

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND SOCIAL VALUES

Definitions

Social stratification is the division of population into **two** or **more** layers, each of which is relatively **homogeneous** and between which there are differences in privileges (opportunities), restrictions, rewards and obligations – **Lundberg** 1968.

A pattern of superimposed categories of differential privilege is termed as **social stratification** – **Cuber** 1954. The movement of individuals or groups from one **stratum** of society to another is known as **social mobility**.

Functions of Social Stratification:

For the proper functioning of society, it has to work out some mechanism by which people engaged in different occupations get different recognition. If each activity is associated with same type of economic returns and prestige, there will be no competition for different occupations.

Stratification is that system by which different positions are hierarchically divided. Such a system has given rise to different classes like Upper, Middle, Working and Lower or caste groups like Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. The importance of stratification can be seen with regard to the functions it performs for the individual and society.

I. For the Individual:

No doubt system of stratification is applicable to the whole society yet it serves some functions for the individual also.

1. Competition:

Individuals based on their attributes compete with each other and only those individuals who have better attributes get greater recognition. This may be in the field of sports, education, occupation etc.

2. Recognition of Talent:

The persons with more training skills, experience and education are given better positions. The deserving individuals are not treated at par with deserving candidates. Such a system helps people to acquire better talents.

3. Motivation:

The system of stratification motivates the individuals to work hard so that they can improve upon their social status. It is more true in case of those societies in which statuses are achieved.

4. Job Satisfaction:

As the jobs are given to the individuals according to their skills and education, the workers get job satisfaction. In case, a person with higher qualification is not allowed to move higher in the social ladder, he feels dissatisfied with his job.

5. Mobility:

The system of achieved status also provides an opportunity for upward and downward mobility. Those persons who work hard and are intelligent move up in the social ladder. On the other hand, those who fail to come up to the expectations move downward. Hence, the possibility of change in the position keeps the people always alert and makes them work hard.

Types of Social Stratification:

Social stratification is based upon a variety of principles. So we find different type of stratification. The major types of stratification are

- (i) Caste
- (ii) Class
- (iii) Estate
- (iv) Slavery

- Caste is a hereditary endogamous social group in which a person's rank and its accompanying rights and obligations are ascribed on the basis of his birth into a particular group. For example-Brahmins, Kshyatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudra Caste.

- Class-Stratification on the basis of class is dominant in modern society. In this, a person's position depends to a very great extent upon achievement and his ability to use to advantage the inborn characteristics and wealth that he may possess.
- Estate system of medieval Europe provides another system of stratification which gave much emphasis to birth as well as to wealth and possessions. Each estate had a state.
- Slavery had economic basis. In slavery, every slave had his master to whom he was subjected. The master's power over the slave was unlimited.

Caste system and **class system** are two of the major types or forms of social stratification. Communities are socially stratified in various ways. Sex division is a major sociological difference, age groups and so on. Society is divided into layers, some of which occupy a **higher** position than others. These layers are generally accepted as **social classes**. So the principal type of social stratification is seen in the phenomenon of '**class**'. The term **CLASS** means a number of individuals in the same society whose status is **similar**. Social status refers to positions of individual or group in **relation** to other. As a sociological concept, social status is the difference between higher and lower.

According to **Maciver** a **social class** is any portion of a community marked off from the rest of social status.

A **social class** has been defined as an abstract category of persons arranged on levels according to **social status** they possess. There are no firm lines dividing one category from another - **Rogers** 1960.

The social class involves three features:

- a. Hierarchy of status (always graded order)
- b. Recognition of superiority and inferiority and
- c. Change and mobility is present

Determinants of social class

In some societies **occupation** and **income** in other **education** and ownership of **material possessions** in some other **family background** may be important criteria. The basis of criteria among the farmers is the **land ownership**.

Caste: The term ‘Caste’ was derived from the **Portuguese** word ‘**casta**’ meaning lineage or race.

Definitions

A **caste** is a social category whose members are assigned a **permanent** status within a given social hierarchy and whose contacts are restricted accordingly – **Lundberg**. **Caste** is a closed class. As compared to class, the caste is the most **rigid**, clearly graded type of social stratification. This has been often referred to as one of the extreme forms of closed class systems.

