

# LESSON NO. 1

## SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION, SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

### STRUCTURE

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Men have long dream of an egalitarian society, a society in which all members are equal. In such a society, men will no longer be ranked in terms of prestige or power and there will be no exploitation and oppression. However, the egalitarian society remains a dream. Inequality of power and advantage has been an extremely common feature of human societies, even if the degree of inequality has varied very greatly. Since time immemorial in each and every society, there is some kind of differentiation i.e., division. Even in the hunting and gathering society, there was division in society i.e., stratification in society on the basis of age, sex, etc.

Social differentiation, social inequality and social stratification are closely related to each other. Social differentiation is the process by which social positions such as father, mother, teacher, student, employee, employer, etc. are distinguished from one another whereas social inequality simply refers to

the existence of socially created inequalities or differences present in society. The term stratification is basically a 'geological term which means 'layers'. It was first used in geology to denote the layers of the rocks and now it is used in sociology to denote different layers or divisions of society into various strata or layers. Social stratification is a kind of social differentiation whereby members of society are grouped into strata based upon their occupation, income, wealth and social status. Social stratification is also a particular form of social inequality in which individuals are ranked on the basis of statuses. In the following sections, we will discuss the concepts of social differentiation, social inequality and social stratification.

## 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:-

- Understand the meaning and causes of social differentiation.
- Describe the concept of social inequality and its dimensions.
- Explain the meaning, functions, dysfunctions and characteristics of social stratification.
- Differentiate social stratification from social differentiation and social inequality.

## 1.2 SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Everywhere individuals and societies differ. Differentiation is the keynote of human society. Differences are inherent in the very nature of the society. In all societies, there is social differentiation of the population by age, sex, occupation and personal characteristics.

Social differentiation is the process by which social positions such as father, mother, teacher, student, employee, employer, etc. are distinguished from one another. It assigns to each position a distinctive role, a set of rights and responsibilities. Social differentiation is indispensable for the satisfactory performance of the basic tasks of society. Societies are marked by differentiation. Societies may only differ only in the degree of differentiation and nature of stratification.

The differentiation is always on the basis of a criterion or a set of criteria. The layers in this case are not arranged vertically or hierarchically but horizontally or even separately. Such an arrangement can easily be illustrated in the case of language, religion or nationalities.

### 1.2.1 Causes of Social Differentiation

Talcott Parsons mention three causal factors of social differentiation. These are :-

- (i) **Possession** : It refers to mainly material possession such as wealth, income, property and all the other valuable and utilitarian objects. People do not have access to these possessions. The unequal distribution of these material possessions has contributed to inequality and differentiation.
- (ii) **Qualities** : It refers to the intrinsic capacities or abilities of people to undertake or to do a task. These qualities are also not equally distributed. For example, physical strength, intelligence, courage, loyalty, selflessness and other internal qualities are not equally distributed. People are ranked differently depending upon the degree of possession of these qualities.
- (iii) **Performance** : It refers to the execution of a task in a given time and under a given situation. Performance is always judged. Firstly, according to their products or results and secondly, they are judged according to the manner and style of the performing.

Performances are always subject to regulatory norms. When the norms are violated, performances are often disvalued, regardless of their results.

### 1.2.2 Social Differentiation and Social Stratification

Social differentiation turns into social stratification through :-

- (i) **Differentiation of Statuses** : It is the process to identify and differentiate positions or statuses such as father and mother, to which various roles i.e., responsibilities and rights are assigned.
- (ii) **Ranking** : It is the process to specify and rank or measure the skills that these roles require along with the personal qualities of the people who are to perform them.
- (iii) **Assessment** : It is the process to assess the relative importance of the various roles for the well-being of the society.
- (iv) **Rewarding** : It involves assigning of rewards in the form of property, prestige and power to the status role and in turn to the people who performs them.

Thus, once statuses are differentiated, ranked and evaluated, they are rewarded with varying amount of valued goods and services. Consequently, social stratification arises with unequal distribution of desired and scarce resources among people placed in different layers or stratas.

## 1.3 SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Social inequality simply refers, to the existence of socially created inequalities or differences present in society. It refers to a condition in which some groups possess limited amounts of one or more resources in comparison to a dominant group, which blocks the upward mobility of other groups.

The first sociological explanation of the origin of inequality was given by French philosopher J.J. Rousseau. He said that the emergence of individual property ownership leads to the concept of inequality.

### 1.3.1 Definitions of Social Inequality

Some of the definitions of social inequality are :

- (i) According to Schaffer & Lamm, "the term social inequality describe the condition in which members of a society have different amount of wealth, prestige and power".
- (ii) According to Davis & Moore, "social inequality is an unconsciously evolved device by - which societies ensure that most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons".
- (iii) According to Andre Beiteille, "the idea of hierarchy entails that of inequality. But inequality does not necessarily means hierarchy i.e., rigidity of high and low statuses".

### 1.3.2 Features of Social Inequality

The main features of social inequality are:

- There are mainly two types of inequalities namely:-
  - ▣ Biological or Natural Inequality
  - ▣ Social Inequality

- Many stratification systems are accomplished by the beliefs that Social inequalities are biological inequalities. For example, racial stratification system where whites might claim biological superiority over blacks and see this -as the basis of their dominance.

J.J. Rousseau tried to establish a relation between them. He refers to biological based inequalities as natural or physical because it is established by bodily strength and the qualities of the mind or the soul whereas socially created inequalities consists of different privileges which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others, such as that of being more rich, more honoured, more powerful or even in a position to exact obedience.

Rousseau believed that biologically based inequalities between people are small and relatively unimportant whereas socially created inequalities provide the major basis for the system of social stratification. However, it could still be argued that biological inequalities no matter how small, provide the foundation upon which structures of social inequalities are built. For example, feudal system of medieval Europe.

Biological differences become biological inequalities when people define them as such. Biological factors assume importance in many stratification systems because of the meaning assigned to them by different cultures. For example, old age has very different meaning in different societies. In traditional Australian societies, it brought high prestige and power since the elders directed the affairs of the tribe but in Western societies, the elders are usually pensioned off.

Andre Beteille argues that the search for a biological basis for stratification is bound to end in failure since the qualities are not just there. Thus, to say that in nature, they are as human beings have defined them in different societies in different historical epochs.

- Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality in which individuals are ranked on the basis of statuses.
- It is possible for social inequality to exist without social strata. For example, some sociologists have argued that it is no longer correct to regard Western industrial society particularly USA as being stratified in terms of a class system. They suggest that social classes have been replaced by continuous hierarchy of unequal positions. Where there were once classes, whose members had a consciousness of kind a common way of life and shared interests, there is now an unbroken continuum of occupational statuses which command varying degrees of prestige and economic rewards.
- Sociologists are more concerned with systematic differences between aggregates of individuals and not with inter-personal differences. Inequalities, however, are not of very direct interest to Sociologists. Their interest is in the differences in life chances and life styles among people which result from the different positions they occupy in society- as landowners and labourers, Brahmins and Harijans, etc.
- Inequality is a social fact. Patterns of social inequality vary from one society to another. For example, class structure of American society is different from class structure of Scandinavian countries. Patterns of social inequality change overtime. For example, the class structure of the USA is not the same today as it was at the time of the civil war.
- One or another aspect of inequality is likely to acquire special prominence in a particular society at a given phase of its historical development.

- Social inequality manifest itself in different forms in societies of different kinds.
- Social inequality is universal.

### 1.3.3 Dimensions of Social Inequality

Social inequality can be categorised into various dimensions:

- **Economic** : Inequality of income, occupation and education.
- **Political** : Inequality of power and authority.
- **Status Factor** : Inequality of statuses.

Ralf Dahrendorf conceptualises four types of inequalities as discussed below:

- (i) Natural differences of kinds (Age, Sex, etc.)
- (ii) Natural differences of position (Caste System)
- (iii) Social differentiation of position (Esteem/Prestige)
- (iv) Social differentiation based on reputation and wealth

## 1.4 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The concept of stratification refers to the idea that society is divided into a patterned structure of unequal groups and usually implies that this structure tends to persist across generations. Social stratification is a relatively permanent ranking of statuses and roles in a social system in terms of differential privileges, prestige, influence and power.

All societies are characterised by some degree of social inequality. When a system of social inequality is based on a hierarchy of groups, sociologists refer to it as stratification i.e., a structured ranking of entire groups of people that perpetuates unequal economic rewards. Social inequality simply refers to the existence of socially existed inequalities or differences. Social stratification is a particular form of inequality. It refers to the presence of social groups which are ranked one above the other, usually in terms of the amount of power, prestige and wealth their members possess. These different layers are called strata or levels within a society, each of which is either superior or inferior to others by virtue of the evaluations and rewards which are unequally given. Those who belong to a particular stratum or group will have same awareness of common interests and a common identity.

Social differences become social stratification when people are ranked hierarchically along some dimension of inequality. Members of the various layers or strata tend to have common life chances or lifestyles and may display an awareness of common identity and these characteristics further distinguish them from other strata. It is safe to say that all large complex societies are stratified, although there is some disagreement as to whether the same can be said of all simple or tribal societies.

Inequality exists all around us. May be your mother loves your sister more than you or your brother received a larger allowance than you did. This kind of inequality is not stratification. Inequality becomes stratification when two conditions exist as discussed below :

- Firstly, the inequality is institutionalized backed up by long-standing social norms about what ought to be.
- Secondly, the inequality is based on membership in a status (such as oldest-son or blue-collar worker) rather than on personal attributes.

Stratification is an institutionalized pattern of inequality in which social statuses are ranked on the basis of their access to scarce resources. There are three basic forms of advantages which privileged groups may enjoy. These are :

- **Life Chances** : Life chances are all those material advantages which improve the quality of the life of the recipient including economic advantages and benefits such as health, job security and recreation.
- **Social Status** : This means prestige or high standing in the eyes of the other members of society.
- **Political Influence** : It is the ability of one group to dominate others or to have greater influence over decision-making,

#### **1.4.1 Definitions of Social Stratification**

Social stratification has been defined differently by different thinkers. Some of the important definitions of social stratification are:

- (i) According to T.B. Bottomore, "social stratification is the division of society into classes or strata which form a hierarchy of prestige and power"
- (ii) According to Melvin M. Tumin; "social stratification refers to that condition, where societies are arranged into hierarchies of positions or strata that command unequal amount of property, power and honour".
- (iii) According to Macionis, "social stratification refers to a system by which groups of people in a society are ranked in a hierarchy".
- (iv) According to Anthony Giddens, "stratification can be defined as structured inequalities between different groupings of people".
- (v) According to Schaffer and Lamm, "the term social inequality describe the condition in which members of a society have different amounts of wealth, privileges or power".

#### **1.4.2 Functions of Social Stratification**

The main functions of social stratification in a society are:

- A means of accomplishing essential jobs in society.
- Regulation and control of individual and group relationships and participation.
- It contributes to social integration and structure.

#### **1.4.3 Dysfunctions of Social Stratification**

Social stratification has also many dysfunctions for society as discussed below ;

- Lack of capability and competence to perform necessary roles.
- Essential roles of society are sometimes neglected or made subordinate when status is ascribed not to them but to some other roles that are less important to the essential interests of society.
- Conflict may occur between the upper and lower stratum to share equal rights when stratification system may be weakening.
- Difficulty in conformity.

- Concentration of power by controlling a lower class group that may result in the monopoly of the assets of society for personal gain and benefits at the expense of the dominated class.
- Lacking as each stratum tends to function as a sub-culture.
- Stratification in society can hence impede normal development of personality of members of lower classes so that realization of potential is never achieved.

#### **1.4.4 Characteristics of Social Stratification**

Melvin M. Tumin has mentioned the following characteristics of social stratification :

##### **• It is Social**

Stratification is social - in the sense that it does not represent inequality which are biologically based. It is true that factors such as strength, intelligence, age, sex can often serve as the basis on which status are distinguished. But such differences by themselves are not sufficient to explain why some statuses receive more power, property and prestige than others.

Biological traits do not determine social superiority and inferiority until they are socially recognised. For example, manager of an industry attains a dominant position not by physical strength, nor by his age, but by having socially defined traits. His education, training skills, experience, personality, character etc. are found to be more important than his biological qualities.

##### **• It is Ancient**

The stratification system is very old. Stratification was present even in the small wandering bands. Age and sex wear the main criteria of stratification. Difference between the rich and poor, powerful and humble, freemen and slaves was there in almost ad the ancient civilisation. Ever since the time of Plato and Kautilya social philosopher have been deeply concerned with economic, social, political inequalities.

##### **• It is Universal**

Social stratification is universal. Difference between rich and poor, the 'haves' or 'have notes' is evident everywhere. Even in the non-literate societies stratification is very much present.

##### **• It is in Diverse Forms**

Social stratification has never been uniform in all societies. The ancient Roman society was stratified into two strata: the Patricians and the Ptebians .The Aryan society was divided into four Varnas namely the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Sudras, the ancient Greek society in to freemen and slaves, the ancient Chinese society into mandarins, merchants, Farmer and soldiers. Class and estate seem to be the general forms of stratification found in the modem world.

##### **• It is Consequential**

The stratification system has its own consequences. The most important, **most** desired and often the scarcest things in human life are distributed unequally because of stratification. The system leads to two kind of consequences: (i) Life chances and (ii) Life style.

Life chances refer to such things as infant mortality, longevity, physical and mental illness, marital-conflict, separation and divorce. Life styles include the mode of housing, residential area, education, means of recreation, relation between parent and children, modes of conveyance and so on.

According to Macionis, the main characteristics of social stratification are :

- Social stratification is a characteristic of a society and not simply a function of individual differences.
- Although variable in form, social stratification is universal.
- Social stratification persists/continue over generations.
- Social stratification is supported by patterns of beliefs.

### 1.5 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- Differentiate social differentiation from social stratification.
- Discuss the functions and dysfunctions of social stratification.
- How social inequality is different from natural inequality.

### 1.6 SUMMARY

Stratification is a particular form of social inequality. It refers to the presence of social groups which are ranked one above the other in terms of the power, prestige and wealth their members possess. Those who belong to a particular group or stratum will have some awareness of common interest and common identity. Social differentiation turns into social stratification through differentiation, ranking, evaluation and rewarding of statuses. Social stratification arises with unequal distribution of desired and scarce resources among people placed in different layers. Social differences become social stratification when people are ranked hierarchically along some dimension of inequality. Members of the various layers or strata tend to have common life chances. Thus, social stratification is intricately linked with social differentiation and social inequality.

### 1.7 GLOSSARY

- **Natural Inequality** : Natural inequality stems from differences in age, health or other physical characteristics.
- **Social Differentiation** : Social differentiation is the process by which social positions such as father, mother, teacher, student, employee, employer, etc. are distinguished from one another.
- **Social Inequality** : Unequal sharing of social rewards and resources.
- **Social Stratification** : The division of the members of a society into layers or strata based on such attributes as wealth, power and prestige.

### 1.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- Refer section 1.2.2
- Refer sections 1.4.2 and 1.4.3
- Refer section 1.3.2

### 1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Eisenstadt, S.N. 1971. *Social Differentiation and Stratification*-London: Scott, Foresman & Co.
2. Gupta, Dipankar (ed.). 1991. *Social Stratification*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
3. Haralambus, M. 1998. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.



4. Jackson, J.A. (ed.). 1961. *Social Stratification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Sharma, K L. 1986. *Social Stratification in India*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications.
6. Tumin, M.M. 1978. *Social Stratification*. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India.

#### **1.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

- (i) Define social stratification. Discuss the features of social stratification.
- (ii) What do you understand by social inequality? Elaborate on its features and dimensions.
- (iii) Differentiate between the concepts of social differentiation, social inequality and social stratification.

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## LESSON NO. 2

# FUNCTIONALIST THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: DAVIS & MOORE AND TALCOTT PARSONS

### STRUCTURE

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Theory of Social Stratification: Davis and Moore
  - 2.2.1 Central Arguments of Davis and Moore's Theory of Social Stratification
  - 2.2.2 Criticism of Davis and Moore's Theory of Social Stratification
- 2.3 Theory of Social Stratification: Talcott Parsons
  - 2.3.1 Basic Postulates of Parsons' Theory of Social Stratification
  - 2.3.2 Criticism of Parsons' Theory of Social Stratification
- 2.4 Self Check Exercise
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 2.8 Suggested Readings**
- 2.9 Terminal Questions
- 2.0 INTRODUCTION**

Talcott Parsons and Davis and Moore gave functionalist theory of social stratification. They argue that stratification is integrative and promotes integration and cohesion. Functionalist thinkers believed in integrative role of social stratification. Functionalist theory differ from conflict theories which are based on inequalities due to unequal access to forces of production, power, wealth, etc. and exploitation.

Theory of social stratification is an explanatory generalisation which explains the following arguments :

- Basis of stratification
- Structure of stratification
- Consequences of stratification
- Desirability and universality of stratification

They locate the basis of stratification in performance and argue that rewards are linked to performance. Thus, unequal performance leads to unequal rewards. The functionalist theories ignore structure of stratification. They believe in positive consequences of stratification i.e., strengthening integration. Stratification satisfies need of integration for societies and hence desirable and universal.

## 2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to :

- Explain the conceptual meaning of functional perspective on social stratification.
- Describe the central arguments of Davis and Moore's theory of social stratification.
- Understand the critique of Davis and Moore's theory of social stratification.
- Critically explain the postulates of Talcott Parsons' theory of social stratification.

## 2.2 THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: DAVIS AND MOORE

The functional theory of social stratification was first proposed by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore in their paper titled as "Some Principles of Stratification" published in 'American Sociological Review' in April 1945. This theory, according to Davis & Moore, is an attempt to show the relationship between stratification and the rest of the social order. Starting from the proposition that no society is 'classless' or 'unstratified', an effort is made :-

- to explain, in functional terms, the universal necessity which causes stratification in social system.
- an attempt is made to explain the roughly uniform distribution of prestige as between the major types of positions in every society.
- to explain the varieties of social inequality and the variable factors that give rise to them.

But, it should be kept in mind that this theory relates to the system of the positions only and not to the individuals occupying those positions.

### Functional Necessity of Stratification

In the words of Davis and Moore, "the main functional necessity explaining the universal presence of stratification is precisely the requirement faced by any society of placing and motivating individuals in the social structure".

Thus, the functional necessity for social stratification arises on account of two factors :-

- Each society has a social structure and various positions in which the society needs to place some individuals and
- The task does not end simply with the placement of individuals in certain positions but the society also requires some mechanism through which the individuals are continuously motivated to occupy some positions in the society. It must, thus, concern itself with motivation at two different levels:-
- to instill in the proper individuals the desire to fill certain positions and
- the desire to perform duties attached to them.

In order to keep up the continuous supply of individuals to fill up the positions, it needs continuous motivation. It is irrespective of the type of system i.e., competitive or non-competitive.

### The Two Determinants of Positional Rank

In granting the general function that inequality subserves, one can specify the two factors that determine the relative rank of different positions-. In general, those positions convey the best reward and hence have the highest rank which

- have the highest importance for the society and
- require the greatest training or talent

The first factor concerns function and the second concerns means and is a matter of society.

### **Differential Functional Importance**

Actually a society does not need to reward positions in proportion to their functional importance. If a position is easily filled, it need not be heavily awarded, even though important. On the other hand, if it is important but hard to fill, the reward must be high enough to get it filled anyway. Functional importance is therefore a necessary but not a sufficient cause of high rank being assigned to a position.

### **Differential Scarcity of Personnel**

Practically all positions, no matter how acquired, require some form of skill or capacity for performance. There are, ultimately, only two ways in which a person's qualifications come about through inherent capacity or through training. Some positions require innate talents of such high degree that persons who fill them are bound to be rare. In many cases, however, talent is fairly abundant in the population but the training process is so long, costly and elaborate that relatively few can qualify.

#### **2.2.1 Central Arguments of Davis and Moore's Theory of Social Stratification**

M.M. Tumin argues that the following constitute the central arguments of Davis and Moore's theory of social stratification.

- Certain positions in any society are functionally more important than others and require special skills for their performance.
- Only a limited number of individuals in any society have the talents which can be trained into the skills appropriate to these positions.
- The conversion of talents into skills involves a training period during which sacrifices of one kind or another are made by those undergoing the training.
- In order to induce the talented persons to undergo those sacrifices and acquire the training, their future positions must carry an inducement value in the form of differential i.e., privileged and disproportionate access to the scarce and desired rewards which the society has to offer.
- These scarce and desired goods consists of the rights and pre-requisites attached to or built into the positions and can be classified into those things which contribute to :
  - Sustenance and comfort
  - Humour and diversion and
  - Self-respect and ego expansion
- The differential access to the basic rewards of the society has as, a consequence, the differentiation of the prestige and the esteem which various strata acquire. This may be argued that rights and pre-requisite constitute institutionalized inequality.
- Social inequality is thus an unnecessarily evolved device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons.
- Therefore, social inequality in terms of scarce and desired goods, power and prestige, is inevitable and functional in any society.

## 2.2.2 Criticism of Davis and Moore's Theory of Social Stratification

M.M. Tumin criticises Davis & Moore's theory of social stratification on various counts :-

- Social stratification system functions to limit the possibility of discovery of the full range of talent available in any society. This results from the fact of unequal access to appropriate motivation, channels of recruitment and centres of training
- Social stratification functions to set limit upon the possibility of spending the productive resources of the society.
- Social stratification system functions to provide the elite with the political power necessary to procure acceptance and dominance of an ideology which rationalises the status quo.
- Social stratification system functions to distribute favourable self-images unequally throughout the population which is a necessary requirement for development of the creative and self-potential man. Thus, social stratification limits the development of this creative self-potential.
- Since inequalities in social rewards cannot be made fully acceptable to the less privileged in a society, thus social stratification system encourage hostilities, suspicion and distrust among various segments of society and thereby limiting social integration.
- Since the sense of significant membership depends upon the one's place on the prestige ladder of society, social stratification system functions to distribute unequally the sense of significant membership.
- Since loyalty to a society depends on a sense of significant membership in the society, social stratification system functions to distribute loyalty unequally in the population.
- Since participation depends upon the sense of significant membership in the society, social stratification system functions to distribute the motivation to participate unequally in the population.

In spite of these criticisms by M.M. Tumin, Davis & Moore's theory has still got enough to offer in the study of social stratification in any society. Thus, Davis and Moore's theory is still very useful in the study of social stratification.

## 2.3 THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: TALCOTT PARSONS

Talcott Parsons was a functionalist. He has given functional view on social stratification. According to functional perspective, there are certain functional pre-requisites or certain basic needs which must be met if society is to survive. They therefore look to stratification to see how far it meets these functional pre-requisites. They assume that the parts of society form an integrated whole and thus examine the ways in which the social stratification system is integrated with other parts of society.

Like many functionalists, Talcott Parsons believes that order, stability and co-operation in society are based on value consensus that is a general agreement by members of society concerning what is good and worthwhile. Stratification leads to value consensus. Stratification is result of unequal wealth, power and prestige. Those who perform better with regard to dominant values of society are rewarded better.

### 2.3.1 Basic Postulates of Parsons' Theory of Social Stratification

The basic postulates of Parsons' theory of social stratification are :-

- Parsons argues that social stratification system derive from certain values. It follows from the existence of values that individuals will be evaluated and therefore placed in some form

of rank order. In Parsons' words, "stratification in its valuation aspect, then, is the ranking of units in a social system in accordance with the common value system".

- Those who perform successfully in terms of society's values will be ranked highly and they will be likely to receive a variety of rewards. At a minimum, they will be accorded high prestige since they exemplify and personify common values. For example, if a society places a high value on bravery and generosity, as in the case of Sioux Indians (Tribe of USA), those who excel in terms of these qualities will receive a high rank in the social stratification system.
- Since different societies have different value systems, the ways of attaining a high position will vary from society to society- For example, American society values individual achievement, efficiency and puts primary emphasis on productive activity within the economy.
- Parsons argument suggests that stratification is an inevitable part of all human societies.
- Since value consensus is an essential component of all societies, then it follows that some form of stratification will result from the ranking of individuals in terms of common values. It thus follows from Parsons argument that there is a general belief that stratification systems are just, right and- proper because they are basically an expression of shared values.
- System of co-operation and interdependence extends to the strata in a stratification system and thus serves to integrate various social groups or stratas. For example, it can be argued that many occupational groups within the middle class in western societies, plan, organize and co-ordinate the activities of the working class. Each class needs and cooperates with the other since any large scale task requires both organization and execution.
- Power and prestige differentials are essential for the co-ordination and integration of a specialized division of labour. In societies with a highly specialized division of labour, such as industrial societies, some members will specialize in organization and planning while others will follow their directives. Talcott Parsons argues that this inevitability leads to inequality in terms of power and prestige. This inequality in terms of power and prestige thus become essential for organization.
- Parsons argues that inequalities of power and prestige will suit all members of society since they serve to further collective goals based on shared values.

### **2.3.2 Criticism of Parsons' Theory of Social Stratification**

Parsons' theory was mainly criticized by Marxists. Marxists were pessimistic about the utility of stratification system and its integrative character. According to Marxists, social stratification destabilises society. It brings conflict in society. Social stratification is not based on value consensus but it is based on economic factors. People who are economically rich or haves of society, dominate the society. They own the means of production and distribution and exploit the have not's or dominated individuals.

According to Marxists, social stratification is inevitable because in each and every society, there are people who own the means of production and relations of production and others are people who own only labour power and nothing else. They are consciously exploited. Thus, it is in every society since time immemorial and it is inevitable. But it is not integrative; rather it creates a wedge between different groups. It destabilises the society. Thus, social stratification is not functional.

## 2.4 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Write a short note on the functional necessity of social stratification.
- (ii) Differentiate between the functional and conflict theories of social stratification.
- (iii) Discuss Tumin's critique of Davis and Moore's perspective on social stratification.

## 2.5 SUMMARY

The functional theory of stratification provided by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore and Talcott Parsons suggests that social inequalities are functional for society because they provide an incentive for the most talented individuals to occupy jobs that are essential to the orderly maintenance of a society. However, critics of functional theory suggest that stratification actually undermines the stability within a society due to unequal access to opportunities, the disproportionate amount of power given to elites, and the institutionalization of social distance between diverse members of a society. In spite of these criticisms, this functional perspective on social stratification still is one of the useful and popular theory of stratification.

## 2.6 GLOSSARY

- **Functionalism** : It is a theory that is based on the premise that all aspects of a society serve a purpose and that all are indispensable for the long term survival of the society.
- **Social Inequality** : Unequal sharing of social rewards and resources.
- **Social Stratification** : The division of the members of a society into layers or strata based on such attributes as wealth, power and prestige.
- **Values** : Values are cultural standards that something is good and worthwhile. It defines what is worth having and worth striving for.

## 2.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 2.2
- (ii) Refer section 2.0
- (iii) Refer section 2.2.2

## 2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Eisenstadt, S. N. 1971. *Social Differentiation and Stratification*. London: Scott, Foresman & Co.
2. Gupta, Dipankar (ed.). 1991. *Social Stratification*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
3. Haralambus, M. 1998. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
4. Jackson, J.A. (ed.). 1961. *Social Stratification*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Sharma, K.L. 2010; *Perspectives on Social Stratification*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
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## 2.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Elaborate on the Parsons' functional approach to social stratification.
- (ii) Critically examine the Davis and Moore's functionalist theory of social stratification.
- (iii) Discuss the functional theory of social stratification. Give examples in support of your answer.

## LESSON NO. 3

# CONFLICT THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: MARX AND WEBER

### STRUCTURE

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Theory of Social Stratification: Karl Marx
  - 3.2.1 Theory of Class Struggle
  - 3.2.2 Criticism of Marx's Theory of Social Stratification
- 3.3 Theory of Social Stratification; Max Weber
  - 3.3.1 Weber's Differences with Marx
  - 3.3.2 Weber's Concept of Status
  - 3.3.3 Weber's Concept of Party
- 3.4 Self Check Exercise
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Glossary
- 3.7 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 3.8 Suggested Readings
- 3.9 Terminal Questions

### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

Conflict theorists argue that stratification is dysfunctional and harmful in society. According to conflict theory, social stratification benefits the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor. Thus, it creates a system of winners and losers that is maintained by those who are on the top. The people who are losers do not get a fair chance to compete and thus are stuck on the bottom. Conflict theories of social stratification are based on the premise that stratification leads to classes i.e., deprived and privileged, It leads to social inequality and exploitation of the deprived classes by the privileged classes. So stratification is basically divisive and exploitative. Karl Marx and Max Weber are the primary contributors to the conflict perspective on social stratification. Marx presented one-dimensional approach to social stratification whereas Weber gave three dimensional approach on social stratification.

### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of conflict theories of social stratification.
- Analyse the basic premises of Marx's theory of social stratification.
- Examine the critique of Marx's theory of social stratification.
- Explain the Max Weber's theory of social stratification.



### 3.2 THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: KARL MARX

Marx represents first systematic account of stratification though he was never interested in developing theory of stratification per se. However, he explored inequalities in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and as a basis of it, stratification theory emerged. Except in primitive societies, all other societies are divided into classes based on economic inequality which is most important basis of social inequality. One section accessing forces of production to the exclusion of others leads to economic inequality.

Marx's main focus was to study capitalism in 19<sup>th</sup> century. He did admit that stratification system is complex as there are seven classes in Germany and six in France but he argued that society will eventually get polarized into two classes. Contradiction will turn into conflict only when subjective realisation of objective reality occurs due to homogenisation and organised into polarised class and revolutionary class. Conflict persists as long as classes persist. Classless society will result only when deprived class take over forces of production.

Theory of social stratification is an explanatory generalisation which explains the following arguments :

- Basis of stratification
- Structure of stratification
- Consequences of stratification
- Desirability and universality of stratification

The conflict theory of social stratification addressed the above arguments in the following way :

**Basis of Social Stratification** : Economic inequality and institution of private property.

**Structure of Social Stratification** : Divided between classes mainly due to polarization. Stratification is cumulative in nature when different societal rewards overlap. Those who have wealth enjoy power.

**Consequence of Social Stratification** : Exploitation of deprived class leads to conflict which transformed capitalist society to classless society.

**Desirability of Social Stratification** : Stratification is neither desirable nor universal.

Marxian perspective provides a radical alternative to functionalist view of the nature of social stratification. They regard stratification as a divisive rather than an integrative structure. They see it as a mechanism whereby some exploit others rather than a means of furthering collective goals. They focus on social strata rather than social inequality in general.

From a Marxian perspective, systems of stratification derive from the relationships of social groups to the forces of production. Marx used the term 'class' to refer to the main strata in all stratification systems. From a Marxian view, a class is a social group whose members share same relationship to the forces of production.

Marx believed that western society had developed through four main epochs :

- Primitive Communism
- Ancient Society
- Feudal Society
- Capitalist Society

**Primitive Communism** : Primitive communism is represented by all the societies of pre-history and provides the example of classless societies.

**Ancient Society** : It can be characterized as slave mode of production. In this society, master has right of ownership over the slaves. The slave works on master land and his subsistence in return. The master profit is constituted by the difference between what the slave produces and what he consumes. The slave is deprived of his own means of production.

**Feudal Society** : Feudal society was seen by Marx as intermediate between the slave society of the ancient mode and the capitalist society of modern era. The form of ownership is estate property. This type of society divided into serfs and feudal lords.

**Capitalist Society** : In capitalist society, capital is the dominant means of production. Capitalist society is divided into bourgeoisie and proletariat. The bourgeoisie class owns the forces of production and the proletariat class own their labour which they hire to the bourgeoisie in return for wages.

Thus, in all stratified societies, there are two major social groups namely a ruling class and a subjugated class. During each historical epoch, the labour power required for production was supplied by the subject class, that is by slaves, serfs and wage labourers respectively. The subject class is made up of the majority of the population whereas the ruling or dominant class forms a minority.

### 3.2.1 Theory of Class Struggle

Class struggle is the central theme of the writings of Marx. He wrote, "history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle". Marx believed that except in communistic society, class conflict is inherent in the economic organizations of any society. Marx developed his theory of class conflict in his analysis and critique of the capitalist society. The main ingredients of the theory may be summarised as follows :-

- **Development of Proletariat** : The capitalist economic system transformed the masses of people into workers, created for them a common situation and induced in them an awareness of common interest. Through the development of class consciousness, the economic conditions of capitalism united the masses and constituted them into a class for itself.
- **The Importance of Property** : To Marx, the most distinguishing characteristic of any society is its form of property and the crucial determinant of an individual's behavior is his relation to property. Classes are determined on the basis of individual's relation to the means of production. It is not a man's occupation but his position relative to the instruments of production that determine his class.
- **The Identification of Economic and Political Power**: Although classes are founded on the forces and relations of production, they become socially significant only in the political sphere. Since the capitalist society is based on the concentration of the means of production and distribution in the hands of a few, political power becomes the means by which the ruling class perpetuates its domination and exploitation of the masses.
- **Polarisation of Classes** : Inherent in capitalist society is a tendency towards radical polarization of classes. Society is mainly divided into two classes. The capitalists who own the means of production and distribution and the working classes who own nothing but their own labour. This is not to deny the existence of other classes and Marx indeed referred the

existence of small capitalists, the petit bourgeoisie and the lumpen proletariat. But on maturation of class consciousness and at the height of the conflict, the petit bourgeoisie and small capitalists will be deprived of their property and drawn into the ranks of the proletariat.

- **The Theory of Surplus Value** : Capitalists accumulate profit through the exploitation of labour. Since employers have the monopoly of the instruments of production, they can force workers to do extra hours of work and profits tend to accumulate with increasing exploitation of labour.
- **Pauperisation** : Poverty of the proletariat grows with increasing exploitation of labour. It follows that in every mode of production which involves the exploitation of man by man, the social product is so distributed that the majority of people, the people who labour, are condemned to toil for no more than the barest necessities of life. On the other hand, a minority who owns the means of production, enjoy luxurious life and leisure. Society is divided into rich and poor. Thus, Marx sees poverty as the result of exploitation and not of scarcity.
- **Alienation** : in increasing difficult conditions to work, the worker becomes estranged from himself, from the process as well as the product of his labour, from his fellow men and from the human beings itself.
- **Class Solidarity and Antagonism** : With the growth of class consciousness, the crystallisation of the social relations into two groups becomes streamlined and the classes tend to become internally homogeneous and the class struggle gets more intensified.
- **Revolution** : At the height of the class war, a violent revolution breaks out which destroys the structure of capitalist society. This revolution is most likely to occur at the peak of economic crisis.
- **The Dictatorship of the Proletariat** : The bloody revolution terminates capitalist society and leads to the social dictatorship of the proletariat.
- **Inauguration of the Communist Society** : Socialisation of effective private property will eliminate class and thereby the causes of social conflict. In this type of society, nobody owns anything but everybody owns everything.

This, in a nutshell, is Karl Marx's theory of class struggle.

### 3.2.2 Criticism of Marx's Theory of Social Stratification

Marx's theory of class conflict and his political ideas have been highly criticized. He talks about the inevitable tendency towards polarization and self-destruction which is too simplistic. Further, Marx's analysis of the social classes may be applicable to western societies but not to Asian societies. In spite of these criticisms, Marxian perspective on social stratification is still very important and helpful for understanding causes of stratification.

### 3.3 THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: MAX WEBER

Max Weber like Marx was a German sociologist. Like Marx, Weber sees class in economic terms. He argues that classes develop in market economies in which individuals compete for economic gain. He defines class as a group of individuals who share a similar position in a market economy and by virtue of that fact receive similar economic rewards. Thus, in Weber's terminology, a person's 'class situation' is basically his 'market situation'. Those who share a similar class situation also share similar

life chances. Their economic position will directly affect their chances of obtaining those things defined as desirable in their society like access to higher education and good quality housing.

