

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

In all societies people differ from each other on the basis of their age, sex and personal characteristics. Human society is not homogeneous but heterogeneous. Apart from the natural differences, human beings are also differentiated according to socially approved criteria. Society is divided based on economic, social, religious and other aspects. Heterogeneity in society is called social stratification.

Definitions:

Ogburn and Nimkoff: ‘The process by which individuals and groups are ranked in more or less enduring hierarchy of status is known as stratification’

Lundberg: “A stratified society is one marked by inequality, by differences among people that are evaluated by them as being “lower” and “higher”.

Gisbert: “Social stratification is the division of society into permanent groups of categories linked with each other by the relationship of superiority and subordinations”.

Williams: Social Stratification refers to “The ranking of individuals on a scale of superiority-inferiority-equality, according to some commonly accepted basis of valuation.

Raymond W. Murray: Social stratification is horizontal division of society into “higher” and “lower” social units.”

Origin of Stratification:

Regarding the origin of stratification many views have been given.

- According to Davis, social stratification has come into being due to the functional necessity of the social system.
- Professor Sorokin attributed social stratification mainly to inherited difference in environmental conditions.
- According to Karl Marx, social factors are responsible for the emergence of different social strata, i.e. social stratification.

- Gumplovioz and other contended that the origin of social stratification is to be found in the conquest of one group by another.
- According to Spengler, social stratification is founded upon scarcity which is created whenever society differentiates positive in terms of functions and powers.
- Racial differences accompanied by dissimilarity also leads to stratification.

Characteristics of Social Stratification:

On the basis of the analysis of the different definitions given by eminent scholars, social stratification may have the following characteristics.

- a) **Social stratification 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.”
- b) **Stratification 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.
- c) **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.
- d) **It is in diverse forms:** The forms of stratification is 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 Aryas were divided

into four varnas: the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. 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.

- e) **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.

Social Stratification and Social Mobility:

Social mobility refers to the movement within the social structure, from one social position to another. It means a change in social status. All societies provide some opportunity for social mobility. But the societies differ from each other to extent in which individuals can move from one class or status level to another. Thus, people in society continue to move up down the status scale. This movement is called ‘social mobility’. For example, the poor people may become rich, the bank peon may become bank officers, farmers may become ministers, a petty businessman may become a big industrialist and so on. At the same time a big businessman may become a bankrupt and ruling class may be turned out of office and so on.

Kinds of Social Mobility

- (i) **Vertical Mobility** refers to the movement of people of groups from one status to another. It involves change in class, occupation or power. For example, the movement of people from the poor class to the middle class.

- (ii) **Horizontal Mobility** is a change in position without the change in status. It indicates a change in position, within the range of the status. For example, an engineer working in a factory may resign from his job and join another factory.

Functions of Social Stratification

- (i) **Encourage hard work:** it induces 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.
- (ii) **Ensures 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 top, where their ability can best be used.
- (iii) **Serves an economic functions.**
- (iv) **Prevents waste of resources**
- (v) **Stabilize and reinforces the attitudes and skills.**