition and its processes. Economists, sociologists and social anthropologists have contributed to such studies. Several studies also attempt to establish a very close relationship between caste and class in India. Most such studies are based on empirical observations and have a regional character, but are nevertheless, indicative of class structure in India as well as its closer linkages with caste stratification.

1.6.1 Summation of Status

Traditionally, it has been observed that caste reflected a feature described as 'summation of status' principle. If the status of a caste was low in ritual (pollution-purity) hierarchy, it was also lower in its access to economic, political and social statuses. In such a situation, caste also encompassed the feature of class in a manner of speaking, but not all of its features. By definition, caste is a closed group, its membership is by birth, thus caste status is ascribed, it cannot be achieved by economic or social mobility. On the other hand, class is an open group its membership is based on achievement criteria, which could be economic, political or social in character. Caste also constitutes a community, its mobility is group based and to this extend efforts to arise status by Sanskritization in the past involved the entire caste group. Class, unlike caste does not have a communitarian attribute, although it may evolve group cohesiveness based on common interest. Class in this sense is an interest group where as caste constitutes a community. With new social and economic developments and activating of the caste based social and political movements (including the reservation policy) caste groups do have evolved as interest groups, and to that extent some features of class have also been incorporated in the caste organizations. This is particularly true for a large number of caste associations which have been in existence in India since the time of the British rule and which have only proliferated following Independence.

Activity 2

Discuss with other students the concept of 'Summation of Status'. Put down the main findings in your notebook.

The class structure in India differs as between rural and urban settlements. Studies of rural society by sociologists and social anthropologists have identified the rural class structure • as comprising the landlords, peasants and

working classes. A small population of artisans and functionary castes too has existed in villages as a separate economic interest group with some features of class. Kathleen Gough and a few other sociologists who have followed Marxist categories have described the class structure in village using classifications such as: bourgeoisie class (big landlords), petite bourgeoisie class (medium and small landlords and traders and artisans) rural proletariat or working classes (who do not possess land and subsist only as wage labourers).

1.6.2 Marxist Method and Concepts

The application of Marxist methods and concepts for the analysis of India's class structure has been more common among the economists, which has been later applied by sociologists. Since, Marxist method of social analysis locates class structure in the modes of production, such as the primitive, the feudal and the capitalist, debate about the nature of class structure in India has hinged mostly upon the debates about the modes of production that prevails in the rural and the industrial economy. In the rural context, much debate has followed as to whether its economy and social structure have feudal, semi-feudal precapitalist or capitalist features. These distinctions are based upon whether the analyst starts from the premise of feudal economy as the beginning point of analysis of its capitalist features in the agrarian economy. Broadly, the findings suggest that class structure of villages which are still located in the agricultural economy are fast moving towards capitalist orientation. This implies, money wages instead of wages in kind, agriculture for profit rather than for livelihood, greater role of banking credit and cooperatives in investment for production; a movement from production cash crops rather than cereals with increased linkage with markets, etc.

Box 1.02

Changes in agriculture have brought into existence the class of capitalist farmers, and where the winds of change have not reached fully the pre-capitalist features of class- are moving fast towards capitalistic potential. But the level of changes in the rural economy in India are so uneven and diverse that in many states which 'are backward, one can still find feudalistic and semi-feudalistic (or pre-capitalist) features in the agricultural economy. Hence, the composition of the class structure of the Indian villages continues to remain complex with multiple features.

In the urban centres, class structure comprises generally the industrialists, traders and business classes, the professional or service classes, the semi-skilled workers and daily wagers. Since Independence, the number of the professional classes has increased and the service sector in the economy now occupies about 51 per cent of the share of the gross domestic product. Agriculture now contributes to about 28 per cent of its share in the gross domestic product. Evidently, the class composition of urban-industrial India

is changing fast due to new technological advancement and the liberalization of economy. This change has increased the composition of the middle classes in both the rural mid urban sectors of our society. Green revolution in villages which was led by the peasant castes (the backbone of the backward class movement) created a strong rural middle class; similarly the expansion of the service sector in our economy have added urban middle class numbers in our cities and towns as never before. It is estimated that middle classes taken as a whole number about 350 million now; this is likely to grow to 500 million or 50 per cent of our total population in the next two to three decades if the economy continues to grow.