Like Marx, Weber argues that the major class division is between those who own the forces of production and those who do not. However, Weber sees important differences in the market situation of the property less groups in society. In particular, the various skills and services offered by different occupations have different market values. For example, in capitalist society, managers, administrators and professionals receive relatively high salaries because of the demand for their services.

Weber distinguished the following class groupings in capitalist society :-

- The Propertied Upper Class
- The Propertyless White-Collar Workers
- The Petty Bourgeoisie
- The Manual Working Class

### 3.3.1 Weber's Differences with Marx

Weber agrees with Marx that stratification system is exploitative but he differs from Marx on various other aspects.

**Basis of Social Stratification :** According to Weber, there are three different axes for inequality. Wealth is one besides that there is power and prestige. Along wealth, class based stratification. Class is people in same market situation as it determines life chances (healthcare, lifestyle, education, etc.). Class based stratification exists only in capitalism as only capitalism has market economy. Previous societies had status based societies. Caste system in India is example of status based stratification.

**Structure of Social Stratification :** Trend is towards polarisation of classes. Status differentials are across classes. Class is not a homogeneous class. Status based hierarchy generally overlaps with class based hierarchy. Status groups are highly subjective compared to class groups. Status groups are more aware of their similarities. Class groups may not know who else belong to their class. So status based groups are more close knit than class group. Status is based on prestige associated with lifestyle. Division across power and basis of power lies in party organisation. Members of same class or same status may constitute parties. Sometimes there may be parties which are neither class based nor status based. So who dominate the party may have neither status nor class. He does not disagree with cumulation and says not always it needs to be cumulative.

**Consequence of Social Stratification :** Conflict exists but may not be revolutionary. People may work to rule, sporadic strike or grumble. Weber also disagrees with Marx that there will ever be classless society. At the most, economic inequality may be abolished by abolishing institution of private property but inequality of power and prestige will remain even in communist societies.

In his analysis of class, Weber has parted company with Marx on a number of important issues. These issues are:

- Factors other than 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 return are sufficient to produce different social classes.
- Weber sees no evidence to support the idea of the polarisation of classes. Although, he sees some decline in the number of the petty bourgeoisie, the small property owners, due to

competition from large companies, he argues that they enter white-collar or skilled manual trades rather than being depressed into the ranks of unskilled manual workers. Thus, Weber sees a diversification of classes and an expansion of the white-collar middle class rather than a polarisation.

- Weber rejects the idea, held by some Marxists, of the inevitability of proletariat revolution. He sees no reason why those sharing a similar class situation should necessarily develop a common identity, recognize shared interests and take collective action to further those interests. For example, Weber suggests that the individual manual worker who is dissatisfied with his class situation may respond in a variety of ways. He may grumble, work to rule, sabotage industrial machinery, take strike action or attempt to organize other members of his class in an effort to overthrow capitalism.
- Finally, Weber rejects the Marxian view that political power necessarily 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.

### **3.3.2 Weber's Concept of Status**

While class forms one possible basis for group formation, collective' action and acquisition of political power, Weber argues that there are other bases for these activities. In particular, groups form because their members share a similar 'status situation'.

Whereas class refers to the unequal distribution of economic rewards, status refers to the unequal distribution 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. Unlike classes, members of status groups are almost always aware of their common status situation.

Weber argues that status groups reach their most developed form in the caste system of traditional Hindu society in India. Castes and sub-castes are formed and distinguished largely in terms of social honour. Barriers are set up to social intercourse between status groups, such as the ban on inter-caste marriages. Weber sees status distinctions as the basis of group formation in caste societies.

According to Weber, social honour may be either positive or negative. Positive social honour is where people have high prestige in a given social order. For example, doctors and lawyers have high prestige in British society.

Negative social honour is when people are discriminated from taking advantages of opportunities. For example, Jews in medieval Europe were discriminated.

### **Linkage between Class and Status**

In many societies, class and status situations are closely linked. For example, nouveaux riches (the newly rich) are sometimes excluded from the status groups of the privileged because their tastes, manners and dress are defined as vulgar. Status groups may create divisions within classes.

In a study of Banbury, conducted in the 1950s, Margaret Stacey found that members of the manual working class distinguished three status groups within that class and economic factors influenced their formation.

- a) The respectable working class
- b) The ordinary working class

c) The rough working class

Weber's observation on status groups is 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.

### 3.3.3 Weber's Concept of Party

The presence of different status groups within a single class and of status groups which cut across class divisions can weaken class solidarity and reduce the potential for class consciousness. These points are illustrated by Weber's analysis of 'parties'.

Weber defines 'parties' as groups which are specifically concerned with influencing policies and making interests of their membership. In Weber's words, parties are concerned with the 'acquisition of social power'.

Parties often represent the interests of classes or status groups but not necessarily. Weber argues that parties may represent interests determined through 'class situation' or 'status situation'. In most cases, they are partly class parties and partly status parties but sometimes they are neither. The combination of class and status interests can be seen in the various black organizations in the USA. They represent a status group but they also represent class interests.

Weber's view of parties suggests that the relationship between political groups and class and status groups is far from clear cut. Just as status groups can both divide classes and cut across class boundaries, so parties can divide and cut across both classes and status groups.

### 3.4 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) What do you understand by conflict perspective on social stratification?
- (ii) Give an account of Weber's view on social class.
- (iii) Write a short note on Weber's concept of party?

### 3.5 SUMMARY

Conflict theorists are deeply critical of social stratification, asserting that it benefits only some people, not all of society. Conflict theorists observe that stratification promotes inequality, such as between rich business owners and poor workers. Marx believed social stratification resulted from people's relationship to means of production. Marx attempted to reduce all forms of inequality to class and argued that classes formed the only significant social groups in society. Weber argues that the evidence provides a more complex and diversified picture of social stratification. Weber's analysis of classes, status groups and parties suggest that no single theory can pinpoint and explain their relationship. The interplay of class, status and party in the formation of social groups is complex and variable and must be examined in particular societies during particular time periods.

### 3.6 GLOSSARY

- **Bourgeoisie** : Owners of the means of production in a capitalist society.
- **Capitalism** : It is an economic system in which natural resources and the means of producing goods and services are privately owned.
- **Class Conflict** : Antagonism between social classes over the distribution of wealth and power in society.

- **Conflict Theory** : The conflict theory society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. It holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity.
- **Proletariat** : Workers in a capitalist society who sell their labor in exchange for wages.
- **Social Class** : Grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, power and prestige.

### 3.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 3.0
- (ii) Refer section 3.3
- (iii) Refer section 3.3.3

### 3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Abraham, F. & J.H. Morgan. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. New Delhi: McMillan.
2. Bendix, R & S. M. Upset (eds.). 1970. *Class, Status and Power*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
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### 3.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Critically examine Marx's views on social class and class conflict.
- (ii) How Marxian perspective on social stratification is different from that of Weberian **one** ?
- (iii) Elaborate on the Weber's theory of social stratification in detail.

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## LESSON NO. 4

# SLAVERY AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

### STRUCTURE

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Meaning and Definitions of Slavery
- 4.3 Types of Slavery
- 4.4 History of Slavery
- 4.5 Slavery as a form of Social Stratification
- 4.6 Self Check Exercise
- 4.7 Summary
- 4.8 Glossary
- 4.9 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 4.10 Suggested Readings
- 4.11 Terminal Questions

### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

The division of society into classes or strata, which form a hierarchy of prestige and power, is an almost universal feature of social structure which has, throughout history, attracted the attention of philosophers and social theories. But it is only with the growth of the modern social sciences that it has been subjected to critical study and analysis. Sociologists have commonly distinguished four main types of social stratification; slavery, estates, caste and social class. All societies are stratified, but the criteria used to categorize people vary widely. Social stratification has taken many forms throughout history, including slavery, the estate system, indentured servitude, the caste system, and the class system.

Slavery system is a form of stratification that gives power to some people who can make other people their slave by the amount of money and power. They become other people's property and they were subjected to violence and every kind of ill practice. The people were categorized into two kinds of people i.e., dominant people who ruled over other people and submissive people who were condemned to follow upper class people because of lack of power and self-awareness.

### 4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to :

- Understand the meaning and definitions of slavery.
- Discuss the origin and history of slavery.
- Examine the slavery **as a** form of social stratification.

### 4.2 MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF SLAVERY

Slavery refers to a condition in which individuals are owned by others, who control where they live and at what they work. Thus, slavery is the system by which people are owned by other 'people as



slaves. Slavery is the brutal practice of forcing someone to work hard without paying them a fair wage, sometimes without paying them at all. Slavery had previously existed throughout history, in many times and most places. The ancient Greeks, the Romans, Incas and Aztecs all had slaves.

### **Definitions of Slavery**

Slavery has been defined in different ways by different thinkers. Some of the definitions of slavery are as under :

- (i) L.T. Hobhouse state that slaves become something like non-individual object which does not come under any kind of law and order. Their rights were null and their only duty was to please their dominant master. They cannot elect representative of their own choice and they are forbidden to go out in public. He is seen as unsocial animal and is forced to work at a maximum hour.
- (ii) H.J. hKeboep claimed that the basic reason of slavery is the economic difference between the classes.
- (iii) According to Collins Dictionary, "Slavery is the system by which people are owned by other people as slaves".

### **Conditions of Slave**

Slavery as a system of social stratification was very exploitative. The condition of slaves is very miserable and they suffer on many counts as discussed below :

- Firstly, every slave has his master to whom he is subjected. The master's power over his slave is unlimited. The slave is considered the master's property.
- Secondly, slaves are in lower condition as compared with freemen. The slave has no political rights.
- Thirdly, the idea of compulsory labour is always attached with a slave.

Marxist notion of ancient mode of production is based on the presence of two classes, master and slaves. But above mentioned relationship between slaves and master was considerably modified in medieval period and to larger extent in the modern period. Now a days the term "bonded labour", though declared illegal by all welfare states, explains to certain extent these types of exploitative relationships.

### **4.3 TYPES OF SLAVERY**

Most observers agree that there are five major forms of slavery occurring in the world. Each form represents the basic truths of enslavement: The victims are forced to work involuntarily or are unable to leave once they have started. The enslaved face the threat of physical, mental or emotional punishments and are deceived and abused daily. If a person's labor is exploited by such means, any previous consent to work for the enslaver becomes irrelevant as they are now being held against their will.

Slavery can be classified into various types as discussed below:

- (i) **Chattel Slavery** : It is the most traditional form of slavery where people bound to become master's personal property and now this kind of practice is null and no government takes this system to be legal in any country. Chattel slavery is the most common form of slavery known to Americans. This system, which allowed people-considered legal property- to be

bought, sold and owned forever, was supported by the US and European powers in the 16th to 18th centuries.

- (ii) **Bonded Labour** : This kind of labour was a bond practice which was for some time and not a lifetime imprisonment. For example, if someone took a loan which he fails to pay, then the person pays his debt by becoming labour for some time. It differs from other forms as often the laborer and the employer initially enter into a mutual agreement. However, contract conditions may be illegal and/or vastly more beneficial to the employer than the laborer. These workers become slaves when they continue working, but cannot pay off their initial debt because of exploitative contract terms and, thus, cannot leave.
- (iii) **Forced Labour** : Describes all types of coerced work that an individual must provide against his or her will. Contemporary forced laborers are treated as property to be exploited commercially, much in the same way Afro-Americans were regarded during the antebellum period in American history. People are condemned to work under someone due to their influence or terror against weak people.
- (iv) **Child Slavery** : It describes all child labor obtained from individuals under the age of 18 through the means of force, deception or coercion. Children can be enslaved in debt bondage, forced labor, prostitution, armies, domestic work and other forms of hazardous work. Today, forced child labor exists in nearly every industry around the globe.
- (v) **Domestic Servitude** : Describes slaves that are forced to work in 'extremely hidden workplaces: private homes. Domestic workers become slaves when their employer uses force, fraud or coercion to control or convince an employee that they have no choice but to continue working. Isolating environments, unfamiliar languages, confiscated travel documents and restricted mobility are "often connected to this form of slavery.

Slavery can be called as the highest form of inequality which existed in between the human beings making conditions worse for slave. The abolishment of slavery took place in 1838 and many sociologists work changed the viewpoint of people forcing them to consider an equalitarian society. For a long time, many sociologist and common people saw them in the frame of a victim but C. Wright Mills felt that they were the essential parts of the time whose part was important to bring some changes in the world.

#### 4.4 HISTORY OF SLAVERY

The precise beginning of slavery is difficult to track because its origins predate to historical records. Slavery wasn't a part of hunter-gatherer societies, so the first identifiable evidence of slavery comes from the Code of Hammurabi out of Mesopotamia. This ancient text refers to slavery as a common practice throughout the region which had been in place for thousands of years at the time it was written.

##### **Slavery throughout the Ancient World**

The practice of human slavery grew as the world became more civilized and organized cities and farms were developed. Sumeria is still thought to be the birthplace of slavery, which grew out of Sumer into Greece and other parts of ancient Mesopotamia. The Ancient East, specifically China and India, didn't adopt the practice of slavery until much later, as late as the Qin Dynasty in 221 BC. Historians debate whether or not the practice of slavery in India existed before this time, but many believe argue against its existence as there is no word in ancient Sanskrit that can be translated as "slave".

## **The Middle Ages**

Throughout the Middle Ages, the practice of slavery changed dramatically as global warfare, raiding and conquering spanned across continents. This led to chaos and confusion as the citizens of conquered regions were taken as slaves and transported across many miles to work as slaves for their captors.

### **Slavery in the Americas**

The story of the American slave trade is the first chapter in the history of slavery where most of us already have some familiarity. The first slaves were brought to the Americas in 1619, when 20 men from Africa were brought to Jamestown. Historians are not sure whether this was the true beginning of the legal slave trade in the colonies. Indentured servitude already existed in the region. Roughly 60 years later, via the Royal African Slave Company, records show that the slave trade was booming in the British Colonies and colonists began to acquire slaves in larger numbers. Evidence suggests that the main reason for this dramatic increase was a sharp decline in the availability of indentured servants.

Despite what you likely know about slavery in the Americas, you may not know that the majority of African slaves were concentrated in the Caribbean to work on plantations. European colonies depended on African slaves on the islands to produce their sugar and coffee. Additionally, many African slaves were sold to owners in both Brazil and the Spanish Americas for both field and household work.

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries people were kidnapped from the continent of Africa, forced into slavery in the American colonies and exploited to work as indentured servants and labor in the production of crops such as tobacco and cotton. By the mid-19th century, America's westward expansion and the abolition movement provoked a great debate over slavery that would tear the nation apart in the bloody Civil War. Slaves in the antebellum South constituted about one-third of the southern population. Most slaves lived on large plantations or small farms; many masters owned fewer than 50 slaves.

Slave owners sought to make their slaves completely dependent on them and a system of restrictive codes governed life among slaves. They were usually prohibited from learning to read and write and their behavior and movement was restricted. Many masters took sexual liberties with slave women, and rewarded obedient slave behavior with favors, while rebellious slaves were brutally punished. A strict hierarchy among slaves (from privileged house slaves and skilled artisans down to lowly field hands) helped keep them divided and less likely to organize against their masters. Slave marriages had no legal basis, but slaves did marry and raise large families; most slave owners encouraged this practice, but nonetheless did not usually hesitate to divide slave families by sale or removal. At the time of the American Civil War, there were more than 4 million slaves working in the United States, 95% of whom were in the Southern states.

#### **4.5 SLAVERY AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION**

Slavery is a form of social stratification in which some people own other people. Initially, slavery was based on debt, punishment for violation of the law, or defeat in battle. Gerda Lema notes that women were the first people enslaved through warfare. They were valued, for sexual purposes, reproduction and their labor. Slavery could be temporary or permanent and was not necessarily passed on to one's children."

The first and earliest type of social stratification is slavery. A slave is a person whom custom and legal law considered as the asset and property of another man in the society. The master (owner) possessed the sole and absolute rights over his slave and he could carry out any action with his slave

Just as he could with his property and belongings. A slave was socially, economically and politically despised. Since the slave was deprived of his rights, the concept of slavery might be considered as an extreme form of social inequality. Furthermore, as slavery was more or less connected with compulsory and forced labour the main foundation of this stratum was essentially economic in nature.

In the words of Finley, "Slavery is a system of stratification in which a 'man is in the eyes of the law and of public opinion and with respect to all other parties a possession of another man". Therefore/it is not the attributes or work but the economic fact of being actually possessed and owned that compelled one to be a slave. The status of a slave ranked low by reason of he being owned by others legally, whereas the freeman ranked higher as another man did not possess him.

Consequently, the low rank of slave status was linked to both the economic and power correlation immanent in it. Certainly, the prestige aspect in slave system was inalienable from the power and economic facets pertaining to the position. It was regarded as the most degenerated position to be in, yet it was not believed to evince on the inherent worth of individuals. This is connected to the means in which the positions of slave were filled. The slave system may rest on birth; however, its primary sources were usually prisoners and victims of warfare. Finley says, "the condition of servitude was one which no man, woman or child, regardless of status or wealth, could be sure to escape in case of war or some other unpredictable and uncontrollable emergency". The pre-eminent notion was that slavery was a man-made arrangement, a conventional institution, universally practised.

Typically, slaves owned no property and had no power; however, this was not universally true. To meet the growing need for labor, some colonists tried to enslave Native Americans, but this attempt failed miserably. The colonists then turned to Africans, who were being brought to North and South America by the British, Dutch, English, Portuguese, and Spanish. When American slave owners found that it was profitable to own slaves for life, they developed beliefs to justify what they wanted and to make slavery inheritable. That is, the slaves' children could be sold, bartered or traded.

Slavery in the United States was unique for several reasons. First, it had a fairly equal male-to-female ratio. Slaves also lived longer than in other regions. They often reproduced, and their children were born into slavery. In other countries, slavery was not permanent or hereditary.. Once slaves paid off their debts, they were set free. In the United States, slaves were rarely freed before the Civil War.

The practice of slavery was written into law. Slavery is still practiced in certain parts of the world today. Although their governments have made slavery illegal, the slave trade has been revived in Sudan and Mauritania. The enslavement of children for work and sex is also a problem in Africa, Asia, and South America.

Many sociologists now prefer to treat slavery as an 'industrial system' rather than a system of stratification. There is some justification for this. Slavery divides a community into two distinct sections and within the group of those who are not slaves there may be, and usually is, a system of ranks. Thus, slavery does not by itself constitute a system of stratification. But this view is not entirely convincing due to following reasons.

- Firstly, in feudal society, it may be argued that there is a fundamental distinction between serfs and free men, together with a system of ranks within the latter group.
- Secondly, every system of stratification may be regarded also as an industrial system; as it is, for example, in Marxist theory, where slaves, serfs and wage earners are all categorized as the 'direct producers' upon whose labour the whole social edifice rests.

- Finally, if we examine social stratification in terms of social inequalities, we can legitimately compare and contrast slavery, serfdom, caste and class. It has existed sporadically at many times and places, but there are two major examples of a system of a slavery; (especially Greece and Rome) and the Southern State of the USA in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

H.J. Nieboer gave an excellent account of the social condition of the slave in such a stratification system. He argues :

- Firstly, every slave has his master to whom he is subjected and this subjection is of a peculiar kind. Unlike the authority one freeman sometimes have over another, the master's power over his slave is unlimited, at least in principle because any restriction put upon the master's free exercise of his power is a mitigation of slavery, not belonging to its nature, just as in Roman law the proprietor may do with his property whatever he is not by special laws forbidden to do. The relation between master and slave is therefore properly expressed by the slave being called the master's "possession" or "property", expression we frequently meet with.
- Secondly, slaves are in a lower condition as compared with freeman. The slave has no political rights; he does not choose his government, he does not attend the public councils.
- Thirdly, we always link with slavery the idea of compulsory labour. The slave is compelled to work. The free labourer may leave off working if he likes, be it at the cost of starving. AH compulsory labour, however, is not slave labour as the latter requires that peculiar kind of compulsion, that is expressed by the word "possession" or "property" as has been said before.'

The basis of slavery is always economic. Along with the emergence of slavery, there also appears an aristocracy of some kind, which live upon slave labour. But it is, also, in the opinion of most writers/the inefficiency of slave labour which is responsible for the decline of slavery. However, there is another influence leading to the decline of slavery, which can best be traced in the ancient world. There is always a certain conflict between conception .of the slave as an object of property rights and the conception of him as a human being possessing rights. We find, in both Greece and Rome, with the development of debt-slavery a distinction is made between foreign slaves and slaves originating within the group. In Athens, debt-slavery was prohibited by Solon and ultimately it was abolished in Rome under the influence of the Stoics.

Hobhouse pointed out that 'the formation of debtor-slaves has a certain softening influence upon the institution of slavery itself for while the captive slave remains an enemy in the sight of law and morals. In the ancient world, slavery was gradually modified by progressive limitation of the master's right of punishment, the securing of personal rights of the slave (marriage, acquisition and inheritance of property). The latter was supported and encouraged by the Christian church in the Roman Empire.

#### **4.6 SELF CHECK EXERCISE**

- (i) What do you understand by slavery?
- (it) Write a brief note on types of slavery.
- (iii) Give a brief account of the slavery in America.

## 4.7 SUMMARY

Slavery system is a closed stratification system in which the lowest level has absolutely no control over their social standing. A select group of individuals exercise complete power (and ownership) over an identified group that is offered no access to resources. There is no chance of social mobility of the lowest group. Slavery is a system under which people are treated as property to be bought and sold and are forced to work. Slaves are in lower condition and have no political rights. The legal conditions of slave ownership have varied considerably between different societies. Slavery is an extreme form of inequality. Its basis is economic. It has existed almost in all agrarian societies where slaves become an asset in production.

## 4.8 GLOSSARY

- **Abolitionist Movement** : The abolitionist movement was a social and political push for the immediate emancipation of all slaves and the end of racial discrimination and segregation.
- **Americas** : The two continents of north and south America and the surrounding islands.
- **Colony** : A territory partially or completely controlled by another country and settled by those people.
- **Slavery** : A form of stratification in which people are owned by others as property.
- **Social Stratification**: The division of the members of a society into layers or strata based on such attributes as wealth, power and prestige.

## 4.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

- (i) Refer section 4.2
- (ii) Refer section 4.3
- (iii) Refer section 4.4

## 4.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Bhushan, Vidya and D.R. Sachdeva. 2010. *An Introduction to Sociology*. New Delhi: Kitab Mahal.
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## 4.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Critically explain the slavery as a form of social stratification system.
- (ii) Discuss the evolution of the institution of slavery in the world.
- (iii) Elaborate on the exploitative nature of slavery as a social stratification system.

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## LESSON NO. 5

# CASTE AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

### STRUCTURE

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Meaning and Definitions of Caste System
- 5.3 Origin of Caste System in India
- 5.4 Perspectives on Caste System
  - 5.4.1 G.S. Ghurye's Perspective on Caste System
  - 5.4.2 Louis Dumont's Perspective on Caste System
  - 5.4.3 Mutton's Perspective on Caste System
- 5.5 Functions of Caste System
- 5.6 Demerits of Caste System
- 5.7 Merits of Caste System
- 5.8 Self Check Exercise
- 5.9 Summary
- 5.10 Glossary
- 5.11 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 5.12 Suggested Readings
- 5.13 Terminal Questions

### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

Man have long dreamed of an egalitarian society, a society in which every person will be equal, there will be no inequality and each and every person will get according to his/her needs. In each and every society, there is some kind of division and thus, an egalitarian society is out of question. The term stratification is basically a 'geological' term which means 'layers'. It was first used in geology to denote the layers of the rocks and now it is used in sociology to denote different layers or divisions of society into various strata or layers.

Indian society has long been believed as the most stratified of all the known societies. In Indian social system, caste system is the unique form of social stratification. Caste system exists in Indian society since time immemorial. It would be hard to think of a sociologist and social anthropologist who has worked on Indian social system and has not studied caste system. The uniqueness of this system has attracted sociologists of whole world.

Caste is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a style of life which often includes an occupation, ritual status in a hierarchy and customary social interaction and exclusion based on cultural notions of purity and pollution. Its paradigmatic ethnographic example is the division of India's ancient history and persisting until today. However, the economic

significance of the caste system in India has been declining as a result of urbanization and affirmative action programs. A subject of much scholarship by sociologists and anthropologists, the Hindu caste system is sometimes used as an analogical basis for the study of caste like divisions existing outside Hinduism and India. According to UNICEF and Human Rights Watch, Caste discriminations affect an estimated 250 million people worldwide. In Indian Social system, caste system is the unique form of social stratification. Caste system exists in Indian Society since time immemorial.

## 5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:-

- Understand the meaning and characteristics of caste system as a form of social stratification.
- Explain the origin and functions of caste system.
- Discuss the various perspectives on caste system.
- Know the merits and demerits of caste system.

## 5.2 MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF CASTE SYSTEM

The word 'Caste' owes its origin to the Spanish word 'Casta' which means 'breed', 'race' or 'a complex of hereditary qualities'. The Portuguese applied this term to the classes of people in India known by the name of '*Varna Vyavastha*' or '*Jati vyavastha*'. The English word 'Caste' is an adjustment of the original term. The main objective of this system was to organize the group life at societal level and assign role and statuses to an individual.

### Definitions of Caste

Some of the definitions of caste are :

- (i) According to Arnold Green, "Caste is a system of stratification in which mobility up and down the Status ladder, at least ideally may not occur".
- (ii) According to Herbert Risley, "Class is a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same heredity callings and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous communities".
- (iii) According to Charles Cooley, "When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste".
- (iv) According to E. Blunt, "Caste is an endogamous group bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary, imposing on its member certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse, either following a common traditional occupation or claiming a common origin and generally regarded as forming a single homogenous community".
- (v) According to Maclver and Page, "when status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then class takes the extreme form of caste".

## 5.3 ORIGIN OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Earlier, the caste of a person in India used to define his or her occupation and till death the person had to stick to that occupation. People from upper caste were not allowed to mingle and marry a person from any other caste. Thereby, castes in India were exactly demarcating the society.



Generally, caste system is associated with Hindu religion. As per Rig Veda (early Hindu text) there were four categories known as 'varnas'. Varnas consist of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Most of the historians still believe that today's caste system is based on these varnas. Also there was the fifth category that was even inferior to shudras and that was of 'untouchables' or 'Dalits'. These were the persons who used to perform tasks of removing faeces or dead animals. They were not allowed to enter into temples, drink from the same water source, etc. Untouchability is the most common form of discrimination that is based on the caste system in India. But when and how so many castes originated in India is not clear. Many theories have been put forward regarding the origin of caste system but, so far, no solid proof has been collected in this regard.

### **Traditional Theory**

According to this theory, Brahma, the creator of the universe had created the caste system. Different castes were born out of various body parts of Brahma. Like, from his mouth came the Brahmins, from hands the Kshatriyas, from stomach the Vaishyas and so on. People belonging to different castes then function as per the source of their origin. In ancient India, various sub-castes were born out of these castes and this has received a classical interpretation in the account of Manu. The theory has been criticized for its being a supernatural theory and for its base being just divine.

### **Political Theory**

According to this theory, the Brahmins wanted to have a full control over the society in order to curb and rule them. So, their political interest created a caste system in India. In this theory, caste system is a clever device invented by the Brahmins in order to place themselves at the highest ladder of social hierarchy. Nibey Dubais, a French scholar, originally put forward this theory that was also supported by Indian thinkers such as G.S. Ghurye.

### **Religious Theory**

It is believed that various religious customs had given a birth to the caste system in India. People connected to religion like Kings and Brahmins were given higher positions. Different people used to perform different tasks for the administration of the ruler that later on became the basis of caste system. Along with this, restriction on food habits had led to the development of caste system. Earlier there were no such restrictions on taking food with others as people used to believe their origin was from one ancestor. But as they started worshipping different Gods, their food habits changed. This laid the foundation of caste system in India.

### **Occupational Theory**

Nesfield originally gave the name occupational theory, according to which castes in India developed as per the occupation of a person. Concept of superior and inferior caste also came with this as some persons were doing superior jobs and some were into lower kinds of jobs. All those people who were doing the task of *purohits* were superior and they were the ones who used to do specialized jobs. Superior caste with time grouped into Brahmins. Similarly, other groups were also formed leading to different castes in India.

### **Evolutionary Theory**

Caste system is just like other social institution and developed through the process of evolution. Hutton propounded this theory. The caste system was there in India before Aryans but Aryans made caste system clearer by enforcing this on everybody. In India, there was a fear of touching or coming in

contact with strangers as touching might lead to either good or bad. So people started restraining themselves from others and this gave rise to restrictions regarding eating habits. It is believed that caste system in India is not a result of one individual theory or factor but this is the result of several factors.

## 5.4 PERSPECTIVES ON CASTE SYSTEM

Caste system has been very extensively examined by different thinkers of Indian society. Some of the important perspectives on caste system are discussed as under :

### 5.4.1 G.S. Ghurye's Perspective on Caste System

In the early 1930's, G.S. Ghurye published a book "Caste and Race in India" which still is an important source book on Indian Castes. In this work, he examined the caste system from historical, competitive and integrative perspectives. Later, he made a comparative study of kinship in Indo-European cultures. In his study of kinship and caste, Ghurye emphasised two points :

- (a) the kin and caste networks of India had parallels in some countries also and
- (b) the kinship and caste in India served as integrative frame work.

The evolution of Indian society was based on the integration of diverse racial or ethnic groups through these networks. The Gotra and Charana were kin-categories of Indo-European languages which systematised the rank and status of the people. These categories were derived from names of the sages of the past. These sages were the real or eponymous founders of the gotra and the charana. In India, decent has not always been traced to the blood tie and the lineages are often based on spiritual decent from sages of the past. Outside the kinship we might notice the *guru-shishya* relationship, which is also based on spiritual decent, the disciple is proud to trace his decent from a master. Likewise, caste and sub-caste integrated people into a rank order based on norms of purity pollution. The rules of endogamy and commensality which marked off castes from each other, were in fact integrative instruments to organise them into a totality or collectively. The Hindu religion provided the conceptual and ritualistic guidelines for this integration. The Brahmins in India played a key role in legitimising the caste ranks and order through their interpretation of Dharmashastras, which were the compendia of sacred codes.

### Characteristics of Caste System

According to Ghurye, the following are the main characteristics of caste system :

- **Segmental Division of Society**

Under Caste System society is divided into several small social groups called castes. Each of these castes is a well-developed social group, the membership which is based on birth. Since membership is based on birth, mobility from one caste to another is impossible. Each caste has its own traditional social status, occupations, customs, rules and regulations.

- **Hierarchy**

There is a well-defined stratification in the arrangement of various castes, with Brahmin at the top. Next to Brahmins come Kshatriya, then Vaishyas and then Shudras. As this system is based upon the birth of an individual, change from one caste to another is very difficult. But there are exceptions. In Indian villages this characteristic of caste is still present in its rigid form but in big cities where industries have gripped persons of all caste, into one lot, this rigid form of hierarchical form of caste system is gradually losing its conservation.

- **Restriction of Commensurability and Social Intercourse**

Every caste imposes restrictions on its members with regard to food, drink and social intercourse. There are sets of rules by which a person belonging to caste is forbidden to take food with the members of another caste. There are other sub-rules in which it has been defined that which kind of food can be taken with the other caste. Thus a Brahmin cannot take food cooked with water in a Kshatriyas' house but he can take food prepared and cooked in full ghee. They are also required to observe certain restrictions while accepting water from members of other castes.

- **Differential Civil and Religious Privileges and Disabilities:**

In a caste society, there is an unequal distribution of privileges and disabilities among its members. While the higher caste people enjoy all the privilege, the lower caste people suffer from all kinds of disabilities.

- **Lack of Unrestricted Choice of Occupation**

Choice of occupation is not free under Caste System. Each caste or a group of allied castes is traditionally associated with a particular occupation. Occupations are hereditary and the members of a caste are expected to follow their traditional occupation without fail.

- **Restriction of Marriage**

Castes are divided into sub-castes and each sub-caste is an endogamous group. Endogamy, according to some thinkers is the essence of Caste System. Every caste or sub-caste insists that its members should marry within the group.

#### **5.4.2 Louis Dumont's Perspective on Caste System**

Louis Dumont, the French sociologist, claim that the caste is separate but interdependent hereditary groups of occupational specialist. He postulates that the principle and purity-impurity keeps the segments separate from one another. In this system each *Jati* closes its boundaries to lower *Jati*, refusing them the privileges of inter marriage and other contacts deemed to be polluting. But facts that contradicts the Dumont's theory is that Indian Muslims and Christians also have castes. The 18<sup>th</sup> century German society was divided into princes, nobles; burghers, peasants and serfs between whom no marriage other than morganatic was possible. Korea and Japan also had the practice of untouchability. The Buddhist Dogma about non killing appears to have led to the ostracization of those people whose trades involved hunting, slaughtering animals and so on.

Louis Dumont was primarily concerned with the ideology of the caste system. His approach towards caste system is called attributional approach. For him, caste is a set of relationships of economic, political and kinship system, sustained by certain values which are mostly religious in nature. Dumont says that caste is not a form of stratification but a special form of inequality whose essence has to be deciphered by the sociologists. He identifies hierarchy as the essential value underlying the caste system supported by Hinduism.

According to Dumont, caste divides the whole Indian society into a larger number of hereditary groups distinguished from one another and connected together by three characteristics :

- a) Separations on the bases of rules of the caste in matters of marriage and contact whether direct or indirect.

- b) Interdependence of work or division of labour. Each group is having in theory or by tradition, a profession from which their members can depart only within certain limits.
- c) Gradation of status of hierarchy which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to one another.

Dumont highlights the state of mind which is expressed by the emergence in various situations of castes. He calls caste system as a system of ideas and values which is a formal comprehensible rational system. His analysis is based on a single principle i.e., the opposition of pure and impure. This opposition underlies hierarchy which means superiority of the pure and inferiority of impure. This principle also underlies separation which means pure and impure must be kept separate. According to Dumont, the study of the caste system is useful for the knowledge of India and it is an important task of general sociology. He focused on the need to understand the ideology of caste as reflected in the classical texts and historical examples. He advocated the use of an ideological and structuralist approach to the study of caste system and village social structure in India. Dumont in his "Homo Hierarchicus" has built up a model of Indian civilisation based on non-competitive ritual hierarchal system.

### **Concept of Pure and Impure**

While considering the concept of pure and impure, Dumont had two questions in mind : Why is this distinction applied to hereditary groups? And, if it accounts for the contrast between Brahmins and untouchables, can it account equally for the division of society into a large number of groups, themselves sometimes extremely sub-divided? He did not answer these questions directly. But the opposite has always been two extreme categories i.e., Brahmins and untouchables. The Brahmins, assigned with the priestly functions, occupied the top rank in the social hierarchy and were considered 'pure' as compared to other castes, whereas the untouchables, being 'impure', and segregated outside the village, were not allowed to draw water from the same wells from which the Brahmins did so. Besides this, they did not have any access to Hindu temples, and suffered from various other disabilities. Dumont said that this situation was somewhat changed since the Gandhian agitation and when India attained independence. Untouchability was considered illegal. Gandhi renamed untouchables as 'Harijans' or 'Sons of Hart' that is, creatures of God (Vishnu).

Untouchables are specialized in 'impure' tasks, which lead to the attribution of a massive and permanent impurity to some categories of people. Dumont highlights temporary and permanent impurity. In larger areas of the world, death, birth and other such seclusion of the affected persons, for instance, the newly delivered mother was actually excluded from the church for forty days at the end of which she would present herself carrying a lighted candle and would be met at the church porch by the priest. In India, persons affected by this kind of event are treated as impure for a prescribed period, and Indians themselves identify this impurity with that of the untouchables.