Characteristics of rigid caste system:

1. The caste system is determined slowly **by birth** and there is no vertical social mobility
2. In other words, caste is a **closed class system** with clearly demarcated status and role of its members. One is borne into a caste, lives and dies in it
3. When a class is somewhat strictly heredity we may called it as **caste – Cooley**
4. An individual is borne into a caste of his parents and can rise no further. Status is determined by birth. Type of caste consciousness acts as a **barrier** to social progress
5. India is cited as the most perfect instance of closed but not open system which is extremely differentiated

Determinants of caste:

- a. The family in to which the individual takes birth and its name
- b. The way of dressing
- c. The privileges, rewards and restrictions
- d. The way of performing religious rights etc

Difference between Class & Caste system

Character	Class pattern	Caste pattern
Value definition of inferiority and superiority	Applied to any characteristic	Usually applied to biological
Relevancy in norm role definitions	Less than in caste systems	More than in class systems
Self definitions	Labels and awareness may be	Rigid labels and awareness

	vague	
Change and expectation	Provided for and expected	Neither provided nor expected
Material objects	Possession of valued objects increases as class position increases	Possession of valued objects increases as caste position increases
Justification of system (value definition)	Pragmatic 'this worldly' justification	Strong religious endorsement
Status	Achieved	Ascribed

Social Values

Definitions:

Values are relative importance or preferences we give to any object, idea or content of experience etc. **Value** is defined as anything desired or chosen by someone. **Social values** are relatively enduring (lasting or permanent) awareness plus emotion regarding an object, idea or person – **Green** 1964.

Social values are abstract and often unconscious assumptions of what is right and important **Young** – 1959.

Value system

The values in terms of attitudes taken together as a set form a system, which is called value system of society. E.g. prestige based on caste of individual, status based up on individual's possession of land etc.

Values and Norms

Norms are closely associated with values but are clearly differentiated from them (values). **Values** are the attitudes, held by the individuals, groups or society as a whole, as to whether material or non-material objects are good, bad, desirable or undesirable. The **rules** that govern action directed towards achieving values are called **norms**. **Norms** are the accepted and approved forms of behavior that are based on and consistent with dominant **social values** in society. The values and norms go together.

Opinion → Attitude → Norm/Social value

A set of social values will always have an accompanying set of social norms or rules that uphold and support values.

E.g. of value: Religious worship and respect to god usually is considered value

E.g. of value system: Religion

Examples of norms: Observance of religious festivals and performance of rituals and worship and other relevant activities are important norms of society towards the value system of religion.

Characteristics of values:

Values may be specific, such as honouring one's parents or owning a home or they may be more general, such as health, love and democracy. "Truth prevails", "love thy neighbour as yourself", "learning is good as ends itself are a few examples of general values. Individual achievement, individual happiness and materialism are major values of modern industrial society.

Value systems can be different from culture to culture. One may value aggressiveness and deplores passivity, another the reverse, and a third gives little attention to this dimension altogether, emphasizing instead the virtue of sobriety over emotionality, which may be quite unimportant in either of the other cultures. This point has very aptly been explored and explained by Florence Kluchkhon (1949) in her studies of five small communities (tribes) of the American south-west. One society may value individual achievement (as in USA), another may emphasize family unity and kin support (as in India). The values of hard work and individual achievement are often associated with industrial capitalist societies.

The values of a culture may change, but most remain stable during one person's lifetime. Socially shared, intensely felt values are a fundamental part of our lives. Values are often emotionally charged because they stand for things we believe to be worth defending. Often, this characteristic of values brings conflict between different communities or societies or sometimes between different persons.

Most of our basic values are learnt early in life from family, friends, neighbourhood, school, the mass print and visual media and other sources within society.

These values become part of our personalities. They are generally shared and reinforced by those with whom we interact.

The main functions of values are as follows:

1. Values play an important role in the integration and fulfillment of man's basic impulses and desires in a stable and consistent manner appropriate for his living.
2. They are generic experiences in social action made up of both individual and social responses and attitudes.
3. They build up societies, integrate social relations.
4. They mould the ideal dimensions of personality and range and depth of culture.
5. They influence people's behaviour and serve as criteria for evaluating the actions of others.
6. They have a great role to play in the conduct of social life.
7. They help in creating norms to guide day-to-day behaviour.