1.6.3 Service Oriented Economy

The class structure of the Indian society is increasingly moving from its primacy of the agrarian economy towards industrial and particularly service oriented economy. This may have important sociological consequences in the existing nexus between caste and class structure in the society. Due to increased momentum of the new economies which also are likely to trigger greater degree of urbanization and migration between regions and communities in India the political mobilization based on caste is bound to give way to new principles of structural location of political and social force. In such a situation, class and ethnicity will gain prominence than a set of caste groups. Social anthropologists have already noted the increased process of caste ethnicization in our society.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write a note of about five lines on caste and class in India.

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- 2) Say True and False.

- i) Weber used the dialectical approach to stratification.
- ii) A low caste status means a low place in the caste hierarchy.
- iii) Class is an interest group while caste constitutes a community

1.6 LET US SUM UP

After defining social stratification as a system of social ranking involving relations of superiority and inferiority, we have discussed its organising principles, namely, class, status and power. The process of change in the

structure of society and system of social stratification can be observed through the indicators of growth in the professional entrepreneurial classes in India and the rise in the services sectors in the economy. As we have already discussed, the middle classes in India roughly amounts to one third of the population, being estimated at 350 millions. This is a very significant number, and it is associated with the growth in the industrial - urban and information technology related sectors of our society. The process of change in this area has just begun and the policy of economic liberalization might add new momentum to this process. However, qualitatively, the class structure both in the rural and urban India does continues to make adaptive and integrative responses to the forces of change which it encounters on an increasing scale from exposure to western cultural and social institutional values.

1.7 KEYWORDS

Demography	: Concerned with various facets of a population such as gender ratios, distribution of a trait, gross numbers etc
Dialectical	: Taking into account the two opposing or antagonistic views on a topic and resolving them at a higher level of abstraction
Hierarchy	: A rank order of castes or groups from top to bottom
Caste	: An ascriptive grouping which is community based
Class	: A achievement oriented interest group.
Power	: The capacity of a group or persons to influence decisions in their own way in the group or community.
Status	: Ranking of groups in a society on basis of their relative position in terms of honour or respect.

1.8 FURTHER READINGS

Yogendra Singh: *Social Stratification and Social Change in India*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishing House, 1997.

Bottomore T.B.,1965.Classes in Modern Society.George Allen and Unwin

Tumin Melvin M., 1969.Social Stratification. :Prentice Hall of India:Delhi

1.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Basic Concepts:
Meaning of Social
Stratification

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Traditional Indian society was organised mainly on the basis of caste. Caste functioned as the central principle in all aspects of social life, such as economy polity and culture. In this Scheme Varna is the frame of reference for classification while jati is the specific caste groups ranked in order.
- 2) iii)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Caste reflects the 'Summation of Status'. If it is low in ritual hierarchy, then it is usually low in the economic, political and social statuses. By definition caste is a closed group, based on ascription. Class on the other hand is an open group its membership is based on achievement criteria. Thus caste is community based while class represents a status group.
- 2)
 - i) False
 - ii) True
 - iii) True

UNIT 2 BASES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 What is Social stratification?
- 2.3 Bases of Social stratification
 - 2.3.1 Class
 - 2.3.2 Power
 - 2.3.3 Status
- 2.4 Other Bases of Social Stratification
 - 2.4.1 Age
 - 2.4.2 Race
 - 2.4.3 Ethnicity
 - 2.4.4 Sex
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Further Readings
- 2.8 Specimen Answers to check your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this you should be able to

- Understand the bases of social stratification.
- Discuss how natural inequalities become the bases of social stratification

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit explains what social stratification is, and then discusses its general principles in terms of the bases or dimensions of social stratification. It also discusses how the natural inequalities become the bases of social stratification.