### **5.4.3 Mutton's Perspective on Caste System**

Hutton has made scratching attack on the Brahmanical theory of the origin of caste on two counts. First, it is not possible to accept this theory unless it is confirmed that Brahmins must have got the political power to implement such a scheme. Secondly, such a deep rooted social institution like caste could hardly be imposed by an administrative measure. Of course both the arguments of Hutton appear to be illogical because Kshatriyas have ruled over the land throughout the entire period of history and furthermore imposition of superiority over others by the Brahmins may not be possible through

administrative measure. The best explanation may be the appeal to the religious sentiments of the people.

### **The Theory of Mana**

J.H. Hutton has propounded the theory of 'Mana' in the formation of castes. This has been supported by Roy, Rice and Swart also. 'Mana' is a supernatural power which possesses the capacity to do good or bad to people. The tribals believe that 'Mana' is attached to objects, places and even to individuals. The tribal also believe that this mysterious impersonal power can be transmitted through contact and social intercourse.

Tribal belief in 'Mana' is always accompanied by the belief in value of taboo. Each 'Mana' has its corresponding taboos. Taboos are required to provide protective measures. Taboos' are imposed on commensality, inter-marriage, interaction, etc. to save the members of one tribe from the 'Mana' of the other tribe. Tribals consider the food of the other tribe perilous due to the belief that food and contacts may be infected with the dangerous soul matter of others. Mutton's argument is that caste elements were existent in India before the Aryan invasion.

In his study of certain tribes east of the Naga Hills, Hutton found that in this area each village was an independent political unit and occupations were distributed by villages. Some villagers were adepts in pot-making while people belonging to other villages were weaving cloth. The villages had interdependence on each other through barter system of their products. Hutton suggested that this has probably been the state of affairs throughout pre-Aryan India.

The exogamous clans started migrating from one village to another due to political, social and natural disturbances. The villages also welcomed such migration because it was beneficial for them in respect of the non-availability of particular trade. The migrants were not allowed to practise the profession of the village, where they got settled, because the professions were tabooed.

The tribals believed that if the strangers were allowed to practise the ancestral occupation of the villagers that would displease the ancestors. Since the ancestors were believed to have possessed the 'Mana' they would destroy the crops and fruits of the earth. Hutton has also cited the 'Mana' principles in other religions like Buddhism, where it appears as 'iddhi'. In Islam such beliefs are known as 'Kudrat'. In Hinduism it is analogous to 'Shakti'.

Thus, Hutton has come to the conclusion that the fear of 'Mana' led to the restrictions on occupation, food, drink and marriage, because it is believed that 'Mana' would be transmitted through such contracts. As a result caste system originated.

## **5.5 FUNCTIONS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM**

The functions of caste can be specifically explained on three levels:

- I. Functions at the level of individual
- II. Functions at the level of Society and
- III. Functions for the Caste System itself.

### **I. Functions of Caste for Individual**

The main functions of caste for individual are :

- **Mental security**

In Caste system social status, occupation, selection of marriage partners, etc. are determined by caste. So, the life of an individual is well-channelized. Thus, the individual is saved from mental conflicts which are inevitable outcome of loneliness, uncertainty, and competition.

- **Cooperation and Unity**

Caste provides an individual a sense of belongingness. There is complete cooperation and a give and take relationship among the members of a caste.

## II. Functions for the Society

The strength and stability of a society depends upon the types of institutions it possesses. The social system has to maintain some equilibrium for its operation in the environment. Caste system helps the social system to- maintain its equilibrium and status (sameness). We may look at any institution of Indian Society, we will notice that directly or indirectly it is affected by the caste system. Some of the functions of caste system for society are as :

- **Institution of Marriage**

The sacramental character of Hindu marriage is maintained by many factors and the caste is one of them. The caste consideration is of utmost importance in Hindu marriage. No marriage can be declared to be complete unless the nearer 'Gotras' have been avoided. Even in modern times caste continues to affect the institution of marriage system of Hindu way of life.

- **Economic Functions**

Jajmani system explains the functioning of caste in the village. This system implies that each caste in the village specializes in some occupation and all castes perform these functions in cooperation with each other. The literal meaning of 'Jajmani system' is the relation of master and servant. In the village, there are some castes which monopolize the means of production and upon which other castes are dependent. The caste which owns the means of production gives something in return for the services rendered by some other castes. The payment is made in kind and not in cash. In a nutshell, the Jajmani system is based upon a division of labour and according to Wieser, it is much more efficient in functioning than the modern market system. This is because the element of competition is absent in the Jajmani system.

- **Political Functions**

Caste is a source of some united political action in so far the people belonging to a particular caste, at times, act a political bloc. Politics in India clearly reflects the role of caste and castism. Caste acts as a factor of voting behaviour as well as political participation. Currently, caste panchayats have been becoming more active in some states of India, e.g. Haryana.

- **Religious Functions**

According to Redcliff Brown, the institutions of caste and religion are closely related. He believes that the norms of caste are the norms of religion. Srinivas explains this statement by giving the example of Hinduism as a system. He says that all castes are under the fold of Hinduism and they are governed by the norms of Hinduism directly or indirectly.

## III. Functions of Caste for the Caste System itself

Caste plays an important role in strengthening caste system as discussed below :

- **Continuity and Stability**

Caste cannot increase its membership or ideally speaking it cannot fight for higher status. This is because caste system is based upon Karma theory and ascription of status. That is why the caste system has been able to maintain stability and continuity.

- **Better Organisation**

Caste can act as a separate body to implement its norms. There are some caste bodies like caste panchayats or some associations based upon caste which execute the norms and other means of social control. Therefore, social deviation can be checked by the caste system.

- **Makes Clear the Status of Each Caste**

The social status of each caste can be easily known and the hierarchical system of caste is quite specific and clear.

## 5.6 DEMERITS OF CASTE SYSTEM

Caste system performed some of the very useful services for Hindu Society. But in course of time, some of its aspects became hindrance in the way of social progress. Conservatism of caste system prevented it from keeping pace with the advancement in other spheres of human activities. Dr. Radha Krishnan has rightly stated that the device of caste system has ultimately prevented it from growing. Many other thinkers are of the opinion that the time has come to overthrow the whole caste system. The following are some of the more obvious harms which the caste system is doing to Indian society in its present state of development.

- **Social Disorganisation**

Instead of remaining a uniting force as it was in its past, caste system has become a dividing element in Hindu society. It has divided the Hindus into hundreds and hundreds of sub-caste groups and sects. Enmity and hatred has replaced the feeling of respect and sympathy amongst the members of high and low caste.

This attitude between high and low caste gradually developed into the worst form of untouchability which pushed a major section of population to a state of lower than of an animal. This stratification of society into high and low has cast its shadow on all aspects of Hindu society. Even the top caste Brahmins are divided into the hundreds of sections, each claiming itself to be superior to others. Even in present India, this problem still stands as it was a hundred years ago.

- **Political Disunity**

Caste system divided the whole society into innumerable subdivisions and to unite them politically has become impossible. This national disunity which was the direct outcome of caste system enabled foreigners to conquer and rule over this land without any apparent difficulty. Even after independence we find that caste elements are very active in our society and more after than not, they stand in the way of social welfare.

- **Untouchability**

Caste system was the cause of degradation of a large portion of population of the Hindus. Shudras were and still are treated as sub-humans. Persons of high caste think it necessary to wash themselves if they accidentally touch a *Hahjan*. They were deprived of all social privileges which were available to members of high caste and were forbidden from all of such public places

as temples, ghats, wells and schools etc. Thus, caste system cut nearly crores of persons from the main stream of Indian social life.

- **Despotism of Upper Caste**

The caste system ultimately became an instrument in the hands of upper caste for suppression of the persons of lower caste. That section of population which is called by the common name of Harijans, were deprived of all kinds of property rights, of utilization of villages ponds and the right of self-development. Such treatment of a part of Hindu community by the rest portion weakened the strength of the whole community.

- **Religious Conversions**

Compelled by the tyranny of upper caste, great masses of the tower castes converted their religion and accepted Islam or Christianity and became worst enemies of the Hindus. In Hindu social organisation, cultural sphere is closely interwoven with the religious one. With the growing rigidity of caste system, the religious life of an individual became an adulterated one and so became the whole culture. Each caste and every sub-caste claimed the superiority of its own brand of culture. This fact stood as a veritable obstacle in the way of cultural development of India as a whole.

- **Lower Status of Women**

Caste system is the principal cause of the downtrodden state of Hindu women. By the practice of the maintenance of the- structure, almost every right of a free human being were snatched away from women. They were deprived of education and all directions of their progress were closed. For the sake of caste, they were married before they could differentiate between a doll and a husband. They were not allowed to remarry even if they became widows on the first day of their marriage, instead they were compelled to burn themselves with the dead bodies of their husbands.

- **Denies Mobility of Labour**

It has denied mobility of labour since the individual must follow the caste occupation and cannot change it according to his likes or dislikes. This hinders the economic progress of the country.

- **Retards Solidarity**

It has retarded the growth of solidarity and brotherhood in the Hindu society by rigidly separating one caste from the other and denying any type of social intercourse between them, it has been the source of disintegration of Hindu society.

- **Hindrance in National Unity**

The caste system has been an obstacle to the growth of national unity in the country. It is because man has his first loyalty to his caste than to any other group. The caste system is the antithesis of democracy. Casteism has been the main root of malfunctioning of democratic institutions.

- **Obstacle to Social Progress**

Caste system does not allow changes to be introduced in society. Under the caste system people are very conservative and traditional. They believe in customs and traditions and they do not accept changes needed for social progress.



- **Undemocratic**

The caste system is undemocratic because it denies equal rights to all irrespective of their caste, creed or colour. Social barriers are erected specially in the way of lower caste individuals who are not given opportunity for mental and physical development. Thus, caste system has been undemocratic and created inequality among the Hindus.

## 5.7 MERITS OF CASTE SYSTEM

Caste system has been criticized as the form of social stratification because it is closed system and it exploits the people belonging to the lower rung of society. Still some of the merits of caste system cited by supporters of caste system are :

- **Harmonious Division of Society**

Classification of society is indispensable in every country. In ancient India, such classification existed in a perfect form. The whole society was divided into four classes namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishayas and Shudras. These classes were not rigid and closed. No one was Brahmin by blood nor was any one Shudras by birth. Everyone was free to attain the highest social dignity. The classification was based on some scientific principles namely heredity and economy of labour. Thus, it always preserved the social integration.

- **Caste System as a Constitution of Hindu Society**

The caste system has worked as a constitution of Hindu society. According to some European writers, "it is this principle of Hindu social constitution that has enabled the nation to sustain without being shattered to pieces, that the tremendous stocks given by the numerous political conventions and religious upheavals that have occurred during the last thousand years. Similarly, according to Sir Henry Cotton, "the caste system has rendered most important service in the past and still continues to sustain order and solidarity".

- **A Source for the Evolution of Higher Race**

The constitution of caste comprises certain sanctions and prohibition about marriage. Such laws according to Havell, "were laws of spiritual engines designed to promote the evolution of a higher race".

- **A Source of Stability and Contentment**

Besides the evolution of higher race, caste system has been a fundamental source of social stability. In the words of Sidney Law, caste system is the main cause of stability and contentment by which Indian society has been traced for centuries against the stock of politics *and* the cataclysms of nature. Apart from this, caste system has provided 3 definite professional career to each individual.

## 5.8 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Write a short note on the origin of caste system.
- (ii) Critically discuss Louis Dumont's explanation of caste in terms of purity and pollution.
- (iii) Discuss the demerits of caste system?

## 5.9 SUMMARY

Caste system is a closed stratification system in which people can do little or nothing to change their social standing. A caste system is one in which people are born into their social standing and will

remain in it till their whole lives. People are assigned occupations regardless of their talents, interests, or potential. There are virtually no opportunities to improve a person's social position. The Indian caste system provides an example of a peculiar type of social stratification based on ascription, it is a system of inherited inequality as the guiding principle in social relationships. A caste may be defined as an endogamous group whose members follow by tradition a single occupation, or certain cognate occupations and who are held together by definite social rules of behaviour, and by common ceremonial or ritual observances. The system of caste is based on the assumption that each person is preordained a place and occupation in society at birth. Although the caste system in India has been officially dismantled, its residual presence in Indian society is deeply embedded. In rural areas, aspects of the tradition are more likely to remain, while urban centers show less evidence of this past.

### 5.10 GLOSSARY

- **Caste System** : A system of social stratification based on inherited status or ascription.
- **Endogamy** : A system in which an individual may only marry within the same social category or group.
- **Hierarchy** : A ranking of positions of authority, often associated with a chain of command and control.
- **Jati** : The word for caste which is a region-specific hierarchical ordering of castes that marry within their boundaries, pursue hereditary occupations and are fixed by birth.
- **Mana** : Mana is a supernatural force or power that may be ascribed to persons, spirits, or inanimate objects. Mana may be either good or evil, beneficial or dangerous.
- **Untouchables** : Untouchables are those at the bottom of or falling outside the caste system. In administrative parlance, term "Scheduled Castes" is used while rights activists and the population more generally employ the term "Dalits".
- **Varna** : Literally means 'colour', it is a nation-wide version of the caste system dividing society into four hierarchically ordered varnas or caste groups namely *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*.

### 5.11 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 5.
- (ii) Refer section 5.4.2
- (iii) Refer section 5.6

### 5.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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### 5.13 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Explain the various theories to the study of caste system in India.
- (ii) Critically analyse G.S. Ghurye's perspective on caste system in India.
- (iii) Discuss the caste system as a form of social stratification. Illustrate with the help of examples.

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## LESSON NO. 6

# CLASS AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

### STRUCTURE

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Meaning and Definition of Class
- 6.3 Type of Classes
- 6.4 Determinants of Class
- 6.5 Class as a Form of Stratification
- 6.6 Difference between Caste and Class
- 6.7 Self Check Exercise
- 6.8 Summary
- 6.9 Glossary
- 6.10 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 6.11 Suggested Readings
- 6.12 Terminal Questions

### 6.0 INTRODUCTION

Class is a principle type of social stratification found especially in the modern civilized societies. If the caste system is found to be unique to India, the class system is universal in nature. Class is a group of persons with similar social status in the society. The members of a social class view one another as social equals. They hold themselves to be socially superior to some and socially inferior to others. The member of a particular social class often have the same amount of economic power along with this they also have much the same attitudes, values and way of life. Each class has a set of values, attitudes, beliefs and behavioral norms which differ from those of the other classes. Thus, a social class is an aggregate of people who have same status, rank or common lifestyle.

### 6.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning and definitions of social class.
- Explain the characteristics of class **as a** system of social stratification.
- Know the various determinants of class.
- Differentiate caste from class in Indian context.

### 6.2 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF CLASS

Class as a form of social stratification has been analysed by various thinkers. Some of the definitions of class are :

- (i) Horton and Hunt says, "a social class is defined as stratum of people of similar position in the social status continuum".

- (ii) According to Ogburn and Nimkoff, "a social class is the aggregate of persons having essentially the same social status in a given, society".
- (iii) Maclver and Page says, "a social class is any portion of the community marked off from the rest by social status".
- (iv) Max Weber 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's terminology, a person's class situation is basically his market situation. Those who share a similar class situation also share similar life chances.
- (v) According to Marx, "a class is a group of people who stand in a common relationship to the means of production".

### 6.3 TYPES OF CLASSES

Social class is one of the most important concepts that sociologists discuss and two classical sociologists who are most important in the discussions about class are Karl Marx and Max Weber. Marx argues that there are two classes in the capitalist mode of production i.e., capitalists and workers. Capitalists are the owners of the means of production and the workers owned nothing but their ability to work, what Marx called 'labor power'.

Weber argues that the major class division is between those who own the forces of production and those who do not. Those who have substantial property holdings will receive the highest economic rewards and enjoy superior life chances. However, Weber sees important differences in the market situation of the property less groups in the society in particular the various skills and services offered by different occupation have differing market values. In capitalist society, managers, administrators and professionals receive relatively higher salaries because of the demand for their services. Weber distinguishes the following class grouping in capitalist society :

- The propertied upper class
- The property less white-collar workers
- The petty bourgeoisie
- The manual working class

In contemporary times, social class has often been categorized into three general categories viz., a very wealthy and powerful upper class that owns and controls the means of production; a middle class of professional workers, small business owners and low-level managers and a lower class, which rely on low-paying wage jobs for their livelihood and often experience poverty. These are explained as below:

- (i) **Upper Class** : The upper class is the social class composed of those who are rich, well-born, powerful, or a combination of those. They usually, wield the greatest political power. In some countries, wealth alone is sufficient to allow entry into the upper class. In others, only people who are born or marry into certain aristocratic bloodlines are considered members of the upper class and those who gain great wealth through commercial activity are looked down upon by the aristocracy as nouveau riche. In the United Kingdom, for example, the upper classes are the aristocracy and royalty, with wealth playing a less-important role in class status. However, in the United States where there is no aristocracy or royalty, the upper class status belongs to the extremely wealthy, the so-called "super-rich", though there is some tendency even in the United States for those with old family

wealth to look down on those who have earned their money in business. The members of the upper class are often born into it and are distinguished by immense wealth which is passed from generation to generation in the form of estates.

- (ii) **Middle Class** : The middle class is the most contested of the three categories and is the broad group of people in contemporary society who fall socio-economically between the tower and upper classes. One example of the contest of this term is that in the United States where "middle class" is applied very broadly and includes people who would elsewhere be considered working class Middle-class workers are sometimes called "white-collar workers". Theorists such as Ralf Dahrendorf have noted the tendency toward an enlarged middle class in modern Western societies, particularly in relation to the necessity of an educated work force in technological economies. Perspectives concerning globalization and neo-colonialism, such as dependency theory, suggest this is due to the shift of low-level labour to developing nations and the Third World.
- (iii) **Lower Class** : In the United States the lowest stratum of the working class, the underclass, often lives in urban areas with low-quality civil services. Lower class (occasionally described as working class) are those employed in low-paying wage jobs with very little economic security. The term "lower class" also refers to persons with low income. The working class is sometimes separated into those who are employed but lacking financial security (the "working poor") and an underclass who are long-term unemployed and/or homeless, especially those receiving welfare from the state. The latter is analogous to the Marxist term "lumpen-proletariat". Members of the working class are sometimes called blue-collar workers.

#### 6.4 DETERMINANTS OF CLASS

Social class of an individual can be described on the basis of various indicators. There are various determinants of social class that are discussed as below :

- **Wealth and Income** : Possession of substantial amounts of wealth is the main characteristic distinguishing the upper class from other class groups in society. Persons having more wealth and income generally have higher social position and respect in society. Wealth and income (money), though necessary for upper-class position, yet one's class position is not directly proportional to his income. A criminal has less social status than a professor though may be income is far greater than the professor. In spite of all its weaknesses, wealth and income are an important determinant of social class because of the way of life it.
- **Occupation** : Occupation is an exceedingly important aspect of social class and as such it is another determinant of class status. It is a well-known fact that some kinds of work are more honourable than others like doctors, engineers, administrators, professors and lawyers hold a higher position than a car mechanic or manual worker. The high-prestige occupations generally receive the higher incomes, yet there are many exceptions. Occupation is also one of the best clues to one's way of life and therefore to one's social class membership. It affects many other facets of life (values, beliefs, marital relations) other than determining the social class.
- **Education** : There is a close reciprocal relationship between social class and education. To get a higher education, one needs money plus motivation. Upper-class children already

have money for the finest schools and colleges. They also have family tradition and social encouragement. One's amount and kind of education affects the class rank he will secure. Thus, education is one of the main levers of a man's social class.

- **Prestige** : It refers to the respect and admiration with which an occupation is regarded by society. Prestige is independent of the particular person who occupies a Job. Sociologists have tried to assign prestige rankings to various occupations. Besides wealth, occupation and education, there are certain other criteria which help a person to attain higher social status in the society. These are family background, kinship relations, location of residence, etc. but education, occupation and expanded income are the most visible clues of social class.

## 6.5 CLASS AS A FORM OF STRATIFICATION

Class system characterizes all modern industrial and urban societies. Like caste system, it also reveals a well-defined hierarchical order between different classes. It is a system of stratification in which individual status depends on his achievements. Thus, a class is an open basis of social stratification. Class based stratification of society has following characteristics :

- **Mode of Feeling** : Three kinds of feelings are found among the members of various classes.
  - ▣ There is feeling of equality in relation to members of one's own class.
  - ▣ There is feeling of inferiority in relation to higher class.
  - ▣ There is feeling of superiority in relation to those classes which have a lower status.

Such a feeling gives rise to class consciousness among the members of a particular class and leads to class solidarity.

- **Achieved Status** : Class has an achieved status. Each class earns its status. Class system provides scope for improving one's status. The class of an individual is based on his accomplishments. In other words, the amount of award that an individual gets for his social labour determines his class.
- **It is Universal** : Class system is almost a universal phenomenon. It appears in all modern societies of the world.
- **Element of Prestige** : Class system is associated with prestige. Status is associated with prestige. The status of the ruling class or rich class or a higher status class in every society is superior. The prestige which a class enjoys depends upon evaluations of the people of the society.
- **Open Group** : A class is an open group. Mobility from one class to another or up or down circulation or mobility is possible. There is little or no restriction on social mobility and change of status and class. This feature makes the class very different from caste. In the class system, there is no restriction on marriage outside one's own class.
- **Class Consciousness** : This is the basic feature of a class. It is the sentiment that makes the realization of solidarity with other members of the same class.

## 6.6 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CASTE AND CLASS AS A FORM OF STRATIFICATION

Caste and class are two dominant systems of social stratification. Caste is found in Indian society whereas class based stratification is found in almost all societies. The fundamental points of difference between class and caste are following :

- **Open vs Closed System of Stratification** : Class is more open than caste. Hitter says, "a class system is an open system of rating levels. If a hierarchy becomes closed against vertical mobility, it ceases to be a class system and becomes a caste system". Since class is open and elastic, social mobility becomes easier. A man can by his enterprise and initiative changes his class and thereby rises in social status. If a man is born in a labour class, it is not necessary for him to live in the class for life and die in it. He can strive for money and success in life and with wealth he can change his social status implied in the class distinction.

In case of caste system, it is impossible to change one's caste status. Once a man is born in a caste, he remains in it for his life-time and makes his children suffer the same fate. A caste is thus a closed class. The individual's status is determined by the caste status of his parents, so that what an individual does has little bearing upon his status. On the other hand, the membership of a class does not depend upon hereditary basis rather depends on the worldly achievements of an individual. Thus, class system is an open and flexible system while caste system is a closed and rigid system.

- **Divine vs Secular**: Caste system is believed to have been divinely ordained. Maclver writes, "the rigid demarcation of caste could scarcely be maintained were it not for strong religious persuasions. The hold of religious belief, with its supernatural explanations of caste itself is essential to the continuance of the system". The Hindu caste structure may have arisen out of the subjection or enslavement incidental to conquest and perhaps also out of the subordination of one endogamous community to another. But the power, prestige and pride of race engendered could rise to a caste system, with its social separation of groups that are not in fact set apart by any clear social signs, only as the resulting situation was rationalized and made "eternal by religious myths". It is everybody's religious duty to fulfill his caste duties in accordance with his 'dharma'.

In the *Bhagavact Gita*, the Creator is said to have apportioned the duties and functions of the four castes. An individual must do the duty proper to his caste. Failure to act according to one's caste duties meant birth in a lower caste and finally spiritual annihilation. Men of the lower castes are reborn in higher castes if they have fulfilled their duties." Caste system in India would not have survived for so many centuries if the religious system had not made it sacred and inviolable. On the contrary, there is nothing sacred or of divine origin in the class stratification of society. Classes are secular in origin. They are not founded on religious dogmas.

- **Marriage Rules** : The choice of mates in caste system is generally endogamous. Members have to marry within their own castes. A member marrying outside his caste is treated as outcaste. No such restrictions exist in class system. A wealthy man may marry a poor girl without being outcasts. An educated girl may marry an uneducated partner without being thrown out from the class of teachers. .
- **Class Consciousness** : The feeling of class consciousness is necessary to constitute a class but there is no need for any subjective consciousness in the members of caste.
- **Prestige** : The relative prestige of the different castes is well established but in class system there is no rigidly fixed order of prestige. Recently, the Hon'ble Supreme Court while adjudging the constitutionality of job reservation for the backward classes (OBCs) as



provided under Article 16 (4) of the Indian Constitution has by a majority opinion upheld the criterion of caste as the determinant of a backward class. In its judgment, it has excluded all members of the so called forward classes howsoever economically and educationally backward from the definition of backward classes. It has, thus, equated class with caste.

## 6.7 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) What is an open system of social stratification?
- (ii) What is class consciousness?
- (iii) Discuss the determinants of class.

## 6.8 SUMMARY

Class is one of the most important and significant bases of social stratification in modern complex societies. Class is defined in terms of economic grouping of people. It is affected by economic standing of an individual in the society. The determinants of social classes are income, wealth, occupation, education, achievement criteria and ability of an individual. Thus, classes may be specified as definite entities in terms of difference in wealth, income, property, occupation and education. There may be several distinct classes in a given, society, In sociological usage, the class system is generally interlinked with achievement criteria and open stratification. It is relatively an open system of stratification in which social mobility is permitted.

## 6.9 GLOSSARY

- **Achieved Status** : A social position that someone assumes voluntarily and that reflects personal ability and effort.
- **Bourgeoisie** : Owners of the means of production in a capitalist society.
- **Life Chances** : Likelihood of individuals sharing in the opportunities and benefits of society.
- **Proletariat** : Workers in a capitalist society who sell their labor in exchange for wages.
- **Social Class** : Grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, power and prestige.

## 6.10 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 6.6
- (ii) Refer section 6.5
- (iii) Refer section 6.4

## 6.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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**6.12 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

- (i) What is class? Discuss in detail the Marxian and Weberian concept of class.
- (ii) Critically examine class as a form of social stratification.
- (iii) Differentiate between caste and class as a form of social stratification.

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## LESSON NO. 7

# RACE AND ETHNICITY AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

### STRUCTURE

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Meaning and Definition of Race
- 7.3 Meaning and Definition of Ethnicity
- 7.4 Race in a Global World
  - 7.4.1 Race in Social Science
  - 7.4.2 Race in India
- 7.5 Race and Ethnicity as a form of Social Stratification
- 7.6 Self Check Exercise
- 7.7 Summary
- 7.8 Glossary
- 7.9 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 7.10 Suggested Readings
- 7.11 Terminal Questions

### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

Being different is a construct that we have all somehow somewhere internalized. We learn to be different as we are constantly told in the initial stages of our primary socialization that it is natural to be segregated. Constant reckoning that boys are boys and girls are girls instill an element of gender segregation and awareness of 'self' in terms of notions of 'us' versus 'them'. As one moves through various life cycle processes - construction of categories of 'us' in contrast to 'them' acquires different contours. Cultural contents are added to these reconstructions of 'us' versus 'them'. These reconstructions also often acquire prejudices and voluntary affirmation of stereotypes. It is recognition of these repetitive behavioral patterns and emergent consequences that is instrumental in sociological conceptualization of notions of 'race' and 'ethnicity'.

Societies can be seen as consisting of 'strata' in a hierarchy, with the more favored at the top and less privileged never to the bottom and this phenomenon of dividing society into different strata is known as social stratification. Social stratification in society is done on the basis of caste, class, gender, power, race and ethnicity very often when we talk of social stratification in India we concentrate almost exclusively on the caste system. But social stratification includes a lot more. Caste system, estate system, slavery and ethnicity are the other frame of social stratification.

Racial and ethnic stratification refers systems of inequality in which some fixed groups membership, such as race, religion, or national origin is a major criterion for ranking social positions and their differential rewards. Race is socially defined on the basis of a presumed common genetic heritage resulting in distinguishing physical characteristics. Ethnicity refers to the condition of being culturally

rather than physically distinctive. Ethnic peoples are bound together by virtue of common ancestry and a common cultural background.

## 7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning and definitions of race.
- Discuss the meaning and definitions of ethnicity.
- Analyse the racial classification in world as well as in India.
- Explain the race and ethnicity as a form of social stratification.

## 7.2 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF RACE

Racial minority is one of the two types of minority groups most common in the social world. A race is a group identified by a society because of certain biologically inherited physical characteristics. However, in practice, it is impossible to accurately identify racial types. Most attempts at racial classifications have been based on combinations of appearance, such as skin color and shade, stature, facial features, hair color and texture, head form, nose shape, eye color and shape, height, and blood or gene type. Race, in simple words, is a group or category of persons connected by common origin. Primarily, it was used to refer to common features present because of shared descent.

Pointing out the characteristics of a race in 'What is Race' published by UNESCO, J.S.B. Haldane wrote, "Race is a group which shares in common a certain set of innate physical character and a geographical origin within a certain area". In this way, a race lives in a define geographical area and has some definite innate characteristics. Some of the following definitions will also serve to shed some light on the nature of race.

- (i) A.W. Green says, "a race is a large, biological, human grouping with a number of distinctive, inherited characteristics which vary within a certain range".
- (ii) J. Biesanz and M. Biesanz argues, "a race is a large group of people distinguished by inherited physical differences".
- (iii) Hotrton and Hunt define race "as a group of people somewhat different from other groups in a combination of inherited physical characteristics but race is also substantially determine by popular social definition". -
- (iv) According to L.C. Dunn, "a race in short, a group of related inter-marrying individuals, that is, a population which differ from other population in the relative commonness of certain hereditary traits".
- (v) Sutherland and Woodward says, "a race is a broad association of persons of similar biological heritage, who **are** united in settlement by common cultural traditions and who in time of conflict seek to claim rights to a better social position on the basis of an inherited quality."

## 7.3 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF ETHNICITY

The term 'ethnic' is derived from the Greek word 'ethno' meaning 'nation'. It was originally used to denote primitive tribes or societies that formed a nation on the basis of their simplistic forms of government and economy. Ethnicity pertains to the word ethnic which is distinction of mankind based on

race. Thus, the term ethnic denotes race. Ethnicity is the sense of ethnic diversity which takes about the belongingness of a particular group.

Ethnicity has been defined by various thinkers in their own way. Some important definitions of Ethnicity are as under:

- (i) According to J.M. Yinger, the members of an ethnic group assumed to have a culture which they share exclusively among themselves. Membership of group is believed to be passed on from generation to generation so that biological continuity is an element in the definition of ethnic group.

Yinger's definition brings out the following characteristics of ethnicity :

- That the ethnic group is seen by others as distinct and separate from all those around them in terms of their religion, race, language, country of origin, etc.
  - That the members of the ethnic group themselves see them as distinct or separate in terms of some cultural aspects from all others around them.
  - That the members of the ethnic groups, participate in common activities which they consider to be their very own in order to retain their cultural distinctions.
- (ii) According to Fredrick Barth, "it is a subjective process of status identification". Thus, ethnicity also involves in addition to subjective self-consciousness, a claim to status and recognition either as a superior group or as a group that at least equal to other groups.
  - (iii) According to Anthony Giddens, "ethnicity refers to cultural practices and outlook that distinguish a given community of people. Members of ethnic groups are themselves as culturally distinct from other groups in a society and are seen by those others to be so".
  - (iv) According to Paul Bross, "any group of people Afferent from other people in terms of objective cultural criteria (language, dialect, distinctive, dress or diet or customs, religion or race) and containing within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements of complete division of labor forms an ethnic category".
  - (v) K.S. Singh feels that ethnicity is being increasingly used to denote people with a distinctive set of bio-cultural and bio-social characteristics. Ethnic difference is recognition of contrast between us and them.

#### **7.4 RACE IN A GLOBAL WORLD**

The word 'race' carries with it many meanings that are usually associated with racism e.g. racial profiling, racial inequality, racial discrimination, etc. Many of these terms are connected with the idea of biologically distinct human grouping. However, centuries ago, race originally was used to describe the human race in general as a homogeneous group not as distinct groups. Since 1700s some scientist tried to develop a racial classification system to categorise people according to their race through a process called racialization. For instance, De Gobineau (1816-82) system was based on physical characteristics of people and categories races as :

- Caucasian (White) thought to be more intelligent, superior and moral
- Negroid (Black) thought to be immoral, emotional and
- Mongoloid (Yellow) thought to be immoral, emotional.

In his classification, De Gobineau even questioned the belief that the black and yellow races belong to the same human family as the white race and share a common ancestor. He considered people from Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa as racially mixed. Race science during that time emphasised the racial superiority of the white race. These ideas developed further in Germany under the Nazis. There are similar ideas adopted by Klu Klux Klan in USA, and in the Apartheid system in South Africa. The theory of white supremacy was used as a Justification for social exclusion and murder of others (non-Caucasian). These ideas are clearly not acceptable in our modern society.

#### **7.4.1 Race in Social Science**

Social scientists agree that there is no biological basis to support the idea of race. Especially that race is often used as an ideological base for political inequality. However, many social scientists still disagree on how to deal with the concept of race. There are generally two general views on this regard:

- The concept of race should be dropped all together because its 'ideologically loaded'
- Race still exists in the belief of people in everyday life and this affects how social life is shaped e.g. the social problem of racisms. Therefore, it's important to study race to understand it in more depth.

Historically, determining differences between groups was important in everyday life (e.g. assign identity to people based on tribal or kinship relations and physical characteristics). However, the idea of racialization came to classify groups of people for the purpose of political separation or domination e.g. non-European were racialised as non-white people while African groups in slave trade, Africans in South Africa and Roma groups were socially excluded in Europe based on their race. Racialization is the process by which race becomes meaningful in a particular context. The process of racialization can affect person's life on all levels like education, employment, personal relations, health care, etc.

#### **7.4.2 Race in India**

In case of India, Ristey distinguished seven different 'physical types' in the Indian population in the following way :

##### **(i) The Dravidian Type**

The stature of these people is short or below medium. The complexion is dark, approaching to black. The hair is similarly dark and plentiful with an occasional tendency to curl. The eye colour is also dark. The head is long and the nose is very broad, sometimes depressed at the root. The people of Dravidian type are distributed in the region from Ceylon to the valley of the Ganges covering the southern part of India, which especially includes the Western Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh (Hyderabad), Central India and Chotonagpur. Risley believed these people as original inhabitants of India who are found to be modified at present by the infiltration of the Aryans, the Scythians and the Mongoloids.

##### **(ii) The Indo-Aryan Type**

This type is the most close to the traditional Aryans who colonized India. The people are tall statured with fair complexion, dark eyes and plentiful hair on face and body. They also possess predominant longhead, narrow and long nose. The type is confined to Punjab, Rajasthan and Kashmir where the members are known as the Kashmiri Brahmins, Rajputs, Jats and the Khatris.

##### **(iii) The Mongoloid Type**

The most important characteristic features of this type are broad-head, dark complexion with yellowish tinge and scanty hair on face and body. The stature is usually short or below medium. The

nose shows a wide range of variation, from fine to broad. The people of this type are found along the Himalayan region, especially in the regions namely North East Frontier, Nepal and Burma. The best examples are the Kanets of Lahul and Kulu Valleys, Lepchas of Darjeeling and Sikkim, the Limbus, the Murmis and the Gurungs of Nepal and the Bodo of Assam.

#### **(iv) The Aryo-Dravidian Type**

This type is known as the Hindustani type. Generally the heads of the people are long with a tendency towards medium. The complexion varies from light brown to black. The nose is usually medium, although the broad nose is not uncommon. But in this case, the broad nose is always broader than the nose of Indo-Aryans. Thus, the Aryo-Dravidians is differentiated from the Indo-Aryans. The type is considered as an intermixture of the Aryans and the Dravidians in varying proportions. The people of this type are found in Uttar Pradesh, in some parts of Rajasthan and in Bihar.

#### **(v) The Mongolo-Dravidian Type**

This type is known as the Bengali type. The members of this type are characterized by broad and round heads with a tendency towards medium dark complexion and plentiful hair on face. The nose is usually medium with a tendency towards flatness. The stature is also medium but sometimes short. Such people are found in Bengal and Orissa. The notable representatives of this type are the Bengali Brahmins and Bengali Kayasthas. According to Risley, this type is not only an admixture of the Mongolians and the Dravidians, some blood strains of Indo-Aryan type are also mixed with it.

#### **(vi) The Scytho-Dravidian Type**

The people of this type possess medium to broad head, low to medium stature, fair complexion, and a moderately fine nose, which is not conspicuously long. The hair is scanty on face and body. It is held that the type has been evolved by the intermixture of two distinct racial strains namely the Scythians and the Dravidians. Typical example of this type is found in Western India comprising the Maratha Brahmins, the Kunbis and the Coorgs, who are distributed in the tracts of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra-Gujrat border region upto the Coorg.

#### **(vii) The Turko-Iranian Type**

This type is characterized by broad heads and fine to medium nose, which is long and prominent. The stature is fairly tall although the eyes are dark in colour, grey eyes are not uncommon. Complexion of the people is generally fair; plentiful hair is found on face and body. The type includes the inhabitants of Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Northwest Frontier Provinces (now in Pakistan) who are represented by the Balochis, Brahai, Afghans and some other people of NWFP.

### **7.5 RACE AND ETHNICITY AS A FORM OF STRATIFICATION**

Since the dawning of racism, human beings have passed judgment on each other based on race and ethnicity. The views of people based on their skin color, place of origin, or their cultural background have caused a stratification of men and women. We have majority and minority groups/hate groups, ethnic enclaves, segregation, income differences, and have even experienced mass genocide in our world. All of these are direct effects of a person's race or ethnicity. These all provide humans with a struggle between each other for various resources.

Race is one of the primary lines along which our society is stratified. Race is not biological and that the difference we perceive among people in our society is a social construct. When sociologists use this term, they mean that race is an invention of our society. But, it has very real social consequences.

Racial minorities have much less access to many important resources in our society. One area where we see inequality is wealth and income. Racial minorities have much less wealth than their white counterparts. Racial minorities also tend to earn less income than their white counterparts. Education is another key area of stratification. Blacks are less likely to obtain a high school diploma than their white counterparts.

Race and ethnicity are different. Ethnicity refers to shared membership in a cultural group. Like race, it is also socially constructed. But, like race, ethnicity also has major consequences for people's life chances. We tend to think of ethnic minorities as inferior, which is what result in a system of ethnic stratification. When we speak of ethnic community the emphasis is on the distinct cultural identity of the group. The social definitions of ethnicity like that of class, affect people's place and status in society's stratification system. Ethnicity includes religion, language, kinship, tribe, race and even caste, which all forms the basis for stratification in society.

In many societies ethnicity acts as a basis for unequal distribution of resources. Some groupings, because of their special identity and ethnicity, command a larger share of socially valued group and services than the other correspondingly, others groups because of their different ethnic identities are deprived of many opportunities of life. Ethnic groups, thus because strata or layers in the system of unequal distribution of prestige, property and power in society i.e. social stratification in the social system.

An ethnic group may be considered as stratum in a given system or social stratification. It is possible because ethnicity accompanied with class and power. Ethnicity also considered as an extension of kinship sentiments and hence the synthesis 'of the primordial and the instrumentalists view on ethnicity opines that ethnicity may have a structural basis in several primordial ties like caste, kinship, religion, sect, language, tribe and race and as a social formation of ethnicity played a very important role in the social formation of society.

Ethnicity includes religion, sect, language, kinship, tribe, race, caste and on the basis of these factors people are stratified into different layers in the society. Ethnic consciousness is an indispensable feature of ethnicity. Self-identification is realized by the ethnic consciousness and it is this self-identification which gave rise to the formation of separate stratum for this self-consciousness class in the society and thus leads social stratification in the society.

Ethnicity also involves caste as on the basis of caste, different association participate in political arena as distinct ethnic entities i.e., stratification on the basis of ethnicity in different spheres of life like the political sphere e. g. caste clusters like AJGAR (Ahirs, Jats, Gujars and Rajputs) forwards, backward, Dalits, minorities, etc. have emerged as bigger ethnic blocks in today's politics. Distinction between Hindu-Muslims, native people-outsiders, cultural identities like the Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Gorkhas have also been articulated in ethnic terms i.e., differentiation which is one of the elements of social stratification is done on the basis of ethnic identities. Even the regional identities like Oriya, Tamil, Telugu, Assamese, Marathi and Gujarati are expressed in the ethnic idiom.

Religion, language or cast& may form a sufficient but not necessary reason for ethnic grouping. The contingent economic, political or even cultural interests may be necessary factors for along with the primordial lies as a sufficient base for ethnicization of social relations. Ethnicization has necessarily accentuated by wide range of economic, social and political changes in Indian society

Ethnic division of labor implies that some people work in the subordinate or peripheral sections or position whereas members of some other ethnic groups control assets to the core sections of



economy. As Marwaris and the Panjabis in Bihar have practically monopolized the core section of industry, trade and commerce at the exclusion of the both Biharis and the tribals and other locals. Such a situation besides generating ethnic conflicts also produces an ethnically stratified society commensurate with class stratification. Jaganath Pathy pleads for the development of the tribes of India because they constitute ethnic minorities like any other religious and linguistic minorities.

S.L. Joshi believes that ethnicity imparts continuity and identity to the tribal people. Thus, ethnicity helps them in building their separate class in the society. There is always an interplay between ethnicity and class and also there are multiple identities of some ethnic group. A given ethnic group may have many class identities and within the group class based antagonisms may be expressed frequently. Ethnic identity is based as an instrument for strengthening the demands of ethnic groups and when there is clash between these demands, problems of ethnic identity comes into existence between different strata of society.

## 7.6 SELF-CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) What do you understand by race?
- (ii) Write a brief account on ethnicity.
- (iii) Elaborate on race in the context of India.

## 7.7 SUMMARY

Race is a group of people who are born of common ancestors, possess similar physical traits and a 'we-felling'. Race refers to physical and other characteristics, such as skin colour and intelligence, treated by members of a community or society as socially significant. Many popular beliefs about race are mythical. There are no clear-cut characteristics by means of which human beings can be allocated to different races. Ethnicity refers to shared cultural practices/perspectives and distinctions that set apart one group of people from another. Ethnicity is a shared cultural heritage. The most common characteristics distinguishing various ethnic groups are ancestry, a sense of history, language, religion and forms of dress. Ethnic differences are not inherited but they are learned. In the end, we can say that region, race, caste, sect, language, tribe are all included in the one phenomenon of ethnicity and these are the most important basis of stratification in the society. People differentiate themselves from other group of people on the basis of above factors and thus ethnicity becomes the base for social stratification. So ethnicity is one of the forms of social stratification.

## 7.8 GLOSSARY

- **Discrimination** : Prejudiced action against a group of people.
- **Ethnicity** : Shared culture, which may include heritage, language, religion and more.
- **Racialisation** : Social process by which certain social groups are marked for unequal treatment based on perceived physiological differences.
- **Racism** : Belief that one racial category is innately superior or inferior to another.
- **Stereotypes** : Oversimplified ideas about groups of people.

## 7.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 7.2
- (ii) Refer section 7.3

- (iii) Refer section 7.4.2

### **7.10 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Broom, Leonard; Philip Seiznick and Dorothy Broom Darroch. *Sociology: A Text with Adapted Readings*. 1981. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
2. Giddens, Anthony. 2008. *Sociology*. Delhi: Polity Press.
3. Hawkins, G. 2014. *Contemporary Sociology in a Global Age*. University of London: The London School of Economics and Political Science.
4. Kendall, Diana. 2007. *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials*. Thomson Wadsworth.
5. Mason, David. 2000. *Race and Ethnicity in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6. Sharma, Rajendra K. 2007. *Fundamentals of Sociology*. Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

### **7.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

- (i) Explain race and ethnicity in the context of social stratification.
- (ii) What is ethnicity? Outline the relationship between race and ethnicity.
- (iii) Explain the concept of ethnicity and the manner in which it serves as a basis of stratification in society. Substantiate your answer with an example.

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## LESSON NO. 8

# GENDER AND INEQUALITY

### STRUCTURE

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 Meaning of Gender Inequality
- 8.3 Perspectives on Gender Inequality
  - 8.3.1 Functionalist Perspective on Gender Inequality
  - 8.3.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender Inequality
- 8.4 Gender Inequality in India
- 8.5 Self Check Exercise
- 8.6 Summary
- 8.7 Glossary
- 8.8 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 8.9 Suggested Readings
- 8.10 Terminal Questions

### 8.0 INTRODUCTION

You might think that being a man or woman is simply associated with the sex or with the physical body we are born with. But the nature of maleness and femaleness is not easily classified. To understand this, we need to make an important distinction between sex and gender. In general, sociologists use the term sex to refer to the anatomical and physiological differences that defined male and female bodies. Gender, by contrast, concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity and it is not necessarily a direct product of individual's biological sex. Some people, for example, believe that they have been born into the wrong bodies and seek to "put things right" by switching genders part way through life, or following the lifestyles or dress of other sex. The distinction between sex and gender is a fundamental one, since many differences between males and females are not biological in origin. Contrasting approaches have been taken to explain the formation of gender identities and the social roles based on those identities. The debate among scholars is really one about how much prominence to social influences is given in analysing gender differences.

Sociological interpretation of gender differences and inequalities has taken contrasting positions on this question of sex and gender. Three broad approaches are given. Firstly, we shall look at arguments for biological bases to behavioural differences between man and women. Next, attention will turn to theories placing centre importance on socialisation and the learning of gender roles. Finally, we shall consider the ideas of scholars who believe that both gender and sex have no biological bases but are entirely socially constructed.

Gender Inequalities refers to the obvious or hidden disparities among individuals based on the performance of gender. This problem in simple term is known as Gender Bias which in simple terms

means the gender stratification or making difference between girl and a boy. In India, this problems is mainly seen in the rural areas because many rural people think that the girl child is burden on them. But now this is also being seen in the urban areas i.e., in offices, institutions, school and in society. The afflicted world in which we live is characterised by deeply unequal sharing of the burden of adversities between women and men.

## **8.1 OBJECTIVES**

After going through this lesson, you will be able to;

- Understand the meaning of gender inequality.
- Explain the functional perspective on gender inequality.
- Examine the different strands of feminism in context of prevailing gender inequality.
- Analyse the issues regarding gender inequality in India.

## **8.2 MEANING OF GENDER INEQUALITY**

'Gender' is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviours assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society whereas the term 'sex' is a biological and psychological phenomenon which defines men and women.

There are a lot of ways experts define gender inequality because like most things in life, definition is interpretation. The most straightforward definition identifies gender inequality as "allowing people different opportunities due to perceived differences based solely on issues of gender". Gender inequality can also be defined as "differences in the status, power and prestige women and men have in groups, collectivities, and status". While the first definition focuses on disparities in opportunity, the second highlights disparities in perceptions of gender.

## **8.3 PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER INEQUALITY**

In Sociology, the word gender refers to the socio-cultural characterisation of men and women, the way societies make a distinction between man and women and assign them social roles. The distinction between sex and gender was introduced to deal with the general tendency to attribute women's subordination to their anatomy. For ages, it was believed that the different characteristics, roles and status accorded to women and men in society are determined by sex that they are natural and therefore not changeable. Gender is seen closely related to the roles and behaviour assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences. As soon as child is born families and society begin the process of gendering. The birth of the son is celebrated, the birth of a daughter filled with pain; sons are showered with love, respect, better food and proper health care. Boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing; girls are encouraged to be homebound and shy. All these differences are gender differences and they are created by society. '

Gender inequality is therefore a form of inequality which is distinct from other forms of economic and social inequalities. It dwells not only outside the household but also centrally within it. It stems not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments between women and men but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions.

Gender inequality has adverse impact on development goals as it reduces economic growth. It hampers overall well-being because blocking women from participating in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society. Many developing countries including India have displayed gender inequality in education, employment and health.

Gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. Although the roles of men and women vary from culture to culture, there is no known instance of a society in which females are more powerful than males. Men's roles are generally more highly valued and rewarded than women's role. In almost every culture, women bear the primary responsibilities for child care and domestic work, while men have traditionally borne responsibilities for providing the family livelihood. The prevailing division of labour between the sexes has led to men and women assuming unequal positions in terms of power, prestige and wealth :

Despite the advances that women have made in countries around the world, gender differences continue to serve as the basis for social inequalities. Investigating and accounting for gender inequality has become a central concern of sociologists. Many theoretical perspectives have been advanced to explain men's enduring dominance over women in the realm of economics, politics, the family and elsewhere. In this section, we shall review the main theoretical approaches to explaining the nature of gender inequality at the level of society.

### **8.3.1 Functionalist Perspective on Gender Inequality**

The functionalist approach sees society as a system of interlinked parts which operate smoothly to produce social solidarity. Thus, functionalist perspectives on gender seek to show that gender differences contribute to social stability and integration. While such views once commanded great support, they have been heavily criticised for neglecting social tensions at the expense of consensus and promulgating a conservative view of the social world.

Those who subscribe to the 'natural differences' school of thought tend to argue that the division of labour between men and women is biologically based. Women and men perform those tasks for which they are biologically best suited. Thus, the anthropologist George Murdock saw it as both practical and convenient that women should concentrate on domestic and family responsibilities while men work outside the home. On the basis of a cross-cultural study of more than two hundred societies, Murdock (1949) concluded that a sexual division of labour is present in all cultures. While this is not the result of biological 'programming', it is the most logical basis for the organisation of society.

Talcott Parsons, a leading functionalist thinker, concerned himself with the role of the family in industrial societies. He was particularly interested in the socialisation of children and believed that stable, supportive families are the key to successful socialization. In Parson's view the family operates most efficiently with clear-cut sexual division of labour in which females act in expressive roles, providing care and security to children and offering them emotional support. Men, on the other hand, should perform instrumental roles like being the breadwinner in a family. Because of the stressful nature of this role, women's expressive and nurturing tendencies should also be used to stabilize and comfort men. This complementary division of labour, springing from a biological distinction between the sexes, would ensure the solidarity of the family.

Another functionalist perspective on child-rearing was advanced by John Bowlby (1953), who argued that the mother is crucial to the primary socialization of children. If the mother is absent or if the child is separated from the mother at a young age a state referred to as maternal deprivation the child runs a high risk of being inadequately socialised. This can lead to serious social and psychological difficulties later in life, including anti-social and psychopathic tendencies. Bowlby argued that a child's well-being and mental health can be best guaranteed through a close, personal and continuous relationship with its mother.

### 8.3.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender Inequality

The feminist movement has given rise to a large body of theory which attempts to explain gender inequalities and set forth agendas for overcoming those inequalities. Feminist theories in relation to gender inequality contrast markedly with one another. Competing schools of feminism have sought to explain gender inequalities through a variety of deeply embedded social processes, such as sexism, patriarchy and capitalism. The distinction between the different strands of feminism has never been clear cut, although it provides a useful introduction. Gender inequality has been analysed by different strands of feminism differently as discussed below :

- **Liberal Feminism** : Liberal feminism looks for explanations of gender inequalities in social and cultural attitudes. An important early contribution to liberal feminism came from the English philosopher John Stuart Mill in his essay 'The Subjection of Women' (1869), which called for legal and political equality between the sexes, including the right to vote. Liberal feminists do not see women's subordination as a part of a larger system or structure. Instead they draw attention to many separate factors which contribute to inequalities between man and women. For example, in recent decades liberal feminists have campaigned against sexism and discrimination against women in the work place, education institutions and the media.

Liberal feminists seek to work through the existing system to bring about reforms in a gradual way. In this respect, they are more moderate in their aims and methods than many radical and socialist feminists, who call for an overthrow of the existing system. White liberal feminists have contributed greatly to the advancement of women over the past century, critics charge that they were unsuccessful in dealing with the root causes of gender inequality and do not acknowledge the systemic nature of women's oppression in society.

- **Socialist and Marxist Feminism** : Socialist feminism developed from Marx's conflict theory, although Marx himself had little to say about gender inequality. It has been critical of liberal feminism for its perceived inability to see that there are powerful interests in society hostile to equality for women. Socialist's feminists have sought to defeat both patriarchy and capitalism. It was Marx friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels who did more than Marx to provide an account of gender equality from a Marxist perspective.

Engels argued that under capitalism, material and economic factors underlay women's subservience to man, because patriarchy (like class oppression) has its roots in private property. Engels argues that capitalism intensifies patriarchy by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men. Capitalism intensifies patriarchy more than earlier social systems because it creates enormous wealth compared to previous eras which confers power on men as wage earners as well as possessors and inheritance of property. For the capitalist economy to succeed, it must define people, in particular women, as consumers persuading them that their needs will only be met through ever increasing consumption of goods and products. He argues that capitalism relies on women to labour for free in the home, caring and cleaning. To Engels, capitalism exploited men by paying low wages and women by paying no wages. Payment for housework is an important component of many 'feminists' belief.

Socialists' feminists have argued that the reformist goals of liberal feminism are inadequate. They have called for the restructuring of the family, the end of 'domestic slavery' and the introduction of

some collective means of carrying out child-rearing, caring and household maintenance. Following Marx, many argued that these ends would be achieved through a socialist's revolution, which would produce true equality under a state controlled economy design to meet the needs of all.

**Radical Feminism** : At the heart of radical feminism is the belief that men are responsible for and benefit from the exploitation of women. The analysis of patriarchy is of central concern to this branch of feminism. Patriarchy is viewed **as** universal phenomena that have existed across time and cultures. Radical feminists often concentrate on the family as one of the primary sources of women's oppression in society. They argue that man exploit women by relying on the free domestic labour that woman provide in the home. As a group, men also deny women asses to positions of power and influence in society.

Radical feminists differ in their interpretations of the basis of patriarchy but most agree that it involves the appropriation of women's body and sexuality in some form. Shulamith Firestone (1971), an early radical feminist's writer, argues that men control women's roles on reproduction and child-rearing. Because women are biologically able to give birth to children, they become dependent materially on men for protection and livelihood. This 'biological inequality' is socially organised in the nuclear family. Firestone speaks of a 'sex class' to describe women's social position and argues that women can be emancipated only through the abolition of the family and the power relations which characterize it.

The use of patriarchy as the concept for explaining gender inequality has been popular with many feminists' theorists. In a asserting that 'the personal is political', radical feminists have drawn widespread attention to the many linked dimensions of women's oppression. There emphasises on male violence and the objectifications of women has broad these issues into the heart of mainstream debates about women's subordination. Sylvia Watby has advanced an important reconceptualization of patriarchy. Watby argues that the notion of patriarchy remains a valuable and useful explanatory tool, providing that it is used in certain ways.

#### **8.4 GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA**

The root cause of gender inequality in Indian society lies in its patriarchal system. According to the famous sociologist Sylvia Walby, patriarchy is "a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". Women's exploitation is an age old cultural phenomenon of Indian society. The system of patriarchy finds its validity and sanction in our religious beliefs, whether it is. Hinduism, Islam and any other religion. For instance, as per ancient Hindu law giver Manu, "women are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, they must be under the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son in old age or as widows, in no circumstances she should be allowed to assert herself independently".

The above described position of women as per Manu is still the case in present modern day social structure. Barring few exceptions here and there, women have no power to take independent decisions either inside their homes or in outside world. The unfortunate part of gender inequality in our society is that the women too, through continued socio-culture conditioning, have accepted their subordinate position to men and they are also part and parcel of same patriarchal system.

In India, it is common to find girls and women suffering from high mortality rates. There are vast differences in education level of two sexes. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio-economic and religious practices that resulted in a wide gap between the position of men and women in the society.

The origin of the Indian idea of appropriate female behaviour can be traced to the rules laid down by Manu in 200 B.C. like, "by a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house" or "in childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent".

Women's lives are shaped by customs that are centuries old. "May you be the mother of a hundred sons" is a common Hindu wedding blessing. Statistics reveal that in India male significantly outnumber females and this imbalance has increased over time. The sex ratio according to 2001 census report stands at 933 per 1000 males. Out of the total population, 120 million are women who live in abject poverty. The maternal mortality rate in rural areas is among the world's highest.

From a global perspective, India accounts for 19 per cent of all live births and 27 per cent of all maternal deaths. The deaths of young girls in India exceed those of young boys by over 300,000 each year and every 6<sup>th</sup> infant death is specifically due to gender discrimination. Women face discrimination right from the childhood, Gender disparities in nutrition are evident from infancy to adulthood.

In fact, gender has been the most statistically significant determinant of malnutrition among young children and malnutrition is a frequent, direct and underlying, cause of death among girls below 5. Girls are breast-fed less frequently and for a shorter duration in infancy. In childhood and adulthood, males are fed first and better. Adult women consume approximately 1,000 fewer calories per day than men according to one estimate. Nutritional deprivation has two major consequences for women they never reach their full growth potential, and suffer from anaemia, which are risk factor in pregnancy.

This condition complicates childbearing and results in women and infant deaths, and low birth weight infants. The tradition also requires that women eat last and least throughout their lives even when pregnant and lactating; Malnourished women give birth to malnourished children, perpetuating the cycle. Women receive less healthcare facilities than men.

A primary way that parents discriminate against their girl children is through neglect during illness. As an adult they tend to be less likely to admit that they are sick and may wait until their sickness has progressed far before they seek help or help is sought for them. Many women in rural areas die in childbirth due to easily preventable complications. The Constitution of India ensures gender equality in its preamble as a fundamental right but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women by ways of legislation and policies.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights forums to secure equal rights of women, such as ratification of Convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination among women in 1993. Women have been finding place in local governance structures, overcoming gender biases. Over one million women have been elected to local bodies as Constitution requiring that 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the elected seats to the local governing bodies be reserved for women. The passing of Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technology Act in 1994 also is a step in removing gender discrimination. This Act seeks to end sex-determination tests and female foeticide and prohibits doctors from conducting such procedures for the specific purpose of determining the sex of the foetus. The Government has also drawn up a draft National policy for the empowerment of women which is a policy statement outlining the state's response to problems of gender discrimination.

Gender equality is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance. There is a need for new kinds of institutions, incorporating new norms and rules that support equal and just relations between women and men.



These days' women are organizing themselves to meet the challenges that are hampering their progress.

Some dimensions of gender inequality in India are given as under :

- **Family Code** : The state has fought against child marriage since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the legal age of marriage for girls has been raised continuously from 12 in 1891, 14 in 1929, 15 in 1955 and finally to 18 in 1976. However, a high percentage of women married before the age of 20 shows that the law is not respected.
- **Physical Integrity** : Violence against women is very frequent in India. Statistics show that wives are often the victim of domestic violence. Selective abortions are more and more frequent in India, which explains a high percentage of missing women.
- **Civil Liberties** : Women are not free to move in the village of the North and suffer severe restriction of their movement in the South. In the North, the tradition of the purdah prevails except in large towns. Purdah imposes at the same time the veil and seclusion at home and the wife must ask permission to go the village market or to visit friends.
- **Ownership Rights** : In principle, several laws guarantee that women have access to property, including land. In the North, however, these laws are not respected. On average half the women may not even have access to money (e.g. they must ask their husbands for a small amount of money before going shopping). In these cases, women naturally do not have access to other forms of property as well, including credit. The situation is worse for land ownership which is always restricted to men.

## 8.5 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) What is gender inequality?
- (ii) Differentiate between gender and sex.
- (iii) Discuss gender inequality in the context of India.

## 8.6 SUMMARY

Gender inequality acknowledges that men and women are not equal and that gender affects an individual's lived experience. These differences arise from distinctions in biology, psychology and cultural norms. Gender inequality refers to the differences in status, power and prestige enjoyed by women and men, in various contexts. In explaining gender inequality, functionalists have emphasized that gender differences and the sexual division of labour contribute to social stability and integration. Feminist approaches reject the idea that gender inequality is somehow natural. Liberal feminists have explained gender inequality in terms of social and cultural attitudes, such as sexism and discrimination whereas radical feminists argue that men are responsible for the exploitation of women through patriarchy. Gender inequality is obviously an urgent problem in the world. Despite the fact that its intensity has decreased, it still exists and makes a lot of people suffer its consequences every day.

## 8.7 GLOSSARY

- **Feminism** : Advocacy of social equality for the sexes, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism.
- **Gender** : Socially-constructed roles and responsibilities that societies consider appropriate for men and women.

- **Gender Role** : It refers to learning and performing the socially accepted characteristics for a given sex.
- **Gender Stratification** : A society's unequal distribution of wealth, power and privilege between the two sexes.
- **Patriarchy** : Social organisation that structures the dominance of men over women.
- **Sexism** : Belief that one sex is innately superior to the other.

### 8.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 8.2
- (ii) Refer section 8.0
- (iii) Refer section 8.4

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### 8.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Explain in detail Gender 'as an important form of social stratification.
- (ii) Critically examine the feminist perspective on gender inequality.
- (iii) "For many years studies on stratification were gender blind" Critically discuss.

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## LESSON NO. 9

# CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF CASTE

### STRUCTURE

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 Meaning and Definitions of Caste System
- 9.3 Characteristics of Caste System
- 9.4 Varna and Caste
- 9.5 Changing Dimensions of Caste System
- 9.6 Factors Responsible for Bringing Changes in the Caste System
- 9.7 Self Check Exercise
- 9.8 Summary
- 9.9 Glossary
- 9.10 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 9.11 Suggested Readings
- 9.12 Terminal Questions

### 9.0 INTRODUCTION

Caste is a system of social stratification, which lies at the very root of the social structure of India. By social structure, we mean the persistent pattern of social interaction existing within and among social groups. These patterns of interaction are guided by the normative system of the society. Sociologists have defined caste, locally referred as '*jati*', as a hereditary and endogamous group which is usually localised. It has a traditional association with an occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes.

In Indian social system, caste system is the unique form of social stratification. Caste system exists in Indian society since time immemorial. It would be hard to think of a sociologist and social anthropologist who has worked on Indian social system and has not studied caste system. The uniqueness of this system has attracted sociologists of whole world. Caste is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a style of life which often includes an occupation, ritual status in a hierarchy and customary social interaction and exclusion based on cultural notions of purity and pollution, its paradigmatic ethnographic example is the division of India's ancient history and persisting until today. However, the economic significance of the caste system in India has been declining as a result of urbanization and affirmative action programs. A subject of much scholarship by sociologists and anthropologists, the Hindu caste system is sometimes used as an analogical basis for the study of caste like divisions existing outside Hinduism and India.

### 9.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to :-

- Understand the meaning and characteristics of caste system in India.

- Explain the changes in different dimensions of the caste system in recent times.
- Examine the factors responsible for bringing change in the caste system.

## 9.2 MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF CASTE SYSTEM

The word 'Caste' owes its origin to the Spanish word 'Casta' which means 'bread', race or a complex of hereditary qualities'. The Portuguese applied this term to the classes of people in India known by the name of Varna Vyavastha or 'Jati vyavastha' (system). The English word 'Caste' is an adjustment of the original term. The main objective of this system was to organize the group life at societal level and assign role and statuses to an individual.

### Definitions of Caste

Some of the definitions of caste are :

- According to Arnold Green, "Caste is 3 system of stratification in which mobility up and down the Status ladder, at least ideally may not occur."
- According to Herbert Risley, "Class re a collection of families or group of families bearing a common, name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same heredity callings & regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous communities."
- According to Charles Cooley, "When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste."
- According to Ketekar, "Caste is a social group having two characteristics (a) membership is confined to those who are born of members & includes all persons no born (b) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group."
- According to E. Blunt, "Caste is an endogamous group bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary, imposing on its member certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse, either following a common traditional occupation a claiming a common origin & generally regarded as forming a single homogenous community."
- According to Maclver and Page, "When status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing t, then class takes the extreme form of caste".

## 9.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTE SYSTEM

According to Ghurye, the following are the main characteristics of caste system :

### • Segmental Division of Society

Under Caste System society is divided into several small social groups called castes. Each of these castes is a well-devotoped social group, the membership which is based on birth. Since membership is based on birth, mobility from one caste to another is impossible. Each caste has its own traditional social status, occupations, customs, rules and regulations.

### • Hierarchy

There is a well-defined stratification in the arrangement of various castes, with Brahmin at the top. Next to Brahmins come Kshatriya, then Vaishyas and then Shudras. As this system is based upon the birth of an individual, change from one caste to another is very difficult. But there are

exceptions. In Indian villages this characteristic of caste is still present in its rigid form but in big cities where industries have gripped persons of all caste, into one lot, this rigid form of hierarchical form of caste system is gradually losing its conservation.

- **Restriction of Commensurability and Social Intercourse**

Every caste imposes restrictions on its members with regard to food, drink and social intercourse. There are sets of rules by which a person belonging to caste is forbidden to take food with the members of another caste. There are other sub-rules in which it has been defined that which kind of food can be taken with the other caste. Thus a Brahmin cannot take food cooked with water in a Kshatriyas' house but he can take food prepared and cooked in full ghee. They are also required to observe certain restrictions while accepting water from members of other castes.

- **Differential Civil and Religious Privileges and Disabilities:**

In a caste society, there is an unequal distribution of privileges and disabilities among its members. While the higher caste people enjoy all the privilege, the lower caste people suffer from all kinds of disabilities.

- **Lack of Unrestricted Choice of Occupation**

Choice of occupation is not free under Caste System. Each caste or a group of allied castes is traditionally associated with a particular occupation. Occupations are hereditary and the members of a caste are expected to follow their traditional occupation without fail.

- **Restriction of Marriage**

Castes are divided into sub-castes and each sub-caste is an endogamous group. Endogamy, according to some thinkers is the essence of Caste System. Every caste or sub-caste insists that its members should marry within the group,

## 9.4 VARNA AND CASTE

The caste system is interlinked with the 'Varna' model which divides the Hindu society into four Varnas viz., *Brahman/as* (traditionally priest and scholar), *Kshatriyas* (ruler and soldier), *Vaishyas* (merchant) and *Shudras* (peasant, labourer and servant). The first three castes are 'twice-born' or '*Dvija*' since the men from these castes are entitled to don the sacred thread at the Vedic rite of Upanayana, which the *Shudras* were not allowed to perform. The untouchable castes are outside the Varna scheme.

The term 'Varna' literally means 'colour' and it was originally used to refer to the distinction between '*Arya*' and '*Dasa*' in ancient India. According to the Rig Veda, it was not applied to any classes, such as *Brahman*, *Kshathya*, etc. However, the classes which existed at that time later came to be described as Varna and the original distinction between '*Arya*' and '*Dasa*' gave place to the distinction between *Arya* and *Shudra*. The caste system is an all-India phenomenon of which the Varna model provides an all-India macro-structural scheme, in other words, the Varna model only provides a framework within which the innumerable variations of castes throughout India are found. According to Srinivas, the Varna scheme is a 'hierarchy' in the literal sense of the term because the criteria of ritual purity and pollution are at the basis of this differentiation.

Generally speaking, the higher castes are also the better off castes and the lower castes are generally the lower classes. However, this association between caste and class is not always true. A

caste can be ritually high but ranked lower in the local caste hierarchy because this hierarchy is determined by secular factors like economic, political, educational status also. Thus, one of the most striking features of caste system, as an actual reality has been the vagueness in the hierarchy, especially in the middle rungs.

According to the Varna scheme, there are only four categories. This scheme excludes the untouchables and its number is same throughout India. But this is not true in reality since even during the Vedic period, occupational groups existed which were not subsumed by Varna, although one cannot be sure whether these groups can be called castes or not. According to Ghurye, in each linguistic region, there are about 200 caste groups which are further subdivided into about 3,000 smaller units each of which is endogamous and provides the area of effective social life for the individual.

Therefore, one can say that the Varna scheme refers at the most only to the broad categories of the society and not to the actually existing effective units. Srinivas states that the Varna scheme has certainly distorted the picture of caste but it has also enabled ordinary men and women to understand and assess the general place of a caste within this framework throughout India. It has provided a common social language, which holds good in all parts of India. This sense of familiarity, even when not based on real facts leads to a sense of unity amongst the people. Thus, the Indian society has been full of changes and improvisations. But these changes have been against the background of the Varna hierarchy. It is the Varna frame which remains more or less constant while castes vary from region to region.

## **9.5 CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF CASTE SYSTEM**

Caste system has been changing under the influence of modernization. There are changes in structural, cultural, economic and political dimensions of caste system. Some of the changes seen in caste system are enumerated as below:

- **Decline in the Supremacy of the Brahmins**

There has been a sharp decline in the supremacy of the Brahmins in society. In the past, the Brahmin occupied the topmost position in the caste hierarchy. But today consequent upon the process of modernization the dominance of the Brahmins has been relegated to the background. He does not enjoy the same social status, which he once used to.

- **Changes in the Caste Hierarchy**

The caste system is no longer a clearly demarcated system of hierarchically-ordered caste groups. As a result of certain factors such as occupational diversification, migration to urban areas, mechanization of agriculture, etc. boundaries between caste groups are tending to blur or break down. There is an increasing degree of interpenetration between different groups, classes and categories. A gradual lessening of the congruence between caste, class and power is visible.

- **Protection of the Harijans**

The governmental policy of positive discrimination has gone a long way in improving the socio-economic conditions of the Harijans. Consequently, their social status has improved to a considerable extent.

- **Change in the Fixation of Status**

In a caste society, birth was taken as the exclusive basis of social status. But in the changing social scenario, birth no longer constitutes the basis of social prestige. Criteria such as wealth, ability,

education, efficiency, etc. have become the important determinants of social status. Thus, significance of caste as an a scribe of status has been relegated to the background.

- **Change with Regard to Occupation**

So far as caste system is concerned, the individual had no choice but to follow the occupation ascribed to him by his caste. But today occupation is not the hereditary monopoly of any caste any more. One is free to take up any occupation h& likes according to his ability and interest. Mahatma Gandhi's movement preaching dignity of labour has drawn higher castes towards dirty callings while education has opened white collar occupations for members of lower castes.

- **Changes in Marriage Restrictions**

Under the caste system endogamy was the basis of mate selection. The members of a caste or sub-caste were forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group. But at present the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 have removed endogamic restrictions and declared inter-caste marriages as legally valid. Of late, several factors such as impact of western philosophy, co-education, working together of males and females of different castes in the same factory or office have contributed to an increase in the cases of inter-caste marriage, love-marriage and late-marriage.

- **Change in Commensality**

In the traditional system, the unit of commensality was defined fairly rigidly in terms of caste affiliation. In recent times, there has been a gradual expansion of this unit. Today, Brahmins are inter-dining with 'clean' Shudras. They do not hesitate to take kachha food from other clean castes. Furthermore, they do not hesitate to accept food and water from the members of the lower castes for fulfillment of their political ends.

- **Change in the Concept of Purity and Pollution**

Kapadia stated that the Hindu concept of purity and pollution was very extensive in its scope and mandatory in its observance till the twenties of this century. Under the caste system occupations were ranked in accordance with their ritual purity. For example, a person coming into contact with a barber was supposed to become impure. Meat, fish, wine, etc. were regarded as ritually impure. A menstruating lady was considered impure and as such the food cooked by her was considered impure. In the twenty first century, the importance of these ideas of purity and pollution in Hindu social life has considerably decreased. Religious sanction no more constitutes the basis of pure and impure. The rules of hygiene have formed the criterion of pure and impure at present.

- **Change in the Life Style**

In the past, every caste had its own life style. It was the differences in the styles of life that made the people of different castes appear distinct from one another. But today differences between the life styles of castes are gradually being eliminated and there is a marked tendency towards the evolution of a common style. The standardization of life styles is due to the twin processes of sanskritisation and westernization.