2.2 WHAT IS SOCIAL STRATIFICATION?

Stratification is a system of social ranking, involving relations of superiority and inferiority. These relations between the units of rank are governed by a set of norms. Analytically, stratification is conceived of as an evaluative ranking of social units. Concretely, it refers to the empirical distribution of advantages and benefits in society. It can be seen as a process, which is regulated by some principles. These principles determine the bases of the

2.2.1 Dimensions or Bases of Social Stratification

The bases or dimensions of social stratification refer to the different levels of differentiation which are made to allocate people in a given society. Natural inequalities take the form of social inequalities when the members of society assign some meaning of them. Age, sex, and colour are natural bases of inequalities. But now it becomes the bases of social stratification because society has attached some meanings to them. On the basis of some empirical findings, sociologists present three bases of stratification wealth, power and prestige i.e. class, power and status. These can be listed as follows:

- i) **Class:** It refers to differentiation at the level of wealth. In this sense it can be termed as economic differentiation. Wealth is generated in societies only when technologies advancement takes place and there is a change in the mode of production. Examples are: change from hunting and food garnering economy to settled agriculture, change from agriculture based economy to one based predominantly upon manufacturing and industry. Such changes, not only brought about the institution of social stratification, but in course of time also altered the principles of organization of social stratification. Economic advancement led to generation of more wealth in society, more accumulation of markers of wealth is it in the form of food grains or cattle, or metals and minerals (silver, gold precious stones etc.) or money. At this stage, the groups which had greater control over the economic resources and wealth or which possessed more wealth were ranked higher in society than groups which controlled less of it, or groups which had little or negligible access to wealth (for example, landless workers or industrial workers). The social stratification based on class is its prime example.
- ii) **Power:** It refers to differential access to power in society. It includes political, social and other types of power. It is always possible that a group with higher status in society or that which enjoys greater wealth, also exercises more power in society. Nevertheless, one could make a distinction between say, principle of privileges where as the latter tends to be based on the group's ability to use coercive means for other group's conformity with actions, values and beliefs determined by it. The concept of power as Max Weber has discussed in his treatment of social stratification rests on the fact that it endows the persons or groups which have power to impose their will on other groups by legitimate use of coercive method. In this sense, state offers us a good example of an institution which has maximum power. It has sovereign authority to impose its will on citizens of the society. When legitimacy of exercise of power, is widely accepted by groups, in other words, when it is institutionalized in society, power becomes authority. Authority as a concept could be defined as legitimate power. Power as a principle also enters into the notion of social stratification when its functions or its

social ramifications begin to be influenced by the political processes in society, and when state begins to take more active or direct role in influencing the principles of social stratification. A relevant example of this could be found in the policy of positive discrimination or reservation of jobs, political offices and entry into educational institutions in our country by the state in favour of castes and tribes now declared as 'scheduled' or as 'other backward classes'. Max Weber, in his treatment of power as an element in the formation of social stratification has rightly emphasised the significance of politics, political parties and their role in optimizing their access to power.

- iii) **Status:** It refers to distribution of prestige or social honour. Status in the language of social stratification means ranking of groups in a society on the basis of their relative position in terms of honour or respect. Honour is a qualitative attribute which members in a status group enjoy by birth. Any such attribute which is inherited by birth is ascribed and cannot be acquired by effort. Therefore, status principle of social stratification is also termed as the principle of ascription. In our country, caste is a very appropriate example of status groups. The qualities which go to make a status groups are related more to values and beliefs, to legends and myths perpetuated in societies over a period of time than to principles which are achievable by efforts, whether economic, political or cultural.

In most cases, the three dimensions complement each other. However, Max Weber, class is an economic category, a product of the market situation. The status group, on the other hand, constitutes the social order based on prestige or honour. Status is determined by the social prestige one enjoys. Social prestige is expressed through different styles of life. Analytically, class and status groups can be independent phenomena, but in reality the two overlap with each other. The notion of power is the keynote of Weber's theory of social stratification. Both the propertied and the property less can belong to the same status groups. Thus, economically determined power is not always identical with the social or legal power.

It has been said that Weber's theory of stratification, is a reaction to Marx's theory of class. We can say that Weber is the founding father of stratification analysis, which developed best in the U. S.A. Marx, on the other hand, **was** not a stratification theorist (1947) draws a distinction between class, power and status. According to theorist. For him the oppositions and contradictions found in modes of production, were of central importance. In answer to Marx's ideas on class, Weber developed his ideas on stratification. He emphasised the distinction of the economic, social and political bases of stratification. Thus, he provided a multi-dimensional approach to the study of social stratification.