- **Change in Inter-Caste Relations**

Of late, the pattern of inter-caste relations has undergone profound changes. The mutual rights and obligations characterizing inter-caste relations have crumbled down. Members of the low castes no

longer obey the orders of the members of high castes. They do not come forward to perform forced labour for the members of the upper caste. Further, efforts made by the lower castes to rise in the social ladder have annoyed the upper castes. All these factors have led to inter-caste conflicts. Such inter-caste conflicts are gradually increasing. However, these are more for achieving power than on grounds of ritual status.

- **Declining Power of Caste Panchayats**

So far as caste system was concerned, each caste had a caste panchayat. The caste panchayat played the role of a judicial body. But today, 'Jati Panchayats' are on the decline. Law courts and village factions have taken over most of their roles.

- **Restrictions on Education Removed**

Today education is no more confined to the higher castes. Anybody belonging to any caste can prosecute study in educational institutions. Of late, the Government both at the Union and State levels has adopted several measures for the spread of education among the lower castes by way of giving them stipends, scholarships, free study materials, reservation of seats etc.

- **Changes in the System of Power**

The notions of democracy and adult franchise have affected the caste system in several ways. The new political system attacks the very roots of hierarchization. In the past politics was regarded as the sole preserve of the higher castes. But today people belonging to all castes are becoming conscious that they can play an important role in the political processes and can be benefitted from them.

- **Growth of Caste Consciousness**

Castism has increased due to affirmative action. It has affected political issues and political decisions.

- **Emergence of Dominant Caste**

In the 20th century, the phenomena of dominant caste have emerged. It means some caste becomes economically and politically dominant virtually rules over other castes in the region. A caste can become dominant by having the features like :

- large land holding in the area (good economic position)
- politically dominant (becoming a vote bank)
- having a large population
- high ritual status
- English medium education

- **Democratic Decentralisation**

Through the introduction of Panchayati Raj, local self-governments have been created in the villages. In the Panchayat, reservation has been made for the lower castes. This has given an opportunity for the lower castes to occupy power positions and to empower themselves.

- **Caste and Politics**

It is not a new phenomenon since politics is a part of life always. During the Varna vyavastha, Brahmanical supremacy was an example of politics. Today it is said that castes have a close link with politics because castes have become vote banks, castes have become politically aware, there have



been identification of castes with political parties and every caste has its own association. In fact, the link between caste and politics has led to an empowerment among the lower castes. These castes never had any opportunities to express themselves. Today they ventilate their feelings through elections and power lobby.

Dalit politics is one such example, where the Dalits are trying to assert their identities and have become successful in capturing power in various States. However, there are negative aspects of this as well because the high castes always want to maintain their status quo. They are not able to accept the changing dominant position of the lower castes. This has led to frequent conflicts between high castes and low castes in several regions of the country. However, this is only a transitional phase. Better education, mass awareness campaign and good employment opportunities would ensure smooth passage towards a progressive society.

- **Caste and Economy**

Traditionally, it was said that caste system has been functional for the society particularly in the economic sense. It is nothing but the jajmani system. It is a system of traditional occupation for the tower castes, particularly the service caste. The service caste is known as '*Kamms*' and they used to provide service to the higher castes known as '*Jajmans*'. The '*Kamins*' provided specialized skills and services to the '*Jajmans*' and in return they used to get rewards in kind (food grains). The relationship between '*Jajmans*' and '*Kamins*' used to be a permanent and hereditary relationship i.e., after the death of the '*Jajman*', his son used to be a '*Jajman*' and the same principal applied to the '*Kamins*'.

Thus, Jajmani system was a functional relationship in village India. However, due to introduction of market economy and land reforms, the Jajmani system gradually is being eroded. In this manner, caste system has undergone many changes due to the above processes and it has adapted to the new socio-economic condition. In urban areas, today people do not adhere to caste norms. The only aspect where caste comes is that during marriage they still become endogamous. However, as mentioned earlier, some people have adopted to inter-caste marriage and inter-religious marriages.

- **Change with Regard to Occupation**

So far as caste system is concerned, the individual had no choice but to follow the occupation ascribed to him by his caste. But today occupation is not the hereditary monopoly of any caste any more. One is free to take up any occupation he likes according to his ability and interest. Mahatma Gandhi's movement preaching dignity of labour has drawn higher castes to dirty-hand callings while education has opened white-collar occupations for members of tower castes.

## **9.6 FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR BRINGING CHANGES IN THE CASTE SYSTEM**

The caste system is still existing in our society, but it is not as rigid or irrational as once it was. A number of factors are responsible for bringing about changes in the caste system. These factors are explained below:

- **Industrialisation and Urbanisation**

The twin forces of industrialisation and urbanisation have far reaching consequences in our society. The process of urbanization operates at two levels. First, it draws people from villages to urban and industrial centers through the migratory current. Secondly, there is a shift in the occupational sphere from agricultural to non-agricultural pursuits. That apart, urbanization also produces social

heterogeneity, secondary and tertiary occupations, tolerance, secondary control, social mobility, voluntary associations, individuation, spatial segregation, etc.

Industrialisation refers to the processes wherein production of goods with the use of hand tools is replaced by changes in the technology of agriculture, transport and communication and by changes in the organization of trade and finance. The process of industrialization results in specialized division of labour, development of the machine mode of production, concentration of economy and the growth of class system.

Industrialisation and urbanisation, taken together, produce far reaching changes in the socio-economic life of people in the following manner :

- ◆ The ascriptive status loses its importance. In the industrial urban sector the low caste people also holds higher positions and thus people belonging to the high castes work under them and accept the supremacy of the lower castes.
- ◆ In the industrial colonies, the residential accommodation is usually so allotted that there is no distinction between high and low caste people. Thus, they have social intercourse through inter-mixing and inter-dining. This strikes at the roots of caste system.
- ◆ The educational institutions do not impose any restriction on the basis of caste. Children of different castes read in the same school, play together and take part in common prayer.
- ◆ The frequent mixing of a large number of people inside and outside the factory broadens their outlook and develops a rational approach towards the social issues. They also question the validity of caste system itself.
- ◆ Due to modern means of transport and communication, people belonging to all the castes travel in the same public vehicles and railway compartments. The question of the shadow of a person belonging to a low caste defiling a Brahmin or a person of some other high caste has automatically lost its significance. Similar is the situation in the places of work, markets and other public places.
- ◆ Open competitions for getting into jobs in many factories and industries have shown that many a time people belonging to the low castes establish their superiority over the so-called high caste people. Thus, the superiority of wisdom and knowledge claimed by the high castes cannot be maintained.
- ◆ In the industrial urban matrix, the status symbols of both the higher and lower castes change, food habits and dress pattern become more or less uniform and the high caste people do not hesitate to host lunch and-dinner in honour of well-established persons and holders of superior official positions of other castes.

#### ◆ **Westernisation**

The term westernisation was used by Srinivas to describe the changes in the Indian society during the British rule. The changes were observed in the spheres of dress, food habits, style of eating, manners, etc. Westernisation brought very important changes in the field of education by introducing English as the medium of instruction and the introduction of secular subjects of study.

Moreover, the schools were thrown open to all and so people belonging to the lower castes could send their children for study. This came as a blow to the supremacy of the higher castes, especially the

Brahmins, in matters of acquisition of traditional knowledge. By learning English, young men belonging to different caste groups could enter government services and take up jobs in other commercial organizations and banks started by the Britishers.

Thus, westernization also brought occupational changes cutting across the caste barrier. Westernization also resulted in promoting egalitarianism, secularism, rationalism and a critical outlook towards various social issues and problems. All these offer a striking contrast to the traditional belief pattern promoted by the caste system. The most significant impact of westernization on the Indian society was that it promoted a humanitarian outlook among the westernized elites and some of them led the social reform movement against child marriage, taboos against widow remarriage, seclusion of women, untouchability, restrictions on inter-caste marriage, commensality etc. Thus the process of westernization weakened the traditional caste system and brought about a great change in the Indian Society.

#### ◆ **Sanskritisation**

Sanskritisation as a process of change is the mobility concerned with positional change in the caste system. Srinivas defines "Sanskritisation" as the process by which a low Hindu caste or tribal or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently "twice-born" caste. By changing the customs and rituals, people belonging to the low castes claim a 'higher' position in the caste hierarchy. According to Srinivas, "a low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism and by sanskritising its ritual and pantheon".

Regarding the changes in the caste system through Sanskritisation, S.K. Chatterjee holds the view that "the progressive Sanskritisation of the various pre-Aryan people in their culture, their outlook and their ways of life, forms the keynote of India through the ages. In the course of this Sanskritisation, the affected people also brought their own spiritual and material aspects to bear upon the Sanskrit and sanskritic culture which they were adopting and thus helped them to modify and enrich it in their own circle".

Sanskritisation is an illustration of the operation of the "reference group" process which is used to evaluate one's attitudes, customs, rituals, etc. depending on the prestige of that group in a particular society. Therefore, Srinivas remarks, "the best way of staking a claim to higher position is to adopt the customs and the way of life of higher caste". But the caste system being a closed one, membership in the reference group is impossible. Nevertheless the lower caste people have a slight shift within the varna and move up slightly in the scale of 'Jatis' within a particular varna.

#### ◆ **Secularisation**

Secularisation also disintegrates the caste system as it displaces the religious beliefs, rituals and sense of community from the moral life of the society. People's routine invocations of the sacred lose importance and the "major institutions in society become legitimized primarily by secular ideologies and formal legal doctrines rather than by religious ethics".

Thus, the process of secularization diminishes the religiosity of tradition bound people and simultaneously promotes rationality, scientific attitude and differentiation. As such, the validity of the caste system and its very basis relating to birth, occupation and the concept of purity and pollution fail to withstand the severe challenge posed by secularization. As a result, the system undergoes a process of transformation. Prof. M.N. Srinivas has rightly pointed out, "what was previously regarded as religious is

now ceasing to be such and it also implies a process of different creation which results in the various aspects of society, economic, political, legal and moral, becoming increasingly discrete in relation to each other",

#### ◆ **Legislative Measures**

Law has two important functions to play in a society, first, to reinforce social control and secondly to bring about a social change by influencing the behaviour, values and beliefs of people. India is a bright example of imputing legislative measures to initiate changes. The framing of the Indian Constitution was the first step in this direction. By making provision for the principles of equality, freedom, justice, etc., it created a series of reverberations in the Indian social structure.

Institutionalized inequality, which was the basis of caste system, came under attack. Caste based education and occupation became meaningless and traditional social forces were struck by radical changes in the law of this land. A variety of social legislations are being introduced in the post-independence era. Those which relate to the changes in the caste system cover legislations to safeguard the interests of the downtrodden, to eradicate untouchability, to facilitate the social and economic development of the depressed castes and making the provision of reservation for scheduled castes and other backward classes.

The Untouchability (offences) Act, 1955 provided for punishment against the practice of untouchability. Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution provided equality before law as a fundamental right. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 abolished all caste restrictions as a necessary requirement for a valid marriage, inter-caste marriage became valid. In the pre-independence days various legislations such as the Special Marriage Act, 1872 was amended to make provision for inter-caste marriage. The Caste Disabilities Removal Act, 1950 was also enacted. All these legislations and constitutional provisions are slowly but surely making their impact on the caste system.

#### ◆ **Reform Movements**

Whereas the effective legislative measures are mostly post-independence phenomena, the social and religious reform movements dominated the Indian scene early in the twentieth century. Protest against Brahminical supremacy, formulation of new religions of conversion to other religions were not unknown to India.

#### ◆ **Modern Education**

Modern liberal education has played a crucial role in undermining the importance of caste in Indian social life. Modern education is based on such democratic values like equality, liberty, and fraternity. It encourages scientific values, observation, inter-caste marriage and inter-caste mixing. Moreover, it acts as a powerful force towards the removal of untouchability.

#### ◆ **Rise of New Social Classes**

Industrialisation has given rise to the emergence of new social classes. These social classes are replacing the traditional castes. Trade unions, Political parties are replacing the old caste loyalties. An increase in class consciousness leads to a decrease in caste consciousness.

### **9.7 SELF CHECK EXERCISE**

- (i) What is the difference between 'Caste' and 'Varna' ?
- (ii) Discuss the M.N. Srinivas' concept of Sanskritisation.

- (iii) What are the salient features of the caste system 12 outlined by **G.S. Ghurye**?

## 9.8 SUMMARY

Caste system has been changing in contemporary times due to modernization forces. There are changes in structural, cultural, economic and political dimensions of caste system. But still some social Scientists are of the opinion that the caste system is very much alive. All the existing social situations and conditions seem to be supporting the caste system and its survival. Caste has become a part and parcel of our socio-religious system and politico-economic system. Caste is making all the efforts to survive and to strengthen it by making necessary compromises and accommodations with changing times. Considering both points of view, it can be said that it is not possible for the caste system to retain its distinctiveness and impose traditional restrictions in present times. The restrictions regarding dress, inter-mixing and inter-dining have been removed to some extent but still the core structure caste system is intact and operational in the society.

## 9.9 GLOSSARY

- **Caste System** : A system of social stratification based on inherited status or ascription.
- **Hierarchy** : A ranking of positions of authority, often associated with a chain of command and control.
- **Jati** : The word for caste which is a region-specific hierarchical ordering of castes that marry within their boundaries, pursue hereditary occupations and are fixed by birth.
- **Sanskritisation** : A term invented by M N Srinivas to refer to the process by which middle or lower castes seek upward social mobility by imitating the ritual and social behaviour/practices of castes above themselves, usually *Brahmins* or *Kshatriyas*.
- **Varna** : Literally means 'colour', it is a nation-wide version of the caste system dividing society into four hierarchically ordered varnas or caste groups namely *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra*.

## 9.10 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 9.4  
 (ii) Refer section 9.6  
 (iii) Refer section 9.3

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### 9.12 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) In what way does caste operate as a system of social relations?
- (ii) Critically examine the changing features of caste in India in contemporary times.
- (iii) What do you understand by caste system? Enumerate the various factors responsible for bringing changes in caste system in India.

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## LESSON NO. 10

# DECOMPOSITION OF SOCIAL CLASS

### STRUCTURE

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 Meaning and Definition of Social Class
- 10.3 Type of Social Classes
- 10.4 Determinants of Social Class
- 10.5 Social Class in India
  - 10.5.1 Social Classes in Rural India
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- 10.6 Decomposition of Social Class
- 10.7 Self Check Exercise
- 10.8 Summary
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- 10.10 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 10.11 Suggested Readings
- 10.12 Terminal Questions

### 10.0 INTRODUCTION

The impact of British rule in India has brought about far-reaching changes in Indian society. The class structure in India has been interpreted by employing different theoretical orientations by the Indian sociologists. Sociologists like A.R. Desai has utilised Marxian theory while analysing the Indian class structure in agrarian relation. However, attributes such as income, occupation, non-agricultural modes of 'earning are used to the studies on caste and class is, however, not substantial. The reason is partly historical and importantly, it is because of the continued overlapping between the caste and class status situations or interactions in Indian social stratification. Often, it is difficult to draw a sharp line where caste principle of stratification ceases and the class principle begins. Caste and class are two principles of stratification which are persisted in the Indian social systems in a dialectical relationship. Social classes in India cannot be compared with the western societies class composition as being largely agrarian society, India has been seeing proliferation of social classes over a period of time. In this lesson, we will elaborate comprehensively on the class structure in Indian context in the following sections.

### 10.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning and types of social class.
- Know the various determinants of social class.

- Understand the composition of social classes in rural and urban India.
- Discuss the decomposition of social classes in contemporary India.

## 10.2 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF SOCIAL CLASS

Social class as a form of social stratification has been analysed by various thinkers. Some of the definitions of class are :

- Horton and Hunt says, "a social class is defined as stratum of people of similar position in the social status continuum".
- According to Ogburn and Nimkoff, "a social class is the aggregate of persons having essentially the same social status in a given society".
- Maclver and Page says, "a social class is any portion of the community marked off from the rest by social status".
- Max Weber 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's terminology, a person's class situation is basically his market situation. Those who share a similar class situation also share similar life chances.
- According to Marx, "a class is a group of people who stand in a common relationship to the means of production".

## 10.3 TYPE OF SOCIAL CLASSES

Social class is one of the most important concepts that sociologists discuss and two classical sociologists who are most important in the discussions about class are Karl Marx and Max Weber. Marx argues that there are two classes in the capitalist mode of production i.e., capitalists and workers. Capitalists are the owners of the means of production and the workers owned nothing but their ability to work, what Marx called 'labor power'.

Weber argues that the major class division is between those who own the forces of production and those who do not. Those who have substantial property holdings will receive the highest economic rewards and enjoy superior life chances. However, Weber sees important differences in the market situation of the property less groups in the society in particular the various skills and services offered by different occupation have differing market values. In capitalist society, managers, administrators and professionals receive relatively higher salaries because of the demand for their services. Weber distinguishes the following class grouping in capitalist society :

- The propertied upper class
- The property less white-collar workers
- The petty bourgeoisie
- The manual working class

In contemporary times, social class has often been categorized into three general categories viz., a very wealthy and powerful upper class that owns and controls the means of production; a middle class of professional workers, small business owners and low-level managers and a tower class, which rely on low-paying wage jobs for their livelihood and often experience poverty. These are explained as below :



- (i) **Upper Class** : The upper class is the social class composed of those who are rich, well-born, powerful, or a combination of those. They usually wield the greatest political power. In some countries, wealth alone is sufficient to allow entry into the upper class. In others, only people who are born or marry into certain aristocratic bloodlines are considered members of the upper class and those who gain great wealth through commercial activity are looked down upon by the aristocracy as *nouveau riche*. In the United Kingdom, for example, the upper classes are the aristocracy and royalty, with wealth playing a less important role in class status. However, in the United States where there is no aristocracy or royalty, the upper class status belongs to the extremely wealthy, the so-called "super-rich", though there is some tendency even in the United States for those with old family wealth to look down on those who have earned their money in business. The members of the upper class are often born into it and are distinguished by immense wealth which is passed from generation to generation in the form of estates.
- (ii) **Middle Class** : The middle class is the most contested of the three categories and is the broad group of people in contemporary society who fall socio-economically between the lower and upper classes. One example of the contest of this term is that in the United States where "middle class" is applied very broadly and includes people who would elsewhere be considered working class. Middle-class workers are sometimes called "white-collar workers". Theorists such as Ralf Dahrendorf have noted the tendency toward an enlarged middle class in modern Western societies, particularly in relation to the necessity of an educated work force in technological economies. Perspectives concerning globalization and neo-colonialism, such as dependency theory, suggest this is due to the shift of low-level labour to developing nations and the Third World.
- (iii) **Lower Class** : In the United States the lowest stratum of the working class, the underclass, often lives in urban areas with low-quality civil services. Lower class (occasionally described as working class) are those employed in low-paying wage jobs with very little economic security. The term "lower class" also refers to persons with low income. The working class is sometimes separated into those who are employed but lacking financial security (the "working poor") and an underclass who are long-term unemployed and/or homeless, especially those receiving welfare from the state. The latter is analogous to the Marxist term "lumpen-proletariat". Members of the working class are sometimes called blue-collar workers.

#### 10.4 DETERMINANTS OF CLASS

Social class of an individual can be described on the basis of various indicators. There are various determinants of social class that are discussed as below :

- **Wealth and Income** : Possession of substantial amounts of wealth is the main characteristic distinguishing the upper class from other class groups in society. Persons having more wealth and income generally have higher social position and respect in society. Wealth and income (money), though necessary for upper-class position, yet one's class position is not directly proportional to his income. A criminal has less social status than a professor though his income is far greater than the professor. In spite of all its weaknesses, wealth and income are an important determinant of social class because of the way of life it.

- **Occupation** : Occupation is an exceedingly important aspect of social class and as such it is another determinant of class status, it is a well-known fact that some kinds of work are more honourable than others like doctors, engineers, administrators, professors and lawyers hold a higher position, than a car mechanic or manual worker. The high-prestige occupations generally receive the higher incomes, yet there are many exceptions. Occupation is also one of the best clues to one's way of life and therefore to one's social class membership. It affects many other facets of life (values, beliefs, marital relations) other than determining the social class.
- **Education** : There is a close reciprocal relationship between social class and education. To get a higher education, one needs money plus motivation. Upper-class children already have money for the finest schools and colleges. They also have family tradition and social encouragement. One's amount and kind of education affects the class rank he will secure. Thus, education is one of the main levers of a man's social class.
- **Prestige** : It refers to the respect and admiration with which an occupation is regarded by society. Prestige is independent of the particular person who occupies a job. Sociologists have tried to assign prestige rankings to various occupations. Besides wealth, occupation and education, there are certain other criteria which help a person to attain higher social status in the society. These are family background, kinship relations, location of residence, etc. but education, occupation and expanded income are the most visible clues of social class.

## 10.5 SOCIAL CLASS IN INDIA

The impact of British rule in India has brought about far-reaching changes in Indian society. The class structure in India has been interpreted by employing different theoretical orientations by the Indian sociologists. Sociologists like A.R. Desai has utilised Marxian theory while analysing the Indian class structure in agrarian relation. However, attributes such as income, occupation, non-agricultural modes of earning are used to the studies on caste and class is, however, not substantial. The reason is partly historical and importantly, it is because of the continued overlapping between the caste and class status situations or interactions in Indian social stratification. 'Often, it is difficult to draw a sharp line where caste principle of stratification ceases and the class principle begins. Caste and class-are two principles of stratification which are persisted in the Indian social systems in a dialectical relationship.

The sociology of Indian class stratification should not only take into account the present day processes among the various class strata but also analyse them in the historical contexts of change. Studies which throw light on the class structure and its processes in the traditional Indian society reveal that class structure was related to the modes of production and ownership. Kings, feudal chiefs, traders, artisans, peasants, labourers and the social relationships of these groups assume significance for understanding the Indian class structure.

The king occupied the highest position with so many loyalties and vassals and his subjects owed allegiance to him and in turn the king was responsible for the welfare of his people. The merchants, the business class were the most mobile. Here wealth and economic factors played important roles in determining one's class position and in that context one's social position based on caste became weakened. The establishment of various economic and political institutions by the British enhanced the

mobility of these groups of people that they could mobilise economic surpluses from village to towns and cities.

### 10.5.1 Social Classes in Rural India

The orthodox Marxists observe only two classes in Indian agriculture:

- (i) the class of big landlords and
- (ii) the class of agricultural labourers.

The other view is that today class differentiation in terms of agricultural labourers, poor peasants, middle peasants, rich peasants, landlords, etc., exists and has also existed in the past. The Marxist scholars consider relations between these classes as 'capitalistic', hence the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

T.K. Oommen lists the following five classes in rural India as mentioned below :

- (i) **Landlords** who own but do not cultivate land, either employing intermediaries or leasing out land.
- (ii) **Rich farmers** who look upon agriculture **as a** business proposition, produce **for** the market and for profit, employ wage labour, and supervise rather than cultivate.
- (iii) **Middle peasants** who cultivate their own land and hire labourers only for certain operations or at certain points of time.
- (iv) **Poor peasants** who own small and uneconomic holdings and often have to work as part labourers or as sharecroppers or tenant.
- (v) **Landless agricultural workers** who sell their labour and fully depend on the first three categories for their livelihood.

### 10.5.2 Social Classes in Urban India

In the urban areas, social classes comprise principally :

- (i) **Commercial and Industrial Classes** : Under the British rule, production in India became production for market. As a result of this, internal market expanded and the class of traders engaged in internal trading grew. Simultaneously, India was also linked "up with the world market. This led to the growth of a class of merchants engaged in export import business. Thus, there came into being a commercial middle class in the country. With the establishment of railways, the accumulation of savings on the part of this rich commercial middle class took the form of capital to be invested in other large-scale manufactured goods and modern industries. Like the British, who pioneered the industrial establishment in India, the Indians too made investment initially in plantations, cotton, jute, mining and so on. Indian society thus included in its composition such new groups as mill owners, mine owners, etc. Subsequently, they also diversified the sphere of their industrial activity. Economically and socially this class turned out to be the strongest class in India.
- (ii) **The Corporate Sector** : Any organisation that is under government ownership and control is called as public sector unit and any organisation, which does not belong to public sector can be taken to be a part of private sector. The firms and organisation which are owned, controlled and managed exclusively by private individuals and entities are included in private sector. All private sector firms can be classified into two categories, such as individually owned and collectively owned. Collectively owned firms are further classified

into partnership firms, joint Hindu family, joint-stock companies and co-operatives. The most important of these is the joint-stock organization, which is otherwise popularly known as corporate sector. Joint-stock companies which do not belong to public sector are collectively known as private corporate sector.

- (iii) **Professional Classes** : The new economic and state systems brought about by the British rule required cadres of educated Indians trained in modern law, technology, medicine, economics, administrative science and other subjects. In fact, it was mainly because of the pressing need of the new commercial and industrial enterprises and the administrative systems that the British government was forced to introduce modern education in India. They established modern educational institutions on an increasing scale. Schools and colleges giving legal, commercial and general education were started to meet the needs of the state and the economy. Thus, there came into being an expanding professional class. Such social categories were linked up with modern industry, agriculture, commerce, finance, administration, press and other fields of social life. The professional classes comprise modern lawyers, doctors, teachers, managers and others working in the modern commercial and other enterprises, officials functioning in state administrative machinery, engineers, technologists; agriculture scientists, journalists and so on.
- (iv) **Petty Traders, Shopkeepers and Unorganised Workers** : There has also been in existence in urban areas a class of petty traders and shopkeepers. These classes have developed with the growth of modern cities and towns. They constitute the link between the producers of goods and commodities and the mass of consumers. That is, they buy goods from the producers or wholesalers and sell it among the consumers. Thus, they make their living on the profit margin of the prices on which they buy and, sell their goods and commodities. Like all other classes, this class also has grown in scale in post-independent India.
- (v) **Working Classes** : Origin of the working class could be traced back to the British rule. This was the modern working class which was the direct result of modern industries, railways, and plantations established in India during the British period. This class grew in proportion as plantations, factories, mining, industry, transport, railways and other industrial sectors developed and expanded in India. The Indian working class was formed predominantly out of the pauperized peasants and ruined artisans. Level of living and working conditions characterized their existence. A large proportion of them generally remained indebted because of their inability to maintain themselves and their families.

## 10.6 DECOMPOSITION OF SOCIAL CLASS IN INDIA

There is clear trend toward class decomposition in India. Members of social classes (and even castes) are becoming less similar to one another. There is a progressive social differentiation i.e., even people from the same backgrounds become increasingly dissimilar to one another. Members of bourgeoisie become divided between owner and managers while the working class becomes divided according to the region they live in, their level of skills and a growing diversity of lifestyles and consumption pattern. The middle class also becomes increasingly heterogeneous with divisions between professional, administrative and technical workers and between state employers and those working in private industry.

A.R. Desai's view is that the state in India has assumed the property norms of a capitalist society as the axis of developmental strategy. Economic determinism, implicit in the orthodox Marxism, is countered by those who emphasise the use of indigenous concepts for understanding of the specific social reality of Indian society. While examining the nature of class and class conflict in Indian society, VM. Dandekar mentioned the following classes:

- (i) The agrarian classes
- (ii) The industrial classes
- (iii) The professional classes and
- (iv) The business and mercantile classes.

Dandekar expresses his doubts about the application of the Marxian approach to India's class structure. Large-scale industry and monopoly capitalism have different implications in India compared to western countries. The role of trade unions and collective bargaining of workers have been undermined. Along with class antagonism, class harmony is also a fact of life. The multiplicity of classes in between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' cannot escape our attention.

The emergence of the new middle classes in India during the British period and more so after India's independence does not support a simple two-class theory in regard to the Indian situation. The proletariat is propertyless but he does have a chance for embourgeoisement. Further, the Indian state, being a 'welfare state', is the largest employer today. Can a democratic welfare state be as oppressive or exploitative as the monopoly capitalists could be? Thus, like caste, class is also a complex phenomenon in Indian society. It overlaps with caste, occupation, factions and pressure groups. Instead of the classes at the top and at the bottom of the class pyramid, the middle classes and the mixed classes have emerged as crucial phenomena in contemporary India. The emergence of an upper-middle class during the past decade and half has also set in a new trend of social mobility, particularly among the highly qualified people in the fields of science and technology.

Thus, classes are found as a part of a system of social stratification in the same way as castes are rooted in Indian society. Class, class relations and class conflicts are not monolithic. There are objective criteria of class identification, and class is also a concrete unit of interaction vis-a-vis other units.

### **10.7 SELF CHECK EXERCISE**

- (i) Define social class? Discuss its types.
- (ii) Write a short note on decomposition of social classes in India.
- (iii) Elaborate on the class composition of Rural India.

### **10.8 SUMMARY**

In India, there is clear trend toward class decomposition. Indian society cannot be explained with the Marx as well as Weber's perspectives on class composition in society. Members of social classes (and even castes) are becoming less similar to one another. There is a progressive social differentiation i.e., even people from the same backgrounds become increasingly dissimilar to one another. Members of bourgeoisie become divided between owner and managers while the working class becomes divided according to the region they live in, their level of skills and a growing diversity of lifestyles and consumption pattern. The middle class also becomes increasingly heterogeneous with divisions

between professional, administrative and technical workers and between state employers and those working in private industry.

## 10.9 GLOSSARY

- **Achieved Status** : A social position that someone assumes voluntarily and that reflects personal ability and effort.
- **Capitalism** : It is an economic system in which natural resources and the means of producing goods and services are privately owned.
- **Decomposition of Class** : The process of differentiation within the social class, such that it is no longer a homogeneous group.
- **Life Chances** : Likelihood of individuals sharing in the opportunities and benefits of society.
- **Prestige** : Value people in a society associate with various occupations.
- **Social Class** : Grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, power and prestige

## 10.10 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer sections 10.2 and 10.3
- (ii) Refer section 10.6
- (iii) Refer section 10.5.1

## 10.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## 10.12 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) What do you understand by social class? Elaborate on the various determinants of social class.
- (ii) Critically examine the phenomena of decomposition of social class with particular reference to India.
- (iii) Explain the class as a form of stratification in the context of Indian society.

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## LESSON NO. 11

# CASTE-CLASS NEXUS

### STRUCTURE

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Difference between Caste and Class as a Form of Social Stratification
- 11.3 Caste and Class Nexus
- 11.4 Self Check Exercise
- 11.5 Summary
- 11.6 Glossary
- 11.7 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 11.8 Suggested Readings
- 11.9 Terminal Questions

### 11.0 INTRODUCTION

Caste-class nexus is used as an approach by many sociologists to the study of social stratification in India. Such an approach exposes misconceptions such as that caste and class are antithetical formations, being at opposite poles, caste is a socio-cultural entity and class is an economic phenomenon. Colonialism, policies of the contemporary Indian state, western frames of reference and ideological moorings have undermined the caste-class nexus and its dynamics. Neither the 'caste alone' and nor the 'class alone' approach would bring out the complex social inequality in Indian scenario.

The caste-class nexus approach does not imply a correspondence between caste hierarchy and class ranking. It refers to the dynamics of caste-class contexts and situations at a given point of time and also over a period of time. For example, it has been argued that caste system was never absolutely rigid and stagnant. There are innumerable evidences of protests and movements against rigidity and hegemony of the upper castes by the middle and lower castes. There were also institutional mechanisms for redressal of grievances and for settlement of disputes. Both individuals and families have been units of status-evaluation within and between castes. 'Caste model' ignores this historical fact which is evident in the analyses of ancient, medieval and modern Indian society. Today, castes are acting more as interest groups rather than as socio-cultural entities. Emergence of a new class structure comprising industrialists, big businessmen, entrepreneurs, professionals, government functionaries, workers, etc., cuts across caste hierarchy.

### 11.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of caste and class nexus.
- Differentiate the caste from class as a form of social stratification.
- Examine the opinions of different sociologists on the caste and class nexus.

## 11.2 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CASTE AND CLASS AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Caste and class are two dominant systems of social stratification. Caste is found in Indian society whereas class based stratification is found in almost all societies. A caste is a social category whose members are assigned a permanent status within a given social hierarchy and whose contacts are restricted accordingly. It is the most rigid and clearly graded type of social stratification. It has also often been referred to as the extreme form of closed class system. Sharply contrasted with the caste system, the open class system can be placed at the opposite end of a continuum. A social class consists of a number of individuals who share similar status often ascribed at birth but capable of being altered. Class, therefore, does not consist of organised closed groups defined by law or religion as does caste, nor are the various strata in the system as rigid and easily identifiable.

The fundamental points of difference between class and caste are following :

- **Open vs Closed System of Stratification:** Class is more open than caste. Hitler says, "a class system is an open system of rating levels. If a hierarchy becomes closed against vertical mobility, it ceases to be a class system and becomes a caste system". Since class is open and elastic, social mobility becomes easier. A man can by his enterprise and initiative changes his class and thereby rises in social status. If a man is born in a labour class, it is not necessary for him to live in the class for life and die in it. He can strive for money and success in life and with wealth he can change his social status implied in the class distinction.

In case of caste system, it is impossible to change one's caste status. Once a man is born in a caste, he remains in it for his life-time and makes his children suffer the same fate. A caste is thus a closed class. The individual's status is determined by the caste status of his parents, so that what an individual does has little bearing upon his status. On the other hand, the membership of a class does not depend upon hereditary basis rather depends on the worldly achievements of an individual. Thus, class system is an open and flexible system while caste system is a closed and rigid system.

- **Divine vs Secular :** Caste system is believed to have been divinely ordained. MacIver writes, "the rigid demarcation of caste could scarcely be maintained were it not for strong religious persuasions. The hold of religious belief, with its supernatural explanations of caste itself is essential to the continuance of the system". The Hindu caste structure may have arisen out of the subjection or enslavement incidental to conquest and perhaps also out of the subordination of one endogamous community to another. But the power, prestige and pride of race engendered could rise to a caste system, with its social separation of groups that are not in fact set apart by any clear social signs, only as the resulting situation was rationalized and made "eternal by religious myths". It is everybody's religious duty to fulfill his caste duties in accordance with his 'dharma'.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Creator is said to have apportioned the duties and functions of the four castes. An individual must do the duty proper to his caste. Failure to act according to one's caste duties meant birth in a lower caste and finally spiritual annihilation. Men of the lower castes are reborn in higher castes if they have fulfilled their duties." Caste system in India would not have survived for so many centuries if the religious system had not made it sacred and inviolable. On the contrary, there is nothing sacred or of divine origin in the class



stratification of society. Classes are secular in origin. They are not founded on religious dogmas.

- **Marriage Rules** : The choice of mates in caste system is generally endogamous. Members have to marry within their own castes. A member marrying outside his caste is treated as outcaste. No such restrictions exist in class system. A wealthy man may marry a poor girl without being outcaste. An educated girl may marry an uneducated partner without being thrown out from the class of teachers.
- **Class Consciousness** : The feeling of class consciousness is necessary to constitute a class but there is no need for any subjective consciousness in the members of caste.
- **Prestige** : The relative prestige of the different castes is well established but in class system there is no rigidly fixed order of prestige. Recently, the Hon'ble Supreme Court while adjudging the constitutionality of job reservation for the backward classes (OBCs) as provided under Article 16 (4) of the Indian Constitution has by a majority opinion upheld the criterion of caste as the determinant of a backward class. In its judgment, it has excluded all members of the so called forward classes howsoever economically and educationally backward from the definition of backward classes. It has, thus, equated class with caste.

### 11.3 CASTE AND CLASS NEXUS

Nexus is defined as a set of ties *in* connection to the basic structural and cultural changes. It indicates :

- Interdependency between both factors.
- Contradictions and similarities.
- Control of one group over the other.

Caste and class nexus implies observation of two as mutually inherent areas. Tension and contradiction between caste and class are not only recognizable but also bring their differential consequences on different castes and classes. This nexus between caste and class also implies going beyond caste and going beyond class in understanding social reality.

In some societies, it is not uncommon for individuals to move up or down the social ladder. This is the case of the society having open classes. Elsewhere, there is little shifting of individuals who remains through a lifetime in the class into which they have chance to be born. Ogburn and Nimkoff observed that such classes are closed and if extremely differentiated constitute a caste System. It is said that castes are a special form of social classes which in tendency at least are present in every society.

A group of sociologists give their view that Indian society can be best studied from a caste model. They justify their opinion by saying that caste is an over-reaching ideological system encompassing all aspects of social life of Hindus, in particular, and the other communities, in general. The problem, however, is the fact that caste system is very complicated and complex. At the time of marriage, with all the rigid rules and regulations, a caste gives prime importance to the class. So the assumption that class is taking the place of caste is incorrect. Both caste and class are inseparable parts of Indian social formation.

The sociologists who feel that recent changes are giving way to class than to caste have nothing but a misapprehension. This is because there are studies in which it is observed that castes *are-* also

equally important as class. If caste is getting weak in one aspect it also gets strengthened in other aspects simultaneously with certain additions.

In relation to class and caste, there are two schools of thought:

- (i) Caste is breaking down and class is taking its place.
- (ii) Caste and class are not opposite to one another rather class comes within the caste system. For example, Brahmin is a caste and within Brahmins we find rich Brahmins and poor Brahmins.

Andre Beteille in his article "Class Structure in an Agrarian Society" argues that some of the castes in rural society, particularly in West Bengal are moving towards the formation of class but the procedure of movement is clear. P. Kolenda found in her study that, in Rural India, the importance of caste has decreased to a great extent. Instead of caste, the importance of class is found. She has conducted her study in Kanyakumari. Categorically, Kolenda says that in Rural India middle class is emerging fast. She concluded that caste is replaced by class and emergence of a new class i.e., the middle class.

Jan Breman has conducted his study in Bardoli areas of Surat district of Gujarat. He found that government policies are mainly responsible for widening the gap between the rich and the poor. For example, Green Revolution. Capitalist mode of production is mainly responsible for the emergence of class structure in rural India. Breman and Kolenda both have the same opinion that class is emerging in rural India.

Caste-class transformation is a very complex process. When a caste is transformed to a class, the caste-class conflict emerges in a particular social condition and we find caste wars. For example, in U.P. and Bihar, caste wars are very frequent. In Kerala, also there is a mobilization of power which is based on both caste and class. Iqbal Narain and P.C. Mathur have conducted their study on Rajputs of Rajasthan. Rajputs preferred to make alliance with Baniyas and Jains because of which the status and power of Brahmins was reduced. In the agricultural field or in connection to agrarian production also we find class system. These classes are agricultural classes. In other words, landholdings have never been even in rural India. Differences in the size of land have created diverse agricultural classes in rural society. A broad classification of agricultural classes are :

- Big farmers
- Small farmers
- Marginal farmers
- Landless labourers

Maclver says, "when status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then class takes the extreme form of caste. According to Sangeetha Rao, if castes are detached from religion, class may run parallel to castes.

Hindu society was composed of classes such as namely Brahmins or the priestly class, Kshatriyas or the military class, Vaishyas or the merchant class and Shudras or the artisan. This was considered as a class system. According to B.R. Ambedkar, the priestly class maintains social distance from others through a closed policy and becomes a caste by itself. The other classes undergo differentiation, some into large and some into very minute groups. The natural thing about these subdivisions is that they have lost the open-door character of the class system and have become self-

enclosed units called castes. He further argues that since the Brahmans remain detached from others through endogamy, it was wholeheartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin sub-divisions or classes who became endogamous castes.

Mandal Commission in its report observed that, "castes are the building blocks of the Hindu social structure. Caste is an important factor in the identification of other backward classes among the Hindu Communities. Caste is also a class of citizens". Several Marxist writers have made castes synonymous with classes.

Sripad Amrit Danger, in an analysis of the movement of non-Brahmins against Brahmans, referred to non-Brahmin castes as non-Brahmin classes. The struggle of non-Brahmin classes for enhancement of their status began when Hindu society divided itself into various castes and classes. Marxists in India appear to have realized the significance of caste as a social reality and have embarked upon incorporating the caste reality in India, in one form or the other, in their analysis of class phenomenon. Marxist writers seem to realize that the members of lower classes also belong, by and large, to lower castes. Caste organizations are construed as class organizations which emerged when the rural poor went beyond symbolic reform to upgrade their caste status by raising economic issues. A peasant class is nothing more than a group of individuals belonging to various castes and possessing land to cultivate. Traditionally, the Zamindars were of the highest caste. The landless labourers were of the lower caste and in between were the members of the cultivating castes. The agrarian hierarchy has its root in the caste structure, in the traditional social system.

But, it must be borne in mind that there is only broad correspondence between the agrarian class and caste hierarchies. There are many exceptions. Breman's study of a South Indian village revealed that the village is characterised by the process of depatronisation of relationship between dominant land owning castes on the one hand and the labouring castes on the other. Louis Dumont, A.C. Mayer, M.N. Srinivas and Andre Beteille and others talked about *Jati* as a structural and segmentary system.

The relationship which is established between a master and a servant, land owner and tenant, creditor and debtor, all cut across the barriers. Nevertheless, looking at India's history over the millennia, one reaches the unavoidable conclusion that the most important consideration while determining the constituents of the classes is the caste. Ramakrishna Mukherjee found the inter-mixture of caste and class in East Bengal. The class basis of caste system in India has been highlighted by Kathleen Gough in her reference to conflict and litigation between different castes in a Tanjore village based on economic inequalities.

Prof. Yogendra Singh is of the view that classes operate within the framework of castes. Commenting on the nexus of caste and class, he writes, "the situation corresponds to a 'prismatic' model of change where traditional sentiments of caste and kinship undergo adaptive transformation without completely being diffracted into classes or corporate groups".

K.L. Sharma observes that caste inhered in class and class inhered in caste for centuries in the Indian context and Indian society continues to have their inseparable mix even today. Class consciousness is created among the members of a caste on the basis of common economic deprivations. The upper castes, being conscious of the probable threat to their status, to be generated by the lower castes, strive to prevent the emergence of class consciousness among the lower classes.

A.P Singh's study of a Punjab village reveals that the rich farmers are the Jat Sikhs and the Harijans work in their farms. P.K. Bose's study of social mobility and caste violence in Gujarat shows the congruence of caste and class in the agitation against reservation of seats for postgraduate medical courses.

There are a number of points which have so far remained unclarified in regard to the nature of caste and class in India. Bailey refers to three types of definitions of caste. These are :

- a) the rigidity type
- b) the cultural type and
- c) the structural type.

The first type of definition is found inapplicable as it refers to status immobility hence 'analytic'. The second type is found 'useful' as it refers to religious ideas, namely opposition based on purity and pollution and hierarchy. The third type of definition refers to exclusiveness, exhaustiveness and ranking as the 'structural' criteria of the caste system.

Having realized that caste alone is not the totality of social stratification and that caste is not being replaced by class as the two are not necessarily antithetical to each other. Beteille following Weber's trio of class, status and party analyses 'patterns of social stratification in a Tanjore village in terms of caste, class and power. He is not quite clear about the phenomenon of class. He says, "classes are categories rather than groups". But he contradicts this statement when he writes that "by class we mean a category of persons occupying a specific position in the system of production". The first statement and the second statement signify Weberian notion of class and Marxian notion of class respectively.

Agrawal (1971) and Chauhan (1980) have also followed the viewpoint adopted by Beteille. There is no doubt that Beteille has presented a new approach to the study of social stratification in India but without realizing the incongruity between his approach and the method of his study. The understanding of caste and class demands an approach which has dialects, history, culture and structure. Dialects refers to the effective notions which bring about contradictions and highlight relations between unequal segments and men and women. Thus, it does not simply mean binary fission in the cognitive structure of Indian society as perceived by structuralists in terms of pure and impure. History provides a substantial account of the conditions of human existence. Culture defines the rules of the game, the nature of relations between the haves and the have-nots. Thus, culture does not include only cultural practices, rituals, rites etc. Structure refers to relations between social segments at a point of time as a historical product and as an existent reality. Dialects, history, culture and structure refer to a combination of theory, structure and process about the social formation of Indian society. Together they explain the historicity of Indian society from the point of view of its genesis.

The debates today are whether changes in caste and class are 'transformational' or they are 'replacements', whether caste is 'closed' and class is 'open', whether caste is 'organic' and whether class is 'segmentary' and whether caste is replaced by class. These are questions which have come up quite often as the idea of 'social formation' has not gained currency in our understanding of caste and class. The obsession of considering caste and class as polar opposite has prevented us from thinking of caste and class as dimensions of the historicity of India's social formation.

Several scholars have denied the 'congruence version about caste, class and power in ancient India. They have conclusively established that social mobility existed in ancient and medieval India The Jajmani system was never completely organic in practice. The idea of the contra-priests exposes the hollowness of the concepts of hierarchy and pollution-purity. In the place of Sanskritisation, Westernisation and dominant caste, etc., it is necessary to study downward mobility and proletarianisation, upward mobility and embourgeoisement, the migration of the rural rich to towns, etc.

Thus, there are sociologists like Y. Singh and K.L. Sharma who take the synthetic view of caste and point out that the class dimension of caste and caste dimension of class. There is no doubt that all the high castes are property owners. But there are also exceptions. According to Bailey, division of wealth no longer followed the same lines as caste divisions. In his study of Bisipara village in Orissa, Bailey also maintains that although there was an internal reshuffle of positions, the caste system continued to order political relations between the groups concerned and to reflect their economic status.

Caste has inhered in class and class is also inhered in caste for centuries in the Indian context, and Indian society continues to have this inseparable mix even today. Role of caste and class in elections is an evidence of this mix. However, caste operating as a 'marriage circle' is a different way from the way it functions in other arenas. Hypergamy explains the role of status and wealth within caste. Class like distinctions within caste and caste like styles within a class are part of the people's life situations. Class has been an in-built mechanism within caste, and therefore, caste cannot be seen simply as a ritualistic system and class cannot be seen as an open system as it has often been influenced by the institution of caste. In order to go deep into such a phenomenon, the structural-historical perspective becomes inescapable.

#### 11.4 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) What is the difference between caste and class?
- (ii) Write a short note on caste-class nexus.
- (iii) What do you understand by closed system of social stratification? •

#### 11.5 SUMMARY

Caste and class are inseparable and closely interlinked. Class like distinction within caste and caste life-style within the class are a part and parcel of the members of the society. Both caste and class are real, empirical, interactional and hierarchical. One incorporates the other. Common class consciousness among the members of a caste is mainly due to their common economic deprivations. In connection to caste-class nexus, it can be said that the caste system functions as an extremely effective method of economic exploitation and caste hierarchy is linked with social hierarchy and it reflects ownership of land. Caste determines a definite relation with the means of production. B.R. Ambedkar rightly observed that the caste system not only divides labour or indicate division of labour but also divides the entire social structure. So caste and class represent similar social reality but from varying perspectives.

#### 11.6 GLOSSARY

- **Caste System** : A system of social stratification based on inherited status or ascription.
- **Caste-Class Nexus** : The caste-class nexus approach does not imply a correspondence between caste hierarchy and class ranking. It refers to the dynamics of caste-class contexts and situations at a given point of time and also over a period of time.
- **Prestige** : Value people in a society associate with various occupations.
- **Social Class** : Grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, power and prestige.

#### 11.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 11.2
- (ii) Refer section 11.3

(iii) Refer section 11.2

### 11.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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### 11.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Define caste and class. Discuss how caste and class are correlated in shaping social stratification in India.
- (ii) Discuss the interface between caste and class with suitable examples.
- (iii) Differentiate the caste from class as a form of social stratification system.

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## LESSON NO. 12

# EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS

### STRUCTURE

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Concept of the 'Middle Class'
- 12.3 Emergence of Middle Class in India
  - 12.3.1 Rise of Middle Class during British Rule in India
  - 12.3.2 Rise of Middle Class after Independence in India
- 12.4 Self Check Exercise
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Glossary
- 12.7 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 12.8 Suggested Readings
- 12.9 Terminal Questions

### 12.0 INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the middle class in contemporary capitalist society has been tacking in systematic discussion. This is also the case in a society such as India. There has been an ongoing debate on what Constitutes the middle class in India. However, a comprehensive understanding of the middle class in India is still far from complete. Indian middle class arose as a result of changes in the British social policy and with the introduction of the new economic system and industry and with the subsequent growth of new professions from about the middle of the eighteenth century to modern times.

The factors responsible for the emergence of the Indian middle class were different from those responsible for the emergence of the middle class in the West. In the latter case, the middle class came into existence thanks .mainly to the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century which brought about large-scale mechanical production as a result of economic and technological change. The Indian middle classes emerged due to the changes that occurred in the course of about 200 years of British rule largely as a result of changes in British land and legal policies followed by the introduction of Western education and technology, modern capitalist enterprise, of improved communications and commercial progress. Thus, middle class in India grew due to the contact with Britishers.

### 12.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to :

- Gain knowledge about the concept of middle class.
- Explain the factors led to the emergence of middle class in India during british rule.
- Discuss the reasons for the rise of middle class after independence in India.

## 12.2 CONCEPT OF MIDDLE CLASS

The term "middle class" as interpreted in relation to the materialistic approach of the society, emerged under the aegis of the Pax-Britannica. In the western society, especially after the industrial revolution, the classes were divided into upper, middle and lower classes in accordance with their economic strength. The middle class is a description given to individuals and households who fall between the working class and the upper class within a societal hierarchy. In Western cultures, persons in the middle class tend to have a higher proportion of college degrees than those in the working class, have more income available for consumption, and may own property. Those in the middle class often are employed as professionals, managers, and civil servants.

The middle class is a social group of the people with the income more or less stable and sufficient for the satisfaction of a wide range of material and social requirements. The hallmark of this class is its high educational attainment. The functions of middle class include the introduction of new products and innovations, reproduction of expert labor and perhaps, support to long-term peace and stability in society.

The problems, which the middle class pose for the social scientists are typically metropolitan in character and nationwide in scope. Marx and Weber also use the criteria of property ownership for defining classes. Weber's theory provides a much greater scope for a discussion of the middle classes. He agrees with Marx that the two main classes in capitalist society are the property owning classes and non-property owning classes. However, Weber does not treat all the non-property owning individuals as belonging to a single class of the proletariat. The "class situation" of the non-property owners differ in terms of their skills. Those who possess skills that have a definite 'market value' (for example, doctors, engineers and other professionals) are rewarded better than the unskilled labourers. Thus, their "class situation" is different from that of the working class and it is they who, in the Weberian framework, constitute the middle classes. Further, unlike Marx, Weber does not see any tendency towards polarization of society into two classes. On the contrary, Weber argues that with the development of capitalism, the white collar 'middle class' tends to expand rather than contract.

In 1951, sociologist C. Wright Mills conducted one of first major studies of the middle class in America. According to his definition, the middle class consists of an upper-middle class, made up of professionals distinguished by exceptionally high educational attainment and high economic security; and a lower-middle class, consisting of semi-professionals. While the groups overlap, differences between those at the center of both groups are considerable. Elaborating on the growth of the middle class, John Urry argues that Marx's account of the rise of the middle class was in terms of a growing surplus that demanded a class or classes to consume more than they produced and an increasingly complicated industrial structure which needed non-productive functionaries to service it. In 'Theories of Surplus Value', Marx goes on to argue that as capitalism develops there is an expansion of the middle class. Taking the cue from Marx, Urry propounded that a historical analysis of the growth of the middle class has illustrated that with the market structure there has been the development of a highly significant middle class which does not own the means of **production but is a** powerful favoured status situation in the structure of workplace relationships.

Like Marx and Weber, most modern sociologists use economic factors as the basic criteria for differentiating social classes. Anthony Giddens identifies three major classes in advanced capitalist society. They are :

- Upper class based on the ownership of property in the means of production



- Middle class based on the possession of educational and technical qualifications
- Lower or working class based on the possession of manual labour power

These classes, in Giddens's opinion, are distinguished by their particular strategies for obtaining economic reward in a capitalist economy.

### **12.3 EMERGENCE OF MIDDLE CLASS IN INDIA**

Middle classes emerged for the first time in Western Europe with the development of industrial and urban economy. Middle class was initially used to describe the newly emerging class of bourgeoisie and industrial class. Later on, the term was used for social groups placed in-between the industrialist bourgeoisie on the one side and the working class on the other i.e. the skilled professional.

The historical context of the development of middle classes in India is quite different from that of the West. It was in the nineteenth century, under the patronage of the British colonial rule that the middle classes began to emerge in India. Though they emerged under the patronage of the British rulers, the middle classes played an important role in India's struggle for independence from the colonial rule. During the post-independence period also, the middle classes have been instrumental in shaping the policies of economic development and social change being pursued by the Indian State.

#### **12.3.1 Rise of Middle Classes during British Rule in India**

B.B. Misra in his seminal work on the middle classes in India argues that in pre-British era, though the institutions conducive to capitalist growth like artisan industry, occupational specialisation, a separate class of merchants organized in guilds, a class of middle-men and also a developed money economy were present but the political and social systems were against capitalism and hindered the growth of the middle class. The king was an absolute despot and monopolized any profitable sphere of trade and thus people did not invest their money in trade. The bullion in India remained stocked in houses. It was not utilized in productive investment thereby preventing the circulation of wealth which was essential for capitalist growth. The king, who could utilize his wealth in productive investment, spent it mainly for his personal comforts.

The caste system hampered occupational mobility and technological change. The priest and the king or the warrior caste looked down upon trade and industry. The lot of the artisan was very poor in spite of the presence of developed urban industry making fabrics and luxury goods which was based on small-scale domestic production. Land economy and limited education also proved to be further barriers. Caste was closely related to the law of property, which encouraged the observance of caste rules in order to succeed to one's share in the land. Thus, land economy encouraged caste distinctions and hindered the growth of trade.

The East India Company's rule set free the process of the growth of the Indian middle class with the advent of political stability, contractual relations. Custom was replaced by law. The British brought with them a political and economic organization based on rational principles which ignored caste distinctions. Caste was ignored by the system of Western education as well. Increase in external trade created capital resources for industrialization. The higher castes were the first to take advantage of the changing conditions as they already occupied higher traditional social, economic and political position. They shifted to urban centres and received education. They took to new and profitable occupations and were limited to urban centres especially to the Presidency towns because of the concentration of wealth and of educational institutions in those towns.

The rising middle class consisted of four categories of people according to the role played by them in the new economy.

- (i) The commercial middle class of middlemen and brokers were found with the foreign companies and in the indigenous mercantile and banking houses in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The indigo plantations gave rise in rural area to a clerical and supervisory group of persons and a group of contractors who distributed advances and supplied the plants. Moreover a class of specialists in business administration grew with the opening up of trade, banks and the managing agency system in 1833.
- (ii) The money-lenders, the brokers, the *baniyas*, the agents and the creditors i.e., the new moneyed class invested their money in land which became transferable due to the British policy. In addition, there were people who held land on lease on behalf of the indigo factory (for before 1830 planters were not permitted to buy lands of their own). The recognition of the rights of the under-tenures in 1765 also gave birth to a landed middle-class.
- (iii) The industrial middle class was very small because the growth of industry was very slow. The first to invest money in industry were the English Civil Servants, followed initially by other Europeans and then by some Bengalis in Calcutta and Parsis in Bombay.
- (iv) The educated middle class comprised of a class of professionals which emerged with the introduction of Western education and technology. The changes in the system of law gave rise to a class of lawyers. Then emerged doctors and engineers, printers and publishers. All the higher technical and administrative posts were monopolized by Europeans and Anglo-Indians.

The primary characteristic of these four groups forming the Indian middle classes was that they acquired prestige not through social status but through education, wealth and power.

The aim of the British was to create a class of imitators and not originators of new values and methods. Pavan K. Verma argues that from the circumstances of their origin and growth, the members of the educated class such as government servants, lawyers, college teachers and doctors constituted the bulk of the Indian middle class. This middle class was largely dominated by the traditional higher castes. Ahmad and Redfield argue that in its formation and the role played in history, the Indian middle class bore close resemblance, at least in some parts, to its European counterparts. Like their counterparts in Europe earlier, some of the entrants to commercial activity either as agents or independently in the 17th and the first half of the "18<sup>th</sup> century amassed great wealth and acquired social status far beyond what they could aspire to have in the structure of economic relations in the traditional society. But alongside, differences existed, too.

While the European middle class was independent, the Indian middle class was under foreign rule. Initially, the middle class helped in the establishment of British power and promotion of European commerce and enterprise in India. It was only after the 'Mutiny of 1857' that it began to assume the political role of competitor for power with the British. With the passage of time, the competitor role adopted by an important section of the middle class came to dominate over that of a collaborator and this continued till the very end of the Raj. Ahmad and Redfield conclude that from the beginning of the 20th century, the Indian middle class had come to pose a serious challenge to the continuance of the British power. It was instrumental in arousing national consciousness and giving a sense of unity as a nation to the people.

Sanjay Joshi in his study of the making of the middle class in colonial India has attempted to explain why traditional sociological indicators of income and occupation cannot take us very far in understanding the category of middle class. Though the economic background of the middle class was important, the power and constitution of the middle class in India was based not on the economic power it wielded, which was minimal, but on the ability of its members to be cultural entrepreneurs. Being middle class was primarily a project of 'self-fashioning'. Joshi articulated that the definition and power of the middle class from its propagation of modern ways of life.

### **12.3.2 Rise of Middle Classes after Independence**

India's independence from the colonial rule marked the beginning of a new phase in its history. The independent Indian State was committed, in principle, to democratic institutions of secularism, freedom, justice and equality for all the citizens, irrespective of caste, creed or religion and at all levels - social, economic and political. To achieve these ends, India embarked upon the path of planned development. Plans were chalked out for the development of agricultural, industrial and the tertiary sectors of the economy. There was an overall attempt to expand the economy in all directions. The government of India introduced various programmes and schemes for different sectors of the economy. The execution of these programmes required the services of a large number of trained personnel.

Besides the increase in a number of those employed in the government sectors, urban industrial and tertiary sectors also experienced an expansion. Though compared to many other countries of the Third World, the growth rate of the Indian economy was slower in absolute terms, the industrial sector grew many folds. Growth in the tertiary sector was more rapid. Increase in population, particularly the urban population, led to a growth in the servicing industry. Banks, insurance companies, hospitals, hotels, press, advertisement agencies all grew at an unprecedented rate, giving employment to a large number of trained professionals.

The next stage of expansion was in the rural areas. Various development programmes introduced by the Indian State after independence led to significant agricultural growth in the regions that experienced Green Revolution. Success of the Green Revolution technology increased productivity of land and made the landowning sections of the Indian countryside substantially richer. Economic development also led to a change in the aspirations of the rural people. Those who could afford it started sending their children not only to English medium schools but also to colleges and universities for higher studies. Consumption patterns also began to change. Material goods hitherto considered unnecessary for the simple lifestyle of a farmer, began to be sought. A new class has emerged in rural India that partly had its interests in urban occupations. The process of agrarian transformation added another segment to the already existing middle classes. In ideological terms, this new segment of the middle classes was quite different from the traditional middle classes. Unlike the old urban middle classes, this new "rural middle class" was local and regional in character. The members of the rural middle class tended perceive their interests in regional rather than in the nationalist framework. Politically, this class has been on forefront of the movements for regional autonomy.

Further, new segment of the middle class that emerged during the post- independence period came from the dalit caste groups. Government policies of positive discrimination and reservations for members of the ex-untouchable Schedule castes enabled some of them to get educated and employed in the urban occupations, mostly in the servicing and government sectors. Over the years, a new dalit middle class has thus also emerged on the scene.

## 12.4 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) What is middle class?
- (ii) Highlight the reasons that led to the emergence of middle class in India.
- (iii) Discuss the role of British rule in the rise of middle classes in India.

## 12.5 SUMMARY

Middle classes have always been among the most influential segments of the modern Indian society, they became prominent only during the decade of 1990s, after the liberalization process of the Indian economy began. Introduction of the new economic policy and increasing globalization of the Indian economy brought the Indian middle class into new prominence. The process of globalization has also generated a lot of debate about the actual size of middle classes in India, their consumption patterns, and the pace of their growth in the years to come. Middle classes dominate the cultural and political life in India today. But middle class in India cannot be defined as being completely modern. Modernization is not just about possessing the latest appliances and high end gadgets as well as being technologically updated. Rather it needs to be visible in the attitudes of people that come into effect in their social relations with others. Modernity brings in its wake new forms of social interaction. In the context of the urban middle class in India, lack of modernity is perceptible in most realms of the personal lives of people with social relations continuing to be embedded in traditional expectations, norms and mores.

## 12.6 GLOSSARY

- **Globalisation** : The development of extensive worldwide patterns of economic relationships between nations.
- **Industrial Revolution** : The Industrial Revolution transformed largely agrarian societies in Europe and America into industrialised urban ones. Goods that had once been painstakingly Grafted by hand started to be produced in mass quantities by machines in factories.
- **Middle Class** : The middle class is a description given to individuals and households who fall between the working class and the upper class within a societal hierarchy.
- **Modernisation** : The process of social change whereby less developed societies acquire characteristics common to more developed societies. It involves rationalisation in the socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of society.
- **Social Class** : Grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, power and prestige.

## 12.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 12.2
- (ii) Refer section 12.3
- (iii) Refer section 12.3.1

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## 12.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Explain the concept of the middle class. How does the historical context of development of middle class in western countries differ from that in India ?
- (ii) Examine the emergence of middle class in India.
- (iii) Distinguish between the old middle class and the new middle class in context of India.

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## **LESSON NO. 13**

# **CHANGING RACE, ETHNIC AND MINORITY RELATIONS**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 Conceptual Understanding of Race, Ethnicity and Minority Group
- 13.3 Dimensions of Ethnic and Racial Relations in India
- 13.4 Minorities in India
  - 13.4.1 Rise and Growth of Communalism in India
- 13.5 Self Check Exercise
- 13.6 Summary
- 13.7 Glossary
- 13.8 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 13.9 Suggested Readings
- 13.10 Terminal Questions

### **13.0 INTRODUCTION**

India has been a witness to rising ethnic tensions and conflicts in recent years. Many sociologists have, quite rightly, highlighted the problems encountered in the process of nation-building as a consequence of increasing ethnic problems. India is a plural society. It is characterized by a large diversity in its population with multitudes of castes and several religious, linguistic, cultural and racial groups living here. Because of intense competition for scarce economic resources and the heightened consciousness among people of different groups to preserve their age-old cultures, India has always been vulnerable to assertions of ethnic identities. Lopsided economic development of the country because of which some groups feel that they have been marginalised and completely left behind in the process of development. This makes them highly susceptible to the politics of ethnicity.

India is a multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country, yet it is religion which has been the most tangible basis of determination of groups and communities. Historically also, the basis of determination of majority or minorities in India has been the religion and therefore only religious minorities are recognised at national level today. The Constitution of India does not define minorities at all but it accords recognition to religious and linguistic minorities both. In fact, the aspirations and claims of both the kinds of minorities have posed serious threat to unity and integrity of India.

### **13.1 OBJECTIVES**

After going through this lesson, you will be able to;

- Understand the meaning of race, ethnicity and minority group.
- Discuss the different dimensions of ethnic and racial relations in India.
- Analyse the relationship between minority-majority relation in historical context in India.

- Explore the reasons behind the rise of communalism in India.

### 13.2 CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF RACE, ETHNICITY AND MINORITY GROUP

The terms 'race', 'ethnicity', and 'minority group' have distinct meanings in the subject of sociology. The idea of race refers to superficial physical differences that a particular society considers significant, while ethnicity describes shared culture. On the other hand, the term 'minority groups' describe groups that are subordinate or that lack power in society regardless of skin colour or country of origin. The concepts of race, ethnicity and minority group are discussed in the following sections.

**Race** : Historically, the concept of race has changed across cultures and eras. It has eventually become less connected with ancestral and familial ties and more concerned with superficial physical characteristics. In the past, theorists have posited categories of race based on various geographic regions, ethnicities, skin colours and more. Their labels for racial groups have connoted regions (Mongolia and the Caucasus Mountains, for instance) or skin tones (black, white, yellow, and red, for example). Contemporary conceptions of race, therefore, which tend to be based on socioeconomic assumptions, illuminate how far removed modern understanding of race is from biological qualities.

Pointing out the characteristics of a race in 'What is Race' published by UNESCO, J.S.B. Haldane wrote, "Race is a group which shares in common a certain set of innate physical character and a geographical origin within a certain area", in this way, a race lives in a define geographical area and has some definite innate characteristics.

**Ethnicity** : The term 'ethnic' is derived from the Greek word 'ethno' meaning 'nation'. It was originally used to denote primitive tribes or societies that formed a nation on the basis of their simplistic forms of government and economy. Ethnicity pertains to the word ethnic which is distinction of mankind based on race. Thus, the term ethnic denotes race. Ethnicity is the sense of ethnic diversity which takes about the belongingness of a particular group.

Ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture like the practices, values and beliefs of a group. This culture might include shared language, religion, and traditions, among other commonalities. Like race, the term ethnicity is difficult to describe and its meaning has changed over time. Yinger has mentioned the following characteristics of ethnicity :

- Ethnic group is seen by others as distinct and separate from all those around them in terms of their religion, race, language, country of origin, etc.
- The members of the ethnic group themselves see them as distinct or separate in terms of some cultural aspects from all others around them.
- The members of the ethnic groups, participate in common activities which they consider to be their very own in order to retain their cultural distinctions.

**Minority Group** : The study of ethnic groups incorporates both the majority and the minority groups. There exists a relationship of inequality between the majority and minority groups. The dominant group or the majority group enjoys numerical strength and control over economic and political resources. This group has all the privileges and advantages. The minority group on the other hand consists of and they are in a subordinate position to the majority group, in relation to control over the limited resources.

The co-relation between numerical strength and control over economic and political resources is a point of argument. As history provides many evidences of minority dominance over mass majority, for example, the British colonialism in India and the domination of a White minority on the Black majority in

South Africa during the days of apartheid. In the 1980s we had the immigrant Bengali minority occupying higher offices in Assam. These instances reveal that the myth surrounding the 'minority group' concept, as being a group, which is subjected to dominance and inferior status because of its low numerical strength, is not true. As it is obvious that a group having control over political and economic resources irrespective of its numerical strength becomes a 'majority minority'.

Sociologist Louis Wirth (1945) defined a minority group as "any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination". The term minority connotes discrimination, and in its sociological use, the term subordinate group can be used interchangeably with the term minority, while the term dominant group is often substituted for the group that's in the majority.

Note that being a numerical minority is not a characteristic of being a minority group; sometimes larger groups can be considered minority groups due to their lack of power. It is the lack of power that is the predominant characteristic of a minority, or subordinate group. For example, consider apartheid in South Africa, in which a numerical majority (the black inhabitants of the country) were exploited and oppressed by the white minority.

According to Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris (1958), a minority group is distinguished by five characteristics :

- (i) unequal treatment and less power over their lives
- (ii) distinguishing physical or cultural traits like skin colour or language
- (iii) involuntary membership in the group
- (iv) awareness of subordination and
- (v) high rate of in-group marriage.

### 13.3 DIMENSIONS OF ETHNIC AND RACIAL RELATIONS IN INDIA

Research has pointed out that there are several inter-related factors that have promoted this widespread interest in the study of ethnic and racial relations. The important factors have been :

- (i) **Migration** : The movement of individuals from one place to another, within a nation or between nations has led to multiplicity of groups existing within an area.
- (ii) **Culture Contact** : When people migrate, they take their culture along with them. . They come into contact with another type of culture existing in the area to which they have migrated. This leads to the existence of different kinds of culture groups within an area. The nature of interaction between the groups varies from place to place and from time to time depending on several factors.
- (iii) **Development of Technology** : Technology especially improvement in transport and communication has made the world a smaller place to live in. It has facilitated both movements of people as well as ideas and things from one place to another.
- (iv) **Emergence of Thickly Populated Cities** : The growth of cities along with the opportunities provided for varied kinds of employment has attracted many people from different socio-cultural and geographical backgrounds to converge in a city. Cities host a plurality of ethnic groups within it.



- (v) **Conflict** : The increased frequency of ethnic conflicts, specially between different racial groups and religious groups has drawn world-wide attention.

India is a country of immense diversity. Race, language, religion and caste constitute the major forms of diversity in India. Groups of people in India differ from each other not only in physical or demographic characteristics but also in distinctive patterns of behaviour. These patterns of behaviour are determined by social and cultural factors like language, region, religion and caste. According to Punekar (1974) the four major premises where ethnicity in India operates are language, region, religion and caste. It may be argued that castes are divided into sub-castes, language into dialects, region into sub-regions, religion into sects on ethnic lines. However, ethnic diversity is less obvious at these sub levels when compared to the larger levels of caste, language, religion and region. Let us discuss these one by one.

- (i) **Language and Region** : Language and region have been combined, as in India the division of territory or states is on the basis of language. During the colonial rule, India was divided into several provinces for administrative purposes. This division paved the way for other language communities, in the post-colonial era, to make demand for a separate state of their own. The formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1953, on the demand of Telugu Speakers in Madras Province, opened doors for other language groups to make similar demands. Further, these demands were endorsed by some of the nationalist leaders. Thus, each language group has a State of its own today, such as, Gujarat for the Gujaratis, Kerela for Malayalees and so on. At the state level, regional language is often used as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. This affinity and allegiance felt towards one's own language and region is often reflected outside the State of origin, that is when migrants to a new setting start their own voluntary associations to cater to their cultural needs. Thus language, in India, has been an important premise on which people have established their identities and have drawn social boundaries for defining their 'in group' and the 'out group'. Thus, it is not uncommon to find a Tamil Association in northern belt like UP or Delhi or a Mateyafee association in Middle East or a Bengali association in the U.S.A.
- (ii) **Religion** : Another form of ethnic identification is religion. In India Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Zoroastrainism are some of the religions practiced by its people. In Block 4 of this course, you were introduced to the social organisation of these religious communities in India. In terms of numerical strength, Hindus form the majority community in India. A number of Hindu Gods and Goddesses are worshipped by different linguistic groups spread across India, ft is the numerical strength of the Hindus that has been one of the factors which have led certain Hindu loyalists like the RSS (*Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh*) to assert that India is a Hindu State. In terms of economic dominance, there are disparities within a religious group and between religious communities. For instance, the Zoroastrian community is numerically very small in India. But their economic, resources and status are much better than many other communities.

There is historical evidence to prove that the various religious communities in India have co-existed peacefully through time. Of course, there is also evidence that reflects the conflict between religious communities. The most well-known clashes have been between Hindus and Muslims. One of the major social problems of India has been the communal divide problem. When one group asserts its interests and identity at the cost of another group, the communal divide emerges.

- (iii) **Caste** : Caste is another very important premise for ethnicity in India., Caste operates in different ways in the context of ethnic relations. Generally speaking people belonging to the same caste of different linguistic states belong to one ethnic group. However they rarely intermarry or involve themselves in any other close interactions. This has made some scholars to assert that there is no conscious solidarity of caste across the language boundaries. Some others argue caste at the same time causing fission within a particular ethnic group. For example, the Kashmiris are divided into several caste groups, which causes fission within the group, yet at the same time, a Kashmir. Brahmin finds his counterparts in other linguistic groups such as the Tamils and the Bengalis, this brings fusion to the group in a broad sense. Further, in an otherwise unranked system of ethnic dichotomy, this pan Indian system of stratification is the only factor that ranks ethnic groups hierarchically.