Activity 1

Take a round of your colony/village and note down the pattern of housing, such as, where the richest and most powerful people live, where the market is situated, where the poorest people live. Write a one page essay on "Social Stratification in my Community" Discuss your paper with other' students and your Academic Counsellor at your Study Centre.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What are the three bases of social stratification?

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- 2) Distinguish between class and status group.

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2.4 OTHER BASES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Stratification is a system whereby people are unequally ranked and rewarded on the basis of wealth, power and prestige. It is part of every society and may take various forms like class, gender, race and, of course, ethnicity. The earlier studies of stratification used to focus on the class, status and power while race, age, sex/ gender and ethnicity were treated as side issues. However, of late not only have ethnicity and gender been getting some attention in stratification analysis, but ethnic stratification is even replacing class as the foremost form of social division since now property relations tend to be determined by ethnic ranking instead of it being the other way round. These can be listed below:

2.4.1 Age

Societies, which have been described as stateless type of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940), lack centralised government. They have no office of chief, or if they have such an office, it holds more ritual than secular power. Still, such societies are found to be stratified on the basis of age. This type of

stratification is a characteristic of certain east African societies. The principle of age is most prominent among the Masai and Nandi in East Africa, where ranking on the basis of age, is put together with the exercise of authority, on the basis of seniority. The ranks determined on the basis of age are called age-sets. All the persons (basically men) born, within a range or number of years, belong to one set. The first age-set may comprise as short as six or seven years or as long as fifteen.

In most cases, usually around adolescence, the membership of the first age-set closes and recruitment to the next set takes place. At this stage, entry to the new age-set generally involves an initiation rite, such as circumcision or other body-marks. Thus, after going through the ritual, each member comes out of childhood, and takes on full membership of his tribe. Each person, thus, belongs to an age-set, to which he remains attached throughout his life. Along with other members, he moves to the next age-set. The age-sets in these societies, determine their social organisation, because membership of these sets covers all areas of life. It directs a person to decide whom he may marry, what land he can own, and in which ceremonies he can take part etc. Thus, membership of each stratum tells a person about his ranking in society.

In most cases, where age-sets operate, a member of an age-set also belongs to a particular age-grade. These grades are clearly marked out from one another, so that a person belongs to only one grade at a time. Generally, a person after childhood would move from junior warrior hood to senior warrior hood. Then he would graduate from junior elder hood to senior elder hood. The warriors fight and defend their tribe from attack, while the elders take decisions and settle disputes. They also communicate with the ancestral spirits. Thus, the age-sets go through the different grades in complete units. In other words, all the members of one particular age-set move into one grade all at once. Thus, their social status also changes all at once. In the kinds of societies we belong to, each person usually makes his or her own natural transition from childhood to adulthood and finally to old age. But in age-set societies, these transitions are made on a corporate basis as members of large age-sets.

In terms of a system of social stratification, the age-set system provides for an open society, in which no one is allocated a particular position for life. Everybody in his time does become old, and therefore gets a chance to hold decisive authority. Thus, this is a system in which personnel change within the system, without changing the pattern of stratification itself

2.4.2 Race

Another type of social stratification is the one based on race. Race, as a biological concept, refers to a large category of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics - colour of skin, type of hair; facial features, size of head etc. Anthropologists initially tried to arrive at a classification of races, but ran into problems, because more advanced studies of racial types

showed the near absence of pure races. Thus, the latest thinking is that all humans belong to a common group. Recent genetic research indicates that 95 per cent of DNA (gene-rating) molecules are the same for all humans. The remaining 5 per cent are responsible for differences in, appearance. Outward differences are also seen as varying within a race rather than across the races. Thus, the classification of races floundered at the scientific level.

For sociologists, a race is a group of people who are perceived by a given society, as biologically different from the others. Thus, people are assigned to one race or another, by public opinion which is moulded by that society's dominant group, rather than on any scientific basis. In racist societies, for example South Africa, physical characteristics are believed to be intrinsically related to moral, intellectual and other non-physical attributes and abilities.