The early vedic literature and religious texts prescribed each of the castes with their rightful occupation, rights and duties. The *Brahmans*, with their occupation of priesthood and scholarly pursuits, occupied the top of the social ladder; the *Kshatriyas* were the warriors, and were second in status, the third were the *Vaishyas*, the traders and the last were the *Shudras*, who pursued menial and lowly occupations. The 'outcastes' like the *Chanctalas* were not included in the *varna* scheme. There was restriction of social interaction between the three "twice born" castes and *Shudras*, and no interaction with the outcastes. Thus, members of a caste group formed as in-group and others who did not belong to it formed the out-group. Caste identity was important for the individual and social boundaries were drawn for interaction between castes.

The *varna* system, however, has provided flexibility in terms of social mobility. Over the ages, several lower castes have used a higher caste status as a reference group, and have sanskritised their ways and formulated mythologies to legitimise their claims. This social mobility when accompanied with economic and political power automatically brought about an enhancement in the status of the lower castes. But most of the situations show the close association of ritual purity, economic and political power and education, as echoed in the *varna* scheme. Thus the "twice, born castes" not only had ritual purity but also had greater access to economic and political power and education. The *Shudras* and the outcastes, on the other hand, not only suffered the stigma of ritual impurity but also lived in abject poverty, illiteracy and had no political power.

### 13.4 MINORITIES IN INDIA

The presence of minorities in almost every part of the globe has been established as a permanent and undisputed fact. Minorities of one kind or another are found in every political community of the world. They not only prefer to live as a distinct group but also try to preserve their distinctiveness and resist every attempt at assimilation and homogenisation. It has been acknowledged and asserted that minorities based on religion, culture, language or race should in no case be persecuted. They should be allowed to develop and cherish their peculiar and particular characteristic features without any hindrance. But contrary to it, we find that those who are in power try to enforce their ideas of religion and culture or ideology on those who are in a non-dominant position. Persecution of minorities and attempts to assimilate them into the culture or ethos of dominant majority has led to many problems. The suppression and victimization of minorities have culminated into bloody wars in the past.

The minority problem assumes special significance in India as every conceivable type of minority can be found here. Minorities based on culture, language, race, religion, caste, clan, tribe, ideology, etc.

have shown determination to preserve their distinct identity. Any attempt at assimilation has brought forth dangerous implications in this highly fragmented society. The minority problem deserves special attention in India also because the mishandling of this issue culminated into the bloody partition in August 1947 and brought untold misery to the people of this subcontinent. Even today the minority problem is one of the most complicated and baffling problems faced by the Indian polity and society.

Although India is a multi-religious, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country, yet it is religion which has been the most tangible basis of determination of groups and communities. Historically also, the basis of determination of majority or minorities in India has been the religion and therefore only religious minorities are recognised at national level today. The Constitution of India does not define minorities at all but it accords recognition to religious and linguistic minorities both. In fact, the aspirations and claims of both the kinds of minorities have posed serious threat to unity and integrity of India. However, the reorganisation of states on the basis of language in 1956, minimised the problem of linguistic minorities to a considerable extent and now they are recognised generally at state level. The problem of religious minorities on the other hand, not only exists even today despite a painful Partition of the country in 1947 but it is becoming more complicated day by day.

From a reading of history one finds that religion has played an important role in group formation in this country and the impact of it in day-to-day life of Indians has been profound. In many cases we find that people develop a religious approach to problems which are socio-economic, political and cultural in nature. This is the reason that Indian history scientifically and logically divided into three periods Ancient, Medieval and Modern is also described as Hindu, Muslim and Christian periods respectively. The formation of minority and majority during all three periods of history presents a very complex picture.

#### **13.4.1 Rise and Growth of Communalism in India**

The rise and growth of communalism in India should not be understood in isolation from the historical circumstances it has passed through. In this connection, the nature of British colonialism and challenges it faced in India should be first of all kept in mind. A united and strong population was obviously not in the best interest of British colonialism, thus division and fragmentation must have been their aim. The reform movements amongst Hindus as well as amongst Muslim had already established that both the communities had their own distinct and peculiar problems. However, there were many common problems also which could have been solved with common efforts of both the major communities of India. But this was never done or even attempted at. Thus a socially and culturally divided society could not place political homogeneity. The use of religious symbols drawn from Hinduism also led to alienation and subsequent communalization of other religious minorities. The British government took advantage of the situation and deliberately encouraged political division. Consequently the communalism came first and the nationalism later in India. These historical facts and developments influenced and guided the course of Indian freedom struggle which has a bearing not only on minority rights but majority-minority relations today.

#### **13.5 SELF-CHECK EXERCISE**

- (i) Discuss the concept of linguistic minorities in India.
- (ii) Analyse the causes and consequences of communalism in India.
- (iii) What do you understand by minority group?

### 13.6 SUMMARY

Ethnic relations in India have always been historically complex. India is ethnically diverse, with more than 2,000 different ethnic groups- There is also significant diversity within regions, and almost every province has its own distinct mixture of ethnicities, traditions, and culture. Throughout the history of India, ethnic relations have been both constructive and destructive. On the other hand, the present day minorities and the so called majority in India are the product of a long historical process that started long ago in ancient times. The origin and development of the Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism in India and arrival of other religious communities from outside continuously maintained the process of minority formation. The constant interaction between the followers of diverse persuasions led to large scale religious conversion into Islam and Christianity and as a result a composite Indian culture was developed. The minority-majority relations never became a serious problem in ancient and medieval times. But with the introduction of representative government by the British rulers, it assumed the status of a major problem of Indian society.

Minority problem coupled with communalism led to a sharp division of Indian society. It was already divided horizontally and vertically even before the arrival of British. But as there was kingship and landlordism, these divisions did not affect the polity and state during those days. But the reforms introduced by, the British Government, recognised various groups in India on the basis of their religion and caste. It was useful for the continuation of the British rule in India that the various groups remained divided and assert accordingly. Perhaps this was the reason that the mighty British Empire did not try to bulldoze the parochial, loyalties but encouraged and promoted them. Hence, the minority consciousness naturally developed under the circumstances, got patronage from the Government. However it soon degenerated into communalism. The Partition was accepted with the hope that it would solve the communal problem in India. But the post-independence events have proved beyond doubt that partition is not always a viable and lasting solution to ethnic or communal problem. It is by the recognition of pluralism and allaying the genuine apprehensions of the minorities through the institutionalisation of their rights with effective institutional arrangements that the people belonging to diverse persuasions can live together.

### 13.7 GLOSSARY

- **Assimilation** : It refers to a mental process, whereby the minority migrant group starts identifying themselves with the host community. Its identity merges into that of the dominant group.
- **Communalism** : Chauvinism based on religious identity. The belief that religion supersedes all other aspects of a person's or group's identity. Usually accompanied by an aggressive and hostile attitude towards persons and groups of other religious (or non-religious) identities.
- **Dominant Group** : A group of people who have more power in a society than any of the subordinate groups.
- **Ethnicity** : Shared culture, which may include heritage, language, religion and more.
- **Minority Group** : Any group of people who are singled out from the others for differential and unequal treatment.
- **Social Construction of Race**: The school of thought that race is not biologically identifiable.
- **Stereotypes** : Oversimplified ideas about groups of people.

- **Subordinate Group** : A group of people who have less power than the dominant group.

### 13.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 13.4
- (ii) Refer section 13.4.1
- (iii) Refer section 13.2

### 13.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Barth, F, 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Differences*. London: Alien and Unwin.
2. Barua, Indira et. al. (ed.) 2002. *Ethnic Groups, Cultural Continuities and Social Change in North-East India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
3. Danda, Ajit K. 1999. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Integration*. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society.
4. Gupta, Dipankar. 2000. *Culture, Space and the Nation-State*. Sage Publications: New Delhi.
5. Shakir, Moin. 1980. *Politics of Minorities*. New Delhi: Ajanta Publications.
6. Sinha, Manoj Kumar. 2005. 'Minority Rights: A Case Study of India', *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 12 (4): 355-374.
7. Wagley, Charles, and Man/in Harris. 1958. *Minorities in the New World: Six Case Studies*. New York; Columbia University Press.

### 13.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Critically examine Ethnic and Minority relations with particular reference to India.
- (ii) What do you understand by ethnicity? Write a brief note on ethnic minorities in Indian context.
- (iii) What are the basic features of minority groups? Give suitable examples.

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## LESSON NO. 14

# GENDER AND CASTE

### STRUCTURE

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender with Respect to Socio-Cultural Groups
- 14.3 Gender and Caste
- 14.4 Role and Identity of Women in Caste Based Society
- 14.5 Self Check Exercise
- 14.6 Summary
- 14.7 Glossary
- 14.8 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 14.9 Suggested Readings
- 14.10 Terminal Questions

### 14.0 INTRODUCTION

Indian society is segregated in multiple ways: caste, class, gender, ethnicity and religion. Entrenched patriarchy and gender divisions, which value boys over girls and keep men and women and boys and girls apart, combine with child marriage to contribute to the creation of a society in which sexual abuse and exploitation of women, particularly Dalit women, is an acceptable part of everyday life. The power play of patriarchy saturates every area of Indian society and gives rise to a variety of discriminatory practices, such as female infanticide, discrimination against girls and dowry-related deaths. It is a major cause of exploitation and abuse of women, with a great deal of sexual violence being perpetrated by men in positions of power. Kate Millet (1968) described women as having a 'caste-like status'. There is no mobility between the sexes and men are rewarded differently from women. She argues that sex is an ascribed status and the relationship between men and women are structured by power relations.

In India, a suffocating patriarchal shadow hangs over the lives of women. Women across various castes and classes of society are victims of its repressive and controlling effects. Those subjected to the heaviest burden of discrimination are from the Dalit or "Scheduled Castes". They experience multiple levels of discrimination and exploitation, much of which is barbaric, degrading, appallingly violent and totally inhumane. Dalit women are the victims of a collision of deep-rooted gender and caste discrimination, resulting in wide ranging exploitation. They are oppressed by the broader Indian society, men from their own community and also their own husbands and male members in the family. Practices like *Devadasi*, whereby girls as young as 12 years of age are dedicated to the Hindu goddess Yellamma and sold into prostitution; honour killings; sexual abuse, including rape; appalling working conditions; and limited access to basic services such as water, sanitation and employment are commonplace.

### 14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be able to :

- Understand the relationship between caste and gender;
- Examine the views of feminists on the gender and socio-cultural groupings intersectionalities.
- Elaborate on the role and identity of women in caste based societies and
- Understand the subordination of women in all caste based societies.

## 14.2 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER WITH RESPECT TO SOCIO-CULTURAL GROUPS

The plurality of 'woman' as a category and the need to address the diversity within this category, including how different groups of women have different access to citizenship and other rights, different identities, and different problems, is now recognized all over the world as an important issue in feminism. In this section, we outline some of the important theoretical interventions from the Western feminists and their implications on the understanding of gender and its intersectionalities with caste identity in India.

The mainstream feminist discourse in the West came under criticism, particularly from African American and non-Western scholars, for ignoring the racial aspect of the gender issue and also from those who pay attention to the economic and social oppression of women. The writings from black feminists have focused on the distinct problems of women from discriminated groups, which are similar to those of other women at some level but are also different in other respects because of aspects of race, color, social origin, ethnicity, and nationality. The literature has underlined how the category 'woman' has, in fact, been representative of dominant groups of women in the same way that the liberal notion of citizenship has been representative of dominant groups of men.

In the North American context, black feminists challenged many of the theoretical formulations that reflected white middle-class women's consciousness and experience. For example, quoting from Sylvia Walby's summary:

*"The labour market experience of women of colour is different from that of white women because of racist structures which disadvantage such women in paid work. This means that there are significant differences between women on the basis of ethnicity, which need to be taken into account". •*

Thus, ethnic and racial issues needed to be examined in the context of gender and the specific histories of colonialism and slavery.

Similar parallels may be made about the intersection of gender and caste in the labor market in India. The labor market experiences of Dalit women are different from those of the upper-caste women because of the traditional notion of the caste system of purity and pollution. Dalit women are hardly ever employed as cooks in upper-caste homes. They will be hired to do the work of cleaning, washing clothes, and sometimes looking after the sick. They are treated by other castes coming into contact with them as-untouchable, unapproachable, and at times even unseeable. It is this notion of untouchability that leads to physical isolation and restriction in employment opportunities.

Indian feminist discourse has been uncomfortable until quite recently, to acknowledge caste or religious differences among different groups of women. This is partly because it fractures the kind of political unity that feminists seek to build. The issue of violence against Women like rape, murder, and other forms of violence was taken up initially with campaigns such as those related to the Mathura police station gang rape case in the 1970s. When activists of the Indian women's movement have recognized

caste differences, they have recognized caste as an aspect of class, such as, for instance, in their efforts to organize rural women workers, many of whom might be Dalits; or when they take up issues of poverty, where Dalits and lower castes are overrepresented; or when they address issues of violence against women. Dalit women prominently figure among the victims of sexual violence. For example, the gang rape of a woman (a Dalit woman) employee in a government scheme for 'empowerment' of women when she tried to stop a child marriage within a powerful landowning family in a village in Rajasthan. This case was taken up by a non-governmental organization called *Vishakha* as a case of sexual harassment of a woman carrying out her assigned work duties. This led the Supreme Court to issue a ruling on sexual harassment at the workplace, with a directive to set up cells for the prevention of sexual harassment of working women at their places of employment.

However, the focus on labour and on class struggle has precluded an explicit focus on caste as it affects women, both of the lower and upper castes. That is, upper-caste feminists have often refused to recognize caste as a form of social privilege and capital that enables social mobility and choice. Rather than seeing caste as having its own independent identity, many feminists have seen caste as class-like; that is, as a socioeconomic category instead of an aspect of religious conceptions of self and society that reproduce structural inequality. The proponents of the women's movement in India have generally confined themselves to seeking changes in laws relating to gender relations, marriage, domestic violence, economic empowerment, and sexuality; they have been mostly silent on the public violence and discrimination that Dalit women so frequently endure.

In the early 1990s, Dalit women began to question the mainstream women's movement because of its failure to recognize the distinctive character of the problems of Dalit women. Dalit women's discourse recognizes the problem of gender exploitation by their men, and therefore, the Dalit women's movement, like the 'mainstream' women's movement, addresses the issue of patriarchy, which prevents women from asserting their choices and participating in decision making in both the community and the family. However, writers on the problems of Dalit women have argued that low-caste women, particularly the untouchables, have suffered from not only gender discrimination and economic deprivation, but also discrimination related to prescribed customary provisions in the institution of caste and untouchability. They suffer a triple deprivation owing to gender, poverty and caste. Thus, the role of caste was recognized in having significant influence on gender identities.

### **14.3 GENDER AND CASTE**

Caste is a hierarchical system practiced in the Indian subcontinent predominantly through systematic oppression on the basis of birth. It is not a divine division of labour but discrimination of a caste based on their occupation as well as denying them rights to otherwise change their occupational lineage. The lineage of each caste is ensured by endogamy and social exclusion. Gender is the social norms attached to one's sex. One's gender determines the normative behaviour of a person and is detrimental to an individual's agency. It is a mechanism to control the mobility, sexuality and power of all except cis-gender heterosexual men.

"Women are the gateway to the caste system," as stated by B.R. Ambedkar. Caste and gender are intersectional categories. One's caste determines the nature of the norms that shall be attached to their gender within and outside their community. Moreover, this isn't limited to rural India only, contrary to popular beliefs of urban spaces being devoid of castism and its appropriation in everyday lives.

A woman's chastity is often considered as a caste's honor. Therefore, the men of a particular caste dominate and control the sexuality of their women in order to maintain the 'purity' of their caste



lineage. Savarna women often reciprocate the same patriarchal and casteist values because they are rewarded for conforming to the patriarchal norms and are socialized in a manner to believe in the hetero normative oppressive norms of their castes. Savarna women who don't conform to the normative ideas attached to their caste and gender are punished in various ways.

Violence against women of other castes often happen as a means to humiliate another caste. Savarna men dominate savarna women and lower caste men and women. Savarna women dominate lower caste men and women. Lower caste men dominate their women. Therefore, the most oppressed remains the lower caste women. Thus, caste and gender are not only interrelated but intersecting where the oppression of an individual or a community is in a way to either maintain or uproot the existing power dynamics.

Women of upper caste, in relation to their men occupy a lowly position. Women in upper caste households are strictly bound by social norms. A girl's parents or brothers may withhold economic or physical support to her for not complying with their decision especially related to spouse selection. Marriage, as an event and as an institution greatly determines and restricts women's position in these households.

Women of low caste constitute the most vulnerable section of Indian society. Lower caste women too have codes to uphold. Their marriages are too negotiated by their male kinsmen. Women in low caste society generally go out to work and contribute to family income. In this context it is imperative to mention that in the upper caste manual labour is looked down upon and women are not allowed to go out and work. Women of low caste are thus not confined to domestic domain. They lead a less restricted life compared to the women of upper caste society. It is important to remember that the very idea women of low caste go out for work does not hint to their better status but it is an economic necessity. Lower caste women are victims of both caste discrimination and gender discrimination.

To assess the position of women in ancient society a reference to stratification system which includes Varna and caste system is essential. Caste endogamy as mechanism of recruiting and retaining control over the labor and sexuality of women existed. Concept of purity and pollution segregating groups and also regulating mobility of women are also important. Caste not only determines social division of labor but also sexual division of labor. Certain tasks have to be performed by women that certain other tasks are meant for men.

In agriculture, women can engaged themselves in transplantation or removal of weeds but not in ploughing. Also with upward mobility of the group women are immediately withdrawn from the outside work. Overt rules prohibiting women from specific activities and denying certain rights did exist. But more subtle expression of patriarchy was through symbolism giving messages of inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing pure image of women and through the ritual practices which day in and day out emphasized the dominant role of a woman as a faithful wife and mother. The linking of women and shudras together is one more evidence of the low position of women. Prescription and prohibitions for shudras and women were same on many occasions. The prohibition of the sacred thread ceremony for both women and shudras, similar punishment for kitting a shudra or a woman, denial of religious privileges are some of the examples which indicate how caste and gender got entrenched in Indian society.

The concepts of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriage denigrate women. A marriage where a boy of upper caste marries a girl of lower caste is approved and called *anuloma* while marriage of women ritually pure group with men of lower caste was called *pratiloma*. Serious punishments like

excommunication and even death could be evoked for transgressing the norms. Physical mobility is also restricted through caste norms. The significant symbol of the low status of women in society is that the women of lower caste are accessible to men from higher caste while there is very severe punishment for men of lower caste who dare approach any woman of higher caste. Early marriage, marriage within the caste, prohibition of partiloma and marriage as a sacrament whereby a woman is bound in wedlock till she dies were all practices that suggest the control of sexuality.

#### **14.4 ROLE AND IDENTITY OF WOMEN IN CASTE BASED SOCIETY**

The issue of identity of women in caste based society cannot be discussed without bringing in the concept of patriarchy. Patriarchy is part of all identity construction. Gender, class and caste intersect with patriarchy. Men mostly enjoy more power. Women, on the other hand, occupy a lower position in all identity groups and sub-groups. A large majority of women accept and play out these inequalities that are used in identity politics. Failure to do so angers their community, and can even destroy their relationship. Challenging their community identity codes can lead to severe consequences, in some cases it can lead to death too. Women are symbols and represent the honor of their community. Their autonomy is controlled. Due to dominance and universalism of patriarchal practices, women end up negotiating with patriarchy.

The chastity of women is strongly related to caste status. Generally, the higher ranking the caste, the more sexual control its women are expected to exhibit. Brahman brides should be virgin, faithful to one husband, and celibate in widowhood. By contrast, a sweeper bride may or may not be a virgin, extramarital affairs may be tolerated, and, if widowed or divorced, the woman is encouraged to remarry. For the higher castes, such control of female sexuality helps ensure purity of lineage of crucial importance to maintenance of high status.

Women in upper caste societies live their lives largely within the familial parameters. Their mobility is severely restricted and they are not permitted to go out for work. Women play the key role in maintaining the sanctity and purity of the home. The bodily purity of upper castes is believed to be linked to what is ingested. Leela Dube, a renowned feminist anthropologist has argued that women play an important role in maintaining caste boundaries through preparation of food and in maintaining its purity. The job of safeguarding food, forestalling danger and in a broad sense, attending to the rules which govern the relational idiom of food fall upon women. Women's practices in relation to food play a critical role in the hierarchical ordering of castes. The place of women as active agents and instructors in the arena of food and rituals also implies that women who command its gamut of rules gain special respect. Thus, women who espouse the family tradition and conform to the patriarchal order of society are honoured and respected; else they are subjected to severe punishment. The rules the women are expected to uphold and mostly designed to suit to the requirements of their male folks. These rules are generally considered to be absolute and women are expected to adhere to them blindly.

There is striking difference in the levels of purity/impurity between men and women of high caste. Men of higher caste neither incur self-pollution of the kind their women do nor do they have to perform polluting work for other castes. Their women, on the contrary, are involved in pollution incurred through bodily processes, mainly menstruation and childbirth. They are also responsible for doing some of the polluting tasks within the family. There is a pervasive notion that women never attain the level of purity of men of their own caste. It is well known that traditionally women of twice-born castes have been equated with Shudras who could not be initiated into the (earning of the Vedas.

In the case of low caste women, the difference in the levels of purity/impurity between men and women is much less among the lower castes than among the high castes. Low class women, apart from self-pollution, also deal with other's pollution through occupational activities such as midwifery, disposal of dirt, the washing of dirty clothes, and many other services. But, their men too have to undertake polluting crafts work and services for others. Among these castes, women's substantial contribution to the process of earning a livelihood along with sharing of impure tasks by both men and women makes the gender division less unequal. However, it is worth mentioning here that women's contribution to occupational continuity is carried out within patrilineal confines and under the imposition and control of caste.

Thus, position of women in upper caste society is considerably different from their counterpart in lower castes. The higher the location in the caste hierarchy, the greater are the control on women.

#### 14.5 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Discuss the relationship between gender and caste.
- (ii) Highlight the basic ideas of feminist perspective on gender with respect to socio-cultural groups.
- (iii) How gender identities are constructed in society?

#### 14.6 SUMMARY

Caste is one of the basic institutions of Hindu society. The significance of gender in understanding the caste system and the way caste invades on women's life cannot be ignored. Indian society is strongly patriarchal. Women's compliance to structure of caste and class is not merely passive but can extend to incitement of their menfolk to hold on to unchallenged social power that they have wielded into contemporary times. Women in India are treated as inferior and lowly by their male counterparts. Women are treated as subordinates and their sexuality is controlled by men. In India caste system is an important institution. This feature makes the Indian society highly stratified and hierarchical. Caste and gender are highly correlated. Though women of upper caste face gender discrimination at every step of their life and it is their men who control their destiny. Yet women of upper caste are entitled to certain privileges. It is important to note that these privileges are granted to them only when they conform to the patriarchal order of society. Women of the lower caste are the most disadvantaged lot. They are victim of both gender discrimination and caste inequality.

#### 14.7 GLOSSARY

- **Caste System** : A system of social stratification based on inherited status or ascription.
- **Devadasi** : Devadasi means a woman who performed the service for some deity in a temple. They were unmarried temple servants who had been dedicated to temple deities as young girls through rites resembling Hindu marriage ceremonies.
- **Feminism** : Advocacy of social equality for the sexes, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism.
- **Gender** : Socially-constructed roles and responsibilities that societies consider appropriate for men and women.
- **Gender-based Violence** : Violence against women based on their perceived subordinate status (e.g., physical abuse, sexual assault, psychological abuse, trafficking).
- **Intersectionality** : The view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated,

but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. For example, caste discrimination overlaps with gender discrimination and thus lower caste women are at more vulnerable position than their upper caste counterparts.

- **Patriarchy** : Social organisation that structures the dominance of men over women.

#### 14.8 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 14.3
- (ii) Refer section 14.2
- (iii) Refer section 14.4

#### 14.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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#### 14.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Examine the relationships between caste, gender and social stratification.
2. Critically examine the role of women in caste based society.
3. Discuss how gender serves as a means of stratification in Indian society ?



## **LESSON NO. 15**

# **GENDER AND CLASS DIVISIONS**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 15.0 Introduction
- 15.1 Objectives
- 15.2 Gender and Class
- 15.3 Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Class
  - 15.3.1 Radical Feminism
  - 15.3.2 Materialist Feminism
  - 15.3.3 Dual System Theory
- 15.4 Self Check Exercise
- 15.5 Summary
- 15.6 Glossary
- 15.7 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 15.8 Suggested Readings
- 15.9 Terminal Questions

### **15.0 INTRODUCTION**

The most commonly used approach to the study of social inequality is based on an analysis of the positions that people occupy in the social structure. The concept of class has, thus, been frequently used in sociological studies that seek to determine the positions occupied by different individuals in production and market processes and to explore how that position affects their levels of material well-being and their life opportunities. However, class position is not the only determinant of people's life opportunities. There are other dimensions in today's societies that also influence these outcomes. Sex, or gender, is one example. The available empirical evidence shows that gender is a core determinant of the opportunities that are open to people in the labour market. This has led researchers to look more closely into the relationships between class and gender.

Stratification theory has traditionally focused exclusively on the position of men in the occupational system, either ignoring women completely, or locating them through male heads of families. Recent feminist research has criticised the assumptions underlying this approach, arguing that sex-based inequalities are an inherent feature of the class system, and must therefore be incorporated into class analysis. At a theoretical level, feminists have argued that to treat the family as a single unit in which all members belong to the same class position, ignores the existence of sexual inequalities within the family. At an empirical level the increasing numbers of married women entering the workforce undermines the notion of the male head of household.

### **15.1 OBJECTIVES**

After going through this lesson, you will be able to :

- Understand how gender and class are subordinating the women in comparison to men.

- Understand the gender and class intersectionality in the context of social stratification.
- Elucidate the contribution of different feminist perspectives in comprehending the class and gender relation

## 15.2 GENDER AND CLASS

Different forms of inequality have often been separated out because it is extremely difficult to try to think through how inequality may be simultaneously gendered, racial, and classed. Class is the main concept used within anthropology to theorise social inequality. Class analysis has dealt with three main issues.

- Firstly, the determination of the distinction between class categories and the allocation of people to them;
- Secondly, the understanding of mobility between classes and
- Thirdly, the implications of class position and class mobility for political, class, action and social consciousness.

Gender, combined with other elements of social stratification such as caste, class, ethnicity, location, etc. forms the basis of social and gender inequalities. Scholars argue that one of the problems posed by the gender and stratification studies is understanding the gender inequalities in terms of class divisions. They further argue that the problem seems to be simple but is difficult to sort out. This is because gender inequalities have their roots in history than just class systems. For example, in hunting-gathering societies too, men are considered superior to women; and these societies are classless. But, class divisions are so visible in modern societies that they tend to overlap significantly with gender inequalities. Thus, it is important to understand and explain gender inequalities in class terms.

Traditionally class analysis has ignored gender relations. In the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s most writers on class ignored gender relations. They rarely felt it necessary to establish the reasons for this, at best using resource constraints, in a footnote, to justify an all mate sample. The first full defense of the omission of gender was presented by Goldthorpe in 1983. This approach had faced numerous criticisms of class theory for its sexist bias. Goldthorpe substantiates his position on gender using data from the Oxford Mobility Survey.

The 'conventional position' in the class analysis was that the paid work of women is relatively insignificant compared to that of men. Goldthorpe emphasises that the argument is not in favour of the ideology of sexism; rather it recognizes the subordinated position of most women in the labour force. Therefore, the majority of women are dependent economically on their husbands. Thus, women's class position is determined by the husband's class situation.

However, this argument of Goldthorpe was criticised on many levels. Class position is not the only determinant of people's life opportunities. There are other dimensions in today's societies, that also influence these outcomes. Sex, or gender, is one example. The available empirical evidence shows that gender is a core determinant of the opportunities that are open to people in the labour market. This has led researchers to look more closely into the relationships between class and gender.

This has led researchers to look more closely into the relationships between class and gender. In the 1960s, the feminist movement engaged in a debate concerning the theoretical and methodological implications of the analysis of women's positions in the social structure. As more and more women entered the labour market, they began to question the characterization of women as a peripheral

component of the class system, which was, according to this point of view, reflected in the fact that class position was analysed on the basis of the occupational status of the head of household and chief breadwinner, who was generally a man.

The large-scale entry of Women into forms of gainful employment in advanced capitalist societies prompted researchers to ask themselves to what extent sex was independent of class. They discussed, for example, how to go about analyzing situations in which there were two heads of household who occupied different class positions. In the realm of empirical research, this debate raised questions as to which unit of analysis was appropriate i.e., whether it was better to gather data at the individual or household level.

The most well-known stance regarding the central importance of the household in studies of social class is that of John Goldthorpe. In his view, all members of the household occupied the same class position. He argued that class position should be measured on the basis of the economic activity conducted by the man of the house because men were the main providers and breadwinners.

In contrast, feminists maintained that, given the fact that there were some households that were economically dependent on a woman, and there were some in which both the man and the woman were breadwinners, it was necessary to have a joint classification model, i.e. a model that was capable of combining the attributes of both spouses in determining their class or status. These discussions led to the development of an approach based on the concept of intersectionality, which focuses on the ways in which the interactions of various dimensions of inequality influence life opportunities.

However, many thinkers have not accepted the concept of intersectionality. Wright (1989) has conducted empirical research on class and gender in which he demonstrates that gender is an extremely important determinant of access to positions of authority in countries such as Australia, Japan, Sweden and the United States. However, in an effort to vindicate the Marxist theory of social class, Wright (1992) states that social class is a "gender-neutral" abstract concept in much the same way as patriarchy is, in the abstract, a "class-neutral" concept, in other words, in the abstract, class and gender can be understood as two totally distinct concepts. Accordingly, Wright contends that the complex relationship between class and sex can only be understood, in the abstract, if they are thought of as independent phenomena.

Thus, Wright contends that the interaction between class and gender exists, but only at a concrete level. In other words, class structures are shaped by gender relations solely in a circumstantial material sense. By the same token, it is only at that concrete, circumstantial level that gender shapes other class-related phenomena, such as class consciousness and collective action.

Bourdieu's work on class and status has been very influential and many sociologists have drawn on it for their own studies. For example, British sociologist Beverley Skeggs used Bourdieu's account of class and culture and examined the formation of class and gender in her study of north-west England women. Furthermore, some scholars suggested that class position should be determined from occupation independently for each individual, without referring to the individual's domestic circumstances. Interestingly, the debate still continues due to feminist critiques and undeniable changes in women's economic role'.

### **15.3 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER AND CLASS**

Feminism has a tremendous impact on the analysis of the economy. Whole new areas of activity were declared, such as housework conceptualised as domestic labour, a domestic mode of production and more recently as care-work by different feminists. Feminist ideas led to the reworking of the analysis

of paid work and its transformation. New forms and practices of gender inequality were analysed including women's unemployment as a reserve army of labour, occupational sex segregation, part-time work and issues of time flexibility, all of which had implications for the analysis of inequality in employment more generally. The intersection of gender with class has been a long-running theme. In the following sections, the different feminist perspectives and the feminist interpretation of the economic dimension are discussed.

### **15.3.1 Radical Feminism**

Radical feminists argued that male control of women's sexuality was a key factor in women's oppression. Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone are the more visible of the first radical feminist theorists. Millet undertook the rather daunting task of explaining the causes of women's oppression. Her explanation took women's domination by men (patriarchy) as central to their social position. This inferior position, according to Millet, was not a product of 'natural' differences between women and men. Instead she rigorously examined the socio-cultural production of women by redefining the concept of politics. Millet provides a broad theory of how patriarchy operates through ideology (for example, myth and religion), institutions (for example, family, education, economy) and force (for example, wife beating and rape). Although she recognises class and race as variables in women's oppression, she tends to emphasise that all women are subject to oppression by men.

Radical feminism attempted to highlight women's experiences by going beyond purely economic explanations of women's oppression to include ideology, and literary and other representations of women. In order to overcome that oppression, radical feminists were not content to reform the present system but they envisaged a more revolutionary overturning of present ways of thinking about and organizing the world. In America, radical feminism is sometimes also called cultural feminism.

### **15.3.2 Material Feminism**

Materialist feminists draw their political theory from Marxist materialism, which argues that 'the determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of immediate life'. Materialist feminism signalled the adaptation of Marx's methods rather than simple adoption of Marx's ideas as in Marxist Feminism. Hartmann argues that Marxist class categories are 'gender-blind'. Marx's theory of the development of capitalism is a theory of the development of "empty places" and cannot tell us who will fill the empty places-Marxist attempts at a solution to the 'woman question', she argues, have all suffered from a basic and fundamental flaw in that ultimately, woman's oppression has been conceptualised and understood as but a particular aspect of class oppression. Marxists asserted that there is a link between women's oppression and the system of exploitation of our society or 'the link between the forms of oppression of women and the organisation of production in the society.

Hartmann accepts the radical feminist account of patriarchy as constituting an independent system of domination, yet she is reluctant to abandon class theory altogether. In Hartmann's account, Marxist analysis is presented not as incorrect, but rather as incomplete. Marx did not acknowledge the role of domestic labour within society. Marxist theory also does not explain why it is women that do domestic labour and, if that is unclear, it is also unclear why women should be the reserve army. The main problem raised by critics about Marxist feminism is that it is too narrowly focused on capitalism, being unable to deal with gender inequality in pre-and post-capitalism, rather than recognising the independence of the gender dynamic.

In 1865, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor have suggested that the recognition of domestic labour is necessary and women should be liberated from housework. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1903)



claimed that what housewives do at home should be considered as a work, and society should accept its benefits. The early discussions about housework continued with Margaret Reid's pioneering study. *Economics of Household Production*, which had a little influence on the mainstream economy when it was published in 1934. Despite these efforts the role of domestic labour within society has been largely neglected by both mainstream and critical theories until 1960s. Due to the drastic increase in participation of women in labour force, the debate continued under the name of 'New Home Economies'.

Starting from 1960s, women's unequal position within society has been discussed mainly by feminists. In 1970s, housework and gendered division of labour at home were included within the agenda of Marxists. Referring to Althusser's superstructure theory, most of Marxist analyses have concluded that the patriarchy is an ideology, and it is subsidised by 'economic structure'. Early feminist studies and domestic labour debate try to establish a conceptual framework, which investigates the place of patriarchy within relations of production and reproduction.

### **15.3.3 Dual System Theory**

Dual system theory is a synthesis of Marxist and radical feminist theory. Rather than being an exclusive focus on either capitalism or patriarchy, this perspective argues that both systems are present and important in the structuring of contemporary gender relations. Eisenstein (1981) considers that the two systems are so closely interrelated and symbiotic that they have become one. Patriarchy provides a system of control and law and order, while capitalism provides a system of economy, in the pursuit of profit. Changes in one part of this capitalist patriarchal system will cause changes in another part, as when the increase in women's paid work, due to capitalist expansion, sets up a pressure for political change, as a result of the increasing contradiction in the position of women who are both housewives and wage labourers.

Mitchell (1975) discusses gender in terms of a separation between the two systems, in which the economic level is ordered by capitalist relations, and the level of the unconscious by the law of patriarchy. It is in order to uncover the latter that she engages in her re-evaluations of the work of Freud where she argued for the significance of the level of the unconscious in understanding the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology, which would ostensibly appear to have no material basis in contemporary societies.

Hartmann sees patriarchal relations crucially operating at the level of the appropriation of women's labour by men, and not at the level of ideology and the unconscious. Hartmann argues that both housework and wage labour are important sites of women's exploitation by men. These two forms of expropriation also act to reinforce each other, since women's disadvantaged position in paid work makes them vulnerable in making marriage arrangements, and their position in the family disadvantages them in paid work. Hartmann argues that patriarchy pre-dates capitalism, and that this expropriation of women's labour is not new and distinctive to capitalist societies and hence cannot be reduced to it.

The question arises is whether the concept of class is useful to understand gender relations. The strength of class concept lies in identifying social inequality and in capturing the material aspect of social inequality. Whereas its weaknesses are, firstly that it downplays the significance of non-economic aspects of women's subordination and, Secondly, that it comes with a set of baggage that is difficult to drop about its relations to capitalist rather than patriarchal social relations.

## **15.4 SELF CHECK EXERCISE**

- (i) Write a brief note on radical feminism.

- (ii) What was the 'conventional position' of class analysis?
- (iii) How materialist feminism is different from Marxists feminism.

## 15.5 SUMMARY

Initially feminists endeavored to see how class differences between women were difficult to demarcate using traditional class categories based around relationship to paid work. However, by considering gender as it emerged within both relations of production and of reproduction within the household, materialist feminists were able to make some headway in linking gender and class inequalities. But, class is not just about material situation but is a discourse about what and who is valuable and respectable in society. Gender is intertwined with every aspect of class, both material and non-material. Culture in turn provides a way ahead for holistic understanding of gender exploring it from all dimensions of class. It enriches and encourages reorienting and rethinking class inequalities in gendered ways to cover other dimensions, apart from materialistic. Sylvia Walby opines that class should not be used to cover non-economic forms of inequality, since to do so would be to twist the concept too far from its heritage; however, Bourdieu's theorization of forms of 'capital' contributes and encourages including new dimensions in understanding of class and gender relation.

## 15.6 GLOSSARY

- **Feminism** : Advocacy of social equality for the sexes, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism.
- **Gender** : Socially-constructed roles and responsibilities that societies consider appropriate for men and women.
- **Intersectionality** : The view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. For example, class and gender interface that put lower class women at more vulnerable position than their upper class counterparts.
- **Patriarchy** : Social organisation that structures the dominance of men over women.
- **Social Class** : Grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, power and prestige.

## 15.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 15.3.1
- (it) Refer section 15.2
- (iii) Refer section 15.3.2

## 15.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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**15.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Critically examine the linkages between class and gender.
2. Elaborate on the various perspectives on relation between gender and class.
3. Why has gender been omitted from the classic class analysis? Give reasons.

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## **LESSON NO. 16**

# **ISSUES IN GENDER EQUALITY**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 16.0 Introduction
- 16.1 Objectives
- 16.2 Meaning of Gender Inequality
- 16.3 Gender Socialisation and Gender Inequality
- 16.4 Issues in Gender Equality
- 16.5 Perspectives on Gender Inequality
  - 16.5.1 Functionalist Perspective on Gender Inequality
  - 16.5.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender Inequality
- 16.5 Self Check Exercise
- 16.6 Summary
- 16.7 Glossary
- 16.8 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 16.9 Suggested Readings
- 16.10 Terminal Questions

### **16.0 INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality is a human right, but our world faces a persistent gap in access to opportunities and decision-making power for women and men. Globally, women have fewer opportunities for economic participation than men, less access to basic and higher education, greater health and safety risks, and less political representation. Guaranteeing the rights of women and giving them opportunities to reach their full potential is critical not only for attaining gender equality, but also for meeting a wide range of international development goals. Empowered women and girls contribute to the health and productivity of their families, communities, and countries, creating a ripple effect that benefits everyone.

There is rarely any society where men do not enjoy more power, wealth, status and influence than women. This is the base for gender inequalities throughout the society. It is evident from the fact that men are given an excessive share of social, political, economic and cultural resources. This proves that gender itself is one of the significant bases of stratification. Yet, research studies on stratification were gender blind. They were written as if women did not have an existence or as though, for research on power, wealth and prestige, women did not make an interesting or important category. Thus, the studies of gender and stratification are comparatively recent. It developed from the feminist scholarship. A way to understand the origins of gender inequalities is to study about the process of gender socialisation. In this lesson, we will explore the important issues regarding gender equality.

### **16.1 OBJECTIVES**

After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of gender inequality

- Discuss the role of gender socialisation in maintaining the gender inequality in society.
- Explain the different issues in gender equality in contemporary times
- Examine the different perspectives on gender inequality.

## 16.2 MEANING OF GENDER INEQUALITY

'Gender' is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviours assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society whereas the term 'sex' is a biological and psychological phenomenon which defines men and women. Sociological interpretation of gender differences and inequalities has taken contrasting positions on this question of sex and gender. Three broad approaches are given.

- Firstly, we shall look at arguments for biological bases to behavioural differences between man and women.
- Secondly, attention will turn to theories placing centre importance on socialization and the learning of gender roles.
- Finally, we shall consider the ideas of scholars who believe that both gender and sex have no biological bases but are entirely socially constructed.

Gender Inequalities refers to the obvious or hidden disparities among individuals based on the performance of gender. This problem in simple term is known as Gender Bias which in simple terms means the gender stratification or making difference between girl and a boy. In India, this problems is mainly seen in the rural areas because many rural people think that the girl child is burden on them. But now this is also being seen in the urban areas i.e., in offices, institutions, school and in society. The afflicted world in which we live is characterised by deeply unequal sharing of the burden of adversities between women and men.

There are a lot of ways experts define gender inequality because like most things in life, definition is interpretation. The most straightforward definition identifies gender inequality as "allowing people different opportunities due to perceived differences based solely on issues of gender". Gender inequality can also be defined as "differences in the status, power and prestige women and men have in groups, collectivities, and status". While the first definition focuses on disparities in opportunity, the second highlights disparities in perceptions of gender.

## 16.3 GENDER SOCIALISATION AND GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender socialisation is the process through which boys and girls learn about the behaviours, roles and attitudes expected by the society. It influences how people behave as males and females in society. Gender socialisation encompasses the process of learning society's gender roles and their advantages and limitations. In most societies there is a clear categorization of what it means to be male or female. This categorisation process and the agents of socialisation that transmit knowledge about gender roles influence how individuals define themselves and other in terms of gender and sex roles. It begins during childhood with the help of different agencies such as the family, school, peer group, media etc. The process emphasises on learning those social norms, behaviours, roles that are seen to correspond with one's sex (male/female).

In many societies gender roles are rigidly defined. For instance, men have traditionally been expected to be strong, aggressive even dominating. Women have been expected to be nurturing, sensitive, emotional and relatively passive. Children are taught these values both consciously and

subconsciously from a very early age. This is further reinforced with the use of toys as boys are given large sized, noise making or violent type whereas girls are often given gentler toys. These expressions influence information of self as well as identities. The main agents of gender socialization are parents, peer, siblings, school, society and religion. For very young children parents and family play the central role in shaping gender socialization. They determine how the family interacts with a boy as well as the types of toys and clothes that the baby is given.

It is argued that gender inequalities are outcomes of men and women being socialised into different roles. For example, boys are usually told since childhood that they have to be the breadwinner of the family while girls are being told to learn how to be a good wife. Furthermore, boys and girls learn about the notions of masculinity and femininity. What guide them in this learning process are the positive and negative sanctions. Positive sanctions are responses by individual or groups that encourage expected behaviours. These include rewards, compliments etc. For example, appreciating that a boy wants a gun toy as it is a marker of masculinity. Negative sanctions are responses by individual or groups that discourage behaviours which do not conform to expected ones. It includes punishments, frowns, avoidance etc. For example, girls are being denied a gun toy and instead given dolls or cookery set.

Moreover, the portrayal of gender roles in movies has deep impacts on boys and girls. Male characters are shown as active, aggressive and adventurous while female characters are portrayed as passive, submissive and confined to the domestic sphere. Socialisation is deemed to be inadequate if an individual develops gender practices which are not compatible with his/her biological sex. Therefore, inequalities result from the fact that gender socialization teaches men and women their expected behaviours and roles. And since it is a process that begins at childhood and continues later-in life, its imprints tend to be permanent.

Gender inequality has adverse impact on development goals as it reduces economic growth. It hampers overall well-being because blocking women from participating in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society. Many developing countries including India have displayed gender inequality in education, employment and health.

Gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. Although the roles of man and women vary from culture to culture, there is no known instance of a society in which female are more powerful than males. Men's roles are generally more highly valued and rewarded than women's role. In almost every culture, women bear the primarily responsibilities for child care and domestic work, while men have traditionally borne responsibilities for providing the family livelihood. The prevailing division of labour between the sexes had led to men and women assuming unequal positions in term of power, prestige and wealth. Despite the advances that women have made in countries around the world, gender differences continue to serve as the basis for social inequalities.

#### **16.4 ISSUES IN GENDER EQUALITY**

Gender equality means that men and women have equal power and equal opportunities for financial independence, education, and personal development. Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality. It includes increasing a woman's sense of self-worth, her decision-making power, her access to opportunities and resources, her power and control over her own life inside and outside the home and her ability to effect change. Yet gender issues are not focused on women

alone, but on the relationship between men and women in society. The actions and attitudes of men and boys play an essential role in achieving gender equality. Education, health, violence against women, economic disparities, political empowerment, etc. are some of the core issues in achieving gender equality. In the following sections, we will elaborate on the main issues in achieving gender equality.

- (i) **Women's Education** : Education is a key area of focus. Although the world is making progress in achieving gender parity in education, girls still make up a higher percentage of out-of-school children than boys. Approximately one quarter of girls in the developing world do not attend school. Typically, families with limited means who cannot afford costs such as school fees, uniforms, and supplies for all of their children will prioritize education for their sons. Families may also rely on girls' labor for household chores, carrying water, and childcare, leaving limited time for schooling. But prioritizing girls' education provides perhaps the single highest return on investment in the developing world. An educated girl is more likely to postpone marriage, raise a smaller family, have healthier children and send her own children to school. She has more opportunities to earn an income and to participate in political processes.
- (ii) **Women's Health** : Women's health and safety is an important area. Health is a universal human right. That's why, irrespective of religion, age or where we live, we have a right to the information and the healthcare services that allow us to care for our bodies and our quality of life. It is not just being free of illnesses, but also having access to reasonable standards of living, housing, food, decent work, as well as appropriate level of medical assistance so that we can develop our full potential as individuals.

HIV/AIDS is becoming an increasingly impactful issue for women. This can be related to women having fewer opportunities for health education, unequal power in sexual partnership, or as a result of gender-based violence. Maternal health is also an issue of specific concern. In many countries, women have limited access to prenatal and infant care, and are more likely to experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth. This is a critical concern in countries where girls marry and have children before they are ready; often well before the age of 18. Quality maternal health care can provide an important entry point for information and services that empower mothers as informed decision-makers concerning their own health and the health of their children. Thus, to be able to truly achieve gender equality, we need to look at the health and well-being of women. This is a precondition for the promotion of the sustainable growth of our communities.

- (iii) **Economic Empowerment** : Though women comprise more than 50 per cent of the world's population, they only own 1 per cent of the world's wealth. Throughout the world, women and girls perform long hours of unpaid domestic work. In some places, women still lack rights to own land or to inherit property, obtain access to credit, earn income, or to move up in their workplace, free from job discrimination. At all levels, including at home and in the public arena, women are widely underrepresented as decision-makers.

One of the areas at the workplace where gender differences are seen is the difference in the remuneration that men and women workers receive for work of equal value. A study by the International Labour Organization in 2013 shows that the global wage gap is 23 per cent. However, this number does not account for the millions of women working in the informal economy with no protection. Also, many countries lack reliable statistics to prepare more accurate reports, therefore, this already high figure will be even higher.

- (iv) Political Empowerment :** Women's political participation is a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. Political accountability to women begins with increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. It facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and is a means of ensuring better accountability to women. The equal participation of men and women in decision-making has been identified as important prerequisites for attaining equality and equity through democratic means.

Ensuring women's and men's equal participation in governance processes and the decisions that affect their lives are vital for achieving inclusive and effective governance. However, despite some progress, globally women remain under-represented in all aspects of political life. In legislatures around the world, women are outnumbered 4 to 1, yet women's political participation is crucial for achieving gender equality and genuine democracy.

- (v) Violence against Women :** The socially and culturally built hierarchy between the genders holds certain power relationships. Any power relationship is asymmetrical by definition i.e., one of the subjects of the relationship has power and the other one does not. Usually, men are socially regarded as being of higher value. This asymmetrical situation is present in many areas of social life and can lead to violence (physical, verbal, or psychological). Studies show that more than 1/3 of the women around the world have experienced violence at some point in their lives and it can happen at the workplace.

- (vi) Sexual Harassment :** Sexual harassment in a form of violence that through a show of power intimidates, humiliates, and affects another person's dignity. This behavior is sexual in nature (physical contacts, sexual advances, comments and jokes with sexual content, exhibiting pornographic material or making inappropriate comments) and undesired. It is perceived by the victim as a condition to keep the job, or as one that creates a hostile, intimidating and humiliating work environment.

## 16.5 PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER INEQUALITY

In Sociology, the word gender refers to the socio-cultural characterisation of men and women, the way societies make a distinction between man and women and assign them social roles. The distinction between sex and gender was introduced to deal with the general tendency to attribute women's subordination to their anatomy. Gender inequality is therefore a form of inequality which is distinct from other forms of economic and social inequalities. It dwells not only outside the household but also centrally within it. It stems not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments between women and men but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions.

Investigating and accounting for gender inequality has become a central concern of sociologists. Many theoretical perspectives have been advanced to explain man enduring dominance over women in the realm of economics, politics, the family and elsewhere. In this section, we shall review the main theoretical approaches to explaining the nature of gender inequality at the level of society.

### 16.5.1 Functionalist Perspective on Gender Inequality

Functionalist thinkers subscribe to the 'natural differences' school of thought and argue that the division of labour between man and women is biologically based. Women and men perform those tasks for which they are biologically best suited. Thus, the anthropologist George Murdock saw it as both practical and convenient that women should concentrate on domestic and family responsibilities while men work outside the home. On the basis of a cross-cultural study of more than two hundred societies,



Murdock (1949) concluded that a sexual division of labour is present in all cultures. While this is not the result of biological 'programming', it is the most logical bases for the organisation of society.

Talcott Parsons, a leading functionalist thinker, concerned himself with the role of the family in industrial societies. He was particularly interested in the socialisation of children and believed that stable, supportive families are the key to successful socialization. In Parson's view the family operates most efficiently with clear-cut sexual division of labour in which females act in expressive roles, providing care and security to children and offering them emotional support. Man, on the other hand, should perform instrumental roles like being the breadwinner in a family. Because of the stressful nature of this role, women's expressive and nurturing tendencies should also be used to stabilize and comfort man. This complimentary division of labour, springing from a biological distinction between the sexes, would ensure the solidarity of the family.

### 16.5.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender Inequality

The feminist movement has given rise to a large body of theory which attempts to explain gender inequalities and set forth agendas for overcoming those inequalities. Feminist theories in relation to gender inequality contrast markedly with one another. Competing schools of feminism have sought to explain gender inequalities through a variety of deeply embedded social processes, such as sexism, patriarchy and capitalism. The distinction between the different strands of feminism has never been clear cut, although it provides a useful introduction. Gender inequality has been analysed by different strands of feminism differently as discussed below :

- **Liberal Feminism** : Liberal feminism looks for explanations of gender inequalities in social and cultural attitudes. An important early contribution to liberal feminism came from the English philosopher John Stuart Mill in his essay 'The Subjection of Women' (1869), which called for legal and political equality between the sexes, including the right to vote. Liberal feminists do not see women's subordination as a part of a larger system or structure. Instead they draw attention to many separate factors which contribute to inequalities between man and women. For example, in recent decades liberal feminists have campaigned against sexism and discrimination against women in the work place, education institutions and the media.

Liberal feminists seek to work through the existing system to bring about reforms in a gradual way. In this respect, they are more moderate in their aims and methods than many radical and socialist feminists, who call for an overthrow of the existing system. While liberal feminists have contributed greatly to the advancement of women over the past century, critics charge that they were unsuccessful in dealing with the root causes of gender inequality and do not acknowledge the systemic nature of women's oppression in society.

- **Socialist and Marxist Feminism**: Socialist feminism developed from Marx's conflict theory, although Marx himself had little to say about gender inequality. It has been critical of liberal feminism for its perceived inability to see that there are powerful interests in society hostile to equality for women. Socialist's feminists have sought to defeat both patriarchy and capitalism, (t was Marx friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels who did more than Marx to provide an account of gender equality from a Marxist perspective.

Engels argued that under capitalism, material and economic factors underlay women's subservience to man, because patriarchy (like. Class oppression) has its roots in private property.

Engels argues that capitalism intensifies patriarchy by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men. Capitalism intensifies patriarchy more than earlier social systems because it creates enormous wealth compare to previous eras which confers power on men as wage earners as well as possessors, and inheritance of property. For the capitalist economy to succeed, it must define people, in particular women, as consumer persuading them that their needs will only be met through ever increasing consumption of goods and products. He argues that capitalism relies on women to labour for free in the home, caring and cleaning. To Engels, capitalism exploited man by paying low wages and women by paying no wages. Payment for housework is an important component of many 'feminists' belief.

Socialists' feminists have argued that the reformist goals of liberal feminism are inadequate. They have called for the restructuring of the family, the end of 'domestic slavery' and the introduction of some collective means of carrying out. child-rearing, caring and household maintenance. Following Marx, many argued that these ends would be achieved through a socialist's revolution, which would produce true equality under a state controlled economy design to meet the needs of all.

- **Radical Feminism** : At the heart of radical feminism is the belief that men are responsible for and benefit from the exploitation of women. The analysis of patriarchy is of central concern to this branch of feminism. Patriarchy is viewed as universal phenomena that have existed across time and cultures. Radical feminists often concentrate on the family as one of the primary sources of women's oppression in society. They argue that man exploit women by relying on the free domestic labour that woman provide in the home. As a group, men also deny women asses to positions of power and influence in society.

Radical feminists differ in their interpretations of the basis of patriarchy but most agree that it involves the appropriation of women's body and sexuality in some form. Shulamith Firestone (1971), an early radical feminist's writer, argues that men control women's roles on reproduction and child-rearing. Because women are biologically able to give birth to children, they become dependent materially on men for protection and livelihood. This "biological inequality' is socially organised in the nuclear family. Firestone speaks of a "sex class' to describe women's social position and argues that women can be emancipated only through the abolition of the family and the power relations which characterize it.

## 16.6 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) What is Gender Socialisation?
- (ii) What do you understand by women empowerment?
- (iii) Highlight the features of liberal feminism.

## 16.7 SUMMARY

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and, therefore, also half of its potential. Gender equality, besides being a fundamental human right, is essential to achieve peaceful societies, with full human potential and sustainable development. Moreover, it has been shown that empowering women spurs productivity and economic growth. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go to achieve full equality of rights and opportunities between men and women. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to end the multiple forms of gender violence and secure equal access to quality education and health, economic resources and participation in political life for both women and girls and men and boys. It is also essential to achieve equal opportunities in access to employment and to positions of leadership and decision-making at all levels.

## 16.8 GLOSSARY

- **Feminism** : Advocacy of social equality for the sexes, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism.
- **Gender Socialisation** : It is the process by which individuals are taught how to socially behave in accordance with their assigned gender.
- **Gender** : Socially-constructed roles and responsibilities that societies consider appropriate for men and women.
- **Gender-based Violence** : **Violence** against women based on their perceived subordinate status (e.g., physical abuse, sexual assault, psychological abuse, trafficking).
- **Gender Equality** : Equal power and opportunities for men and women.
- **Patriarchy** : Social organisation that structures the dominance of men over women.
- **Women's Empowerment**: The fostering of a woman's sense of self-worth, her decision-making power, her access to opportunities and resources, her power and control over her own life inside and outside the home, and her ability to affect change.

## 16.9 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) Refer section 16.3
- (ii) Refer section 16.4
- (iii) Refer section 16.5.2

## 16.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Bhasin, Kamla. 1999. *Some Questions on Feminism*. New Delhi: Kali for women.
2. Bhattacharya, Rinki. 2004. *Behind Closed Doors*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
3. Evans, Judith. 1998. *Feminist Theory*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
4. Geetha, V. 2002. *Gender*. Calcutta: Stree.
5. Giddens, Anthony. 2008. *Sociology*. Delhi: Polity Press.
6. Kendall, Diana. 2007. *Sociology in Our Times: The Essentials*. Thomson Wadsworth.
7. Oakley, Ann. 1972. *Sex Gender and Society*. New York: Harper and Row.
8. Walby, Sylvia. 1990. *Theorising Patriarchy*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Oxford.

## 16.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Discuss how gender socialisation leads to gender inequality.
- (ii) Critically examine the various perspectives on gender inequality.
- (iii) What is gender equality? Discuss the various issues concerning gender equality in contemporary times.

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## LESSON NO. 17

# GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### STRUCTURE

- 17.0 Introduction
- 17.1 Objectives
- 17.2 Concept and Definitions of Human Rights
- 17.3 Gender and Human Rights
  - 17.3.1 International Conventions on Women's Human Rights
- 17.4 Self Check Exercise
- 17.5 Summary
- 17.6 Glossary
- 17.7 Answers to Self Check Exercise
- 17.8 Suggested Readings
- 17.9 Terminal Questions

### 17.0 INTRODUCTION

Women's and girls' rights are human rights. They cover every aspect of life - health, education, political participation, economic well-being and freedom from violence, among many others. Women and girls are entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of all of their human rights and to be free from all forms of discrimination - this is fundamental to achieve human rights, peace and security and sustainable development. The 'Beijing Declaration' and 'Platform for Action' confirms that protection and promotion of human rights is the first responsibility of governments and core to the work of the United Nations. The 'Platform for Action' firmly anchors the achievement of gender equality within a human rights framework and makes a clear statement about State responsibility in delivering on the commitments made.

Human rights reflect the moral conscience of the world and the highest common aspiration that everyone should live in liberty, free from want and fear. So, human rights can be seen as a global vision backed by state obligations. Women's rights typically refers to the freedoms inherently possessed by women and girls of all ages, which may be institutionalized, ignored or illegitimately suppressed by law, custom, and behavior in a particular society. Women world-wide continue to suffer violations of their rights. The causes and consequences may differ from country to country, but prejudices and discrimination against women continue to be widespread and involve the full range of human rights violations known to the modern world.

### 17.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this lesson, you will be *able* to:

- Understand the concept and definitions of human rights.
- Know about women's human rights and different issues involved in its realization in contemporary times.
- Elaborate on the different international conventions on protecting the human rights of women.

## 17.2 CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life. They can never be taken away, although they can sometimes be restricted. For example, if a person breaks the law or in the interests of national security. These basic rights are based on shared values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence. These values are defined and protected by law.

Human rights gained attention at the international level following the Second World War, where millions of people lost their lives. Horrified by the devastation of life caused by the Second World War, members of the United Nations (UN) took a pledge to take measures for the achievement of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

The term 'human rights' which is used since World War II, gained importance in contemporary debates and became a universal phenomenon. After the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948 by the United Nations, it was seen by many as a sign of optimism for the better protection, promotion and enforcement of human rights.

### Definitions of Human Rights

Some of the definitions of human rights are :

- (i) The United Nations has defined human rights as those rights which are inherent in our state of nature and without which we cannot live as human beings.
- (ii) Christian Bay defined human rights as any claims that ought to have legal and moral protection to make sure that basic needs will be met.
- (iii) According to D. D. Raphael, human rights in a general sense denote the rights of humans. However, in a more specific sense, human rights constitute those rights which one has precisely because of being a human.
- (iv) Scot Davidson has defined human rights as closely connected with the protection of individuals from the exercise of state government or authority in certain areas of their lives. It is also directed towards the creation of social conditions by the state in which individuals can develop their fullest potential.
- (v) David Selby defined human rights as those rights which pertain to all persons and are possessed by every individual because they are human.

## 17.3 GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Attaining equality between women and men and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women are fundamental human rights. Women around the world nevertheless regularly suffer violations of their human rights throughout their lives, and realizing women's human rights has not always been a priority. Achieving equality between women and men requires a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which women experience discrimination and are denied equality so as to develop appropriate strategies to eliminate such discrimination.

Gender equality between women and men refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities

of both women and men are taken into consideration recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.

Gender equity that provides a level playing field for men and women so that they have a fair chance to realize equal outcomes are a pre-condition for ensuring gender equality and human rights. The ultimate goal in gender equality is to ensure that women and men have equitable access to, and benefit from society's resources, opportunities and rewards. And, as part of this, women need to have equal participation in defining what is valued and how this can be achieved. Equity is a means. Equality is the result. Gender equity denotes an element of interpretation of social justice, usually based on tradition, custom, religion or culture, which is most often to the detriment to women. The 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women', also known as the 'Women's Bill of Rights', declares that countries should :

- Act to eliminate violations of women's rights, whether by private persons, groups or organizations.
- Endeavour to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct that stereotype either gender or put women in an inferior position
- Ensure that women have equal rights in education and equal access to information,
- Eliminate discrimination against women in their access to health care
- End discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations.

Human rights for women, as for all individuals, are protected in the tenets of international law and international conferences provide the opportunity for governments to make, or repeat, declarations of commitment. For example, the 'Platform for Action' adopted by the Fourth UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing during 1995 reflects the commitment made by governments in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights, that *"the human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights"*.

Women world-wide continue to suffer violations of their rights. The causes and consequences may differ from country to country, but prejudices and discrimination against women continue to be widespread and involve the full range of human rights violations known to the modern world. But women and the girl child face additional human rights violations solely or primarily because of their sex. Important steps towards protecting women's human rights world-wide include documenting human rights violations, publicising these violations as widely as possible and campaigning to press government authorities to use all mechanisms available to secure an end to the abuses. Governments which fail to protect fundamental human rights should be confronted with the full force of international condemnation.

Every man, woman and child is entitled to enjoy his or her human rights simply by nature of being human. It is this universality of human rights which distinguishes them from other types of rights such as citizenship, or contractual rights. Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some other way. Violence against women is a pervasive yet under-recognized human rights violation. Domestic violence is the most common form of gender-based violence.

To hold states accountable for their performance with relation to global human rights standards is not to impose the value system of anyone part of the world or another but to refer to universal values based on the distilled knowledge and wisdom of all our cultures. Human rights are not just about liberty

and freedoms but also about equality, equity and Justice. The subject of human rights touches upon every aspect of human endeavour and aspiration. Human rights are inherent. Every man, woman and child is entitled to enjoy his or her human rights simply by nature of being human.

### **17.3.1 International Conventions on Women's Human Rights**

Over the, past 60 years, the international community has made many agreements to promote and defend women's rights, contributing to the creation of national laws and influencing the social norms that we all live by. Women's movements have pushed long and hard for women's rights to be enshrined in international law.

The first inter-governmental women's rights agency, the 'Inter-American Commission of Women', was established in 1928 following five years of lobbying by the 'Pan-American Association for the Advancement of Women'. International campaigning by women in the 1920s and 1930s paved the way for developments following the Second World War, including the establishment in 1946 of the 'UN Commission on the Status of Women', the UN body that brings together governments to review progress on women's rights. The landmark 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, reaffirms that :

*"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, birth or other status".*

Women's rights have been at the heart of a series of international conferences that have produced significant political commitments to women's human rights and equality. Starting in 1975, which was also International Women's Year, Mexico City hosted the World Conference on the International Women's Year, which resulted in the 'World Plan of Action' and the designation of 1975-1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women.

In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW), which is often described as an 'International Bill of Rights for Women'. In its 30 articles, the Convention explicitly defines discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations, and it is the first human rights treaty to affirm the reproductive rights of women.

Five years after the Mexico City conference, a Second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen in 1980. The resulting 'Programme of Action' called for stronger national measures to ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's rights with respect to inheritance, child custody and loss of nationality.

### **Birth of Global Feminism**

In 1985, the 'World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace', was held in Nairobi. It was convened at a time when the movement for gender equality had finally gained true global recognition, and 15,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in a parallel NGO Forum.

The event was described by many as "the birth of global feminism". Realising that the goals of the Mexico City Conference had not been adequately met, the 157 participating governments adopted the 'Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women'. The document broke new ground by declaring all issues to be women's issues.

## **Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action**

In 1993, the 'World Conference on Human Rights' was held in Vienna. It sought to review the status of the human rights machinery in place at the time. The Conference was successful in adopting the 'Vienna Declaration' and 'Programme of Action', which stated that "the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights" and placed particularly heavy emphasis on eliminating all forms of gender based violence. Importantly, the 'Programme of Action' also called for "the eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism".

## **International Conference on Population and Development**

The International Conference on Population and Development, which was held in 1994, represented a milestone for women's rights. While the Conference was focused on population issues, the delegates meeting in Cairo agreed that population was not only about demographics but, more importantly, about people. The issues taken up in its 'Programme of Action' are fundamentally related to Women's human rights, including gender equality, the family, reproductive health, birth control and family planning, women's health, as well as immigration and education of women. Importantly, the 'Programme of Action' is explicitly grounded in human rights and proclaims that "advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of *women*, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes".

## **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, went a step further than the Nairobi Conference. Adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995, the 'Beijing Declaration' and "Platform for Action' focused on 12 areas concerning the implementation of women's human rights and set out an agenda for women's empowerment. The 'Platform for Action' includes a series of strategic objectives to eliminate discrimination against women and achieve equality between women and men. It involves political and legal strategies on a global scale based on a human rights framework. The 'Platform for Action' is the most comprehensive expression of States' commitments to the human rights of women.

## **Millennium Development Goals**

In 2000, the international community agreed to eight time-bound development goals to be achieved by 2015, including a goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as one on the reduction of maternal mortality. Millennium Development Goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women. However, its corresponding target relates only to eliminating gender disparities in education by 2015. While girls' access to education is imperative for achieving gender equality, this narrow target is insufficient for measuring progress on achieving gender equality and empowering women. Critical issues such as violence against women and discriminatory laws are not addressed. Millennium Development Goal 5 aims to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015. Integrating human rights and gender equality throughout the Millennium Development Goals and in the post-2015 development agenda are key to achieving meaningful progress.

## **United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) brought Heads of State and Government to Brazil in 2012, to appraise progress in the implementation of agreements struck



since the landmark United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro 1992. At Rio+20, countries renewed their political commitment to sustainable development, agreed to establish a set of sustainable development goals and established a high-level political forum on sustainable development. Importantly, the outcome document, entitled "The Future We Want", also reaffirms the commitments of States to women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making and includes explicit references to accelerating the implementation of commitments in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Declaration.

#### 17.4 SELF CHECK EXERCISE

- (i) What is Beijing Platform for Action?
- (ii) Define human rights?
- (iii) Highlight the importance of Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)?

#### 17.5 SUMMARY

Women's rights are inalienable and indivisible part of human rights. Women's rights", as a term, typically refers to the freedoms inherently possessed by women and girls of all ages, which may be institutionalized, ignored or illegitimately suppressed by law, custom, and behaviour in a particular society. Human rights for women, as for all individuals, are protected in the tenets of international law and international conferences provide the opportunity for governments to make, or repeat, declarations of commitment. For example, the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing.

Gender equality is a human right, but our world faces a persistent gap in access to opportunities and decision-making power for women and men. Globally, women have fewer opportunities for economic participation than men, less access to basic and higher education, greater health and safety risks, and less political representation. Guaranteeing the rights of women and giving them opportunities to reach their full potential is critical not only for attaining gender equality, but also for meeting a wide range of international development goals. Empowered women and girls contribute to the health and productivity of their families, communities, and countries, creating a ripple effect that benefits everyone.

#### 17.6 GLOSSARY

- **Gender** : Socially-constructed roles and responsibilities that societies consider appropriate for men and women.
- **Gender-based Violence** : Violence against women based on their perceived subordinate status (e.g., physical abuse, sexual assault, psychological abuse, trafficking).
- **Gender Equality** : Equal power and opportunities for men and women.
- **Human Rights** : Those rights which pertain to all persons and are possessed by every individual because they are human
- **Women's Empowerment** : The fostering of a woman's sense of self-worth, her decision-making power, her access to opportunities and resources, her power and control over her own life inside and outside the home, and her ability to affect change.

**17.7 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISE**

- (i) Refer section 17.3.1
- (ii) Refer section 17.2
- (iii) Refer section 17.3.1

**17.8 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Cook, Rebecca J. 1994. *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
2. Knop, Karen. 2004. *Gender and Human Rights*. London: Oxford University Press.
3. Kumar, Jawahar C. (ed.). 1995. *Human Rights: Issues and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Regency Publications.
4. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). 2014. *Women's Rights are Human Rights*. New York/Geneva: United Nations Publications.
5. Patel, Vibhuti (ed.). 2009. *Discourse on Women and Empowerment*. Delhi: The Woman Press.
6. Rajawat, Mamta. 2001. *Burning Issues of Human Rights*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications.

**17.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

- (i) Critically reflect on gender and human rights in the context of contemporary times.
- (ii) Highlight the various International efforts for the protection of human rights of women.
- (iii) What do you understand by human rights? Analyse the status of women's human rights in contemporary times.

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## ASSIGNMENT

**Course Code III**

**Maximum Marks 20**

**Course Title: Social Stratification and Change**

**Note:** Attempt any four questions.

1. What do you understand by social stratification? Discuss its characteristics and also differentiate it from social differentiation and social inequality.
2. Critically examine the Davis and Moore's functionalist theory of social stratification.
3. What do you understand by caste system? Elaborate on the changing dimensions of caste in contemporary India.
4. Explain in detail the gender as a form of social stratification.
5. Critically examine the Ethnic and Minority relations with particular reference to India.
6. Critically examine the role of women in caste based society.

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(i)  
**SYLLABUS**

**Course Title: Social Stratification and Change**

**Course Code III**

**Maximum Marks: 100**

**Time: 3 Hours**

**Note :** The question paper shall consist of eight questions in all i.e. two questions from each unit. The candidates shall be required to attempt four questions by selecting minimum one question from each unit. All questions carry equal marks.

**Unit 1:** Social Stratification: Concepts- Social Inequality, Social Differentiation and Social Stratification; Theories- Marx, Weber, Davis and Moore, Talcott Parsons.

**Unit 2:** Stratification Systems: Slavery (United States, South America and West Indies); Caste (India- Dumont, Mutton, Ghurye); Class (Industrial Societies- Capitalist system and Socialist system); Race and Ethnicity (South Africa, United States of America and United Kingdom); and Gender and Inequality.

**Unit 3:** Social Stratification and Change in India: Changing Dimensions of Caste-Structural, Cultural and Political-economic; Decomposition of Social Class; Caste and Class nexus; Emerging middle class; and Changing Race, Ethnic and Minority Relations.

**Unit 4:** Gender and Caste, Gender and Class Divisions; Issues in Gender Equality and Gender and Human Rights.

**List of Basic Readings**

1. Bendix, R. & S.M. Upset: Class, Caste and Power.
2. Beteille, Andre (ed): Social Inequality.
3. Calvert, P.: The Concept of Class.
4. Cox, Oliver: Caste, Class and Race
5. Giddens, A.: The Class Structure of Advanced Capitalist Society.
6. Hindess, B.: Politics and Class Analysis.
7. Lopreato, J. & L.S. Lewis (ed.): Social Stratification: A Reader.
8. Phandes, Usha: Ethnicity and Nation Building
9. Tumin, Melvin M.: Social Stratification: The Forms and Function of Inequality.
10. Ahmed, Imtiaz (ed.): Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India.

**M.A. Sociology 1<sup>st</sup> Semester**

**Course Code : III**

# **Social Stratification And Change**

## **Lesson 1-17**

**By. : Dr. Ashwani Kumar**



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