At the theoretical level, sociologists talk about race relations as forms of stratification. These are characterised by unequal access to wealth and power, on the basis of physical characteristics. We find in this situation the presence of racial ideologies in one form or the other,

2.4.3 Ethnicity

Looking at ethnicity, it can be said that whereas race is based on popularly perceived physical traits, ethnicity is based on cultural traits. Ethnic group is thus defined as a common group of peoples with a common cultural heritage (learned, not inherited). This group may share a common language, history, national origin, or lifestyle.

The factor of migration on a massive scale in the last century provided sociologists an opportunity to examine the fate of ethnic identities. For example, the Chicago School of Sociologists found that over several generations, ethnic identities were lost and later revised. Gellner (1964 : 163) aptly describes the situation thus : the grandson tries to remember what the son tried to forget. However, sociologists also point out that disappearance of ethnic identities through the process of assimilation is often hampered when the dominant groups do not allow the flow of social benefits to certain groups, deemed to be powerless ethnic minorities. This situation gives rise to ethnic conflicts. All such situations of conflict make the study of social stratification very important and relevant for sociologists.

2.4.4 Sex

Every human being is a man or woman by sex. The part played by an individual in the course of social interaction is called as "role" Men and women play different roles. Sex role is the role played by an individual due to his or her sex. Later there is the development of sex role stereotype. In a male dominated society the men's roles are given a higher status and whatever a woman does is rated as low.

The anatomical differences were for a long time viewed as intimately related

to differences in emotional and intellectual capacities, as well as differences in physical abilities. The tasks and roles assigned to men and women in our own cultural tradition were assumed to be correlated highly with anatomically based aptitudes.

Patriarchy means to serve the interest of the male sex. The sex role division is such that men are for production and women for reproduction. The unpaid, unseen household work is considered lower than the work done by men outside the house. Women are sexually vulnerable; therefore many societies put a lot of restrictions on them and many rituals and taboos are linked to the various biological events in life.

Sociological Theory of Sex Roles

According to a British sociologist Ann Oakley, sex is a biological term and gender is a cultural term. Gender refers to the sex of an individual after socialization.

Oakley argues that division of labour is not universal. She disagrees with Murdock. She regards it as a myth that women are biologically incapable to carry out heavy and demanding work. She also noted that employment of mothers is not detrimental to the children's development. According to her Parson's explanation of woman's "expressive role" and men's instrumental role, is for the convenience of men.

Emile Durkheim one of the founding fathers of sociology, said that in the primitive societies men and women were fairly similar in strength and intelligence and only as civilization progressed new codes evolved which restricted women from working outside home. Thus they became weaker and less intelligent.

The process of socialisation begins the moment a person is born. Sex roles are learned activities as children are socialized into these roles. Thus sex role allocation is a social phenomenon and is in fact learned behaviour. Women for centuries have been socialized into passive roles.

Check your Progress 2

1) Say True or False

- a) Men and women play different roles (T/F)
- b) Gender is a biological term. (T/F)
- c) The process of socialization begins the moment a person is born. (T/F)

2.5 LET US SUM UP

After defining social stratification as a system of social ranking involving relations of superiority and inferiority, we have discussed its three dimensions, namely, class, status and power. Natural inequalities take the

form of social inequalities when the members of society assign some meaning of them. Age, sex, and colour are natural bases of inequalities. But now it becomes the bases of social stratification because society has attached some meanings to them.

2.6 KEY WORDS

Status	: Ranking of groups in a society on basis of their relative position in terms of honour or respect.
Class	: A achievement oriented interest group.
Power	: The capacity of a group or persons to influence decisions in their own way in the group or community.
Ethnicity	: A shared (real or imagined) racial, linguistic or cultural identity of a social group.

Patriarchy : Male headed family and the descent is reckoned in the maleline.

Stereotype ∴ A fixed form, character or image.

2.7 FURTHER READINGS

Beteille, Andre (edt) 1976.Social Inequality.PenguinBooks:London

Tumin,Melvin M.,1969.Social Stratification. Prentice Hall of India: Delhi

2.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The three bases of social stratification are:
 - i) class ii) status iii) power
- 2) Class is an economic category, based on one's income while status group is determined by the social prestige one enjoys.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) a) True
 - b) False
 - c) True

