UNIT 1 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: MEANING AND APPROACHES

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

On going through this unit you should be able to:

- outline evolutionary processes in societies and social stratification;

- discuss its organizing principles: status, wealth and power;

- describe social stratification in India: caste and class;

- distinguish concepts and theories of social stratification, and

- describe social stratification and social change.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

1.2   THE EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

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

1.3   ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

There are three major organizing principles of social stratification. These are, status, wealth and power. Sociological observations of many societies over a period of time have revealed some linkages among these principles in any evolutionary process. For example, even in societies which did not have the institution of social stratification, such as the food gathering and hunting communities, some individuals enjoyed higher social status and were treated as leaders. The magicians (Shamans), persons with exceptional skills in hunting or in any other sphere of social economic and defense were accorded higher status in the community. Yet, it did not result into the arrival of the institution of social stratification because such accrual of individual distinction contributed to social differentiation which could be on the basis of merit, age, gender or any other marker in society. Social stratification comes into being in societies when social gradation or ranking is done on the basis of an entire group of people such as the gradations based on caste and class in our society.

1.3.1   Status

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

1.3.2 Wealth

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

1.3.3 Power

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

Activity 1

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

1.4 CASTE AND CLASS IN INDIA

We have discussed so far the principles of status, wealth and power as the main determinants of ranking of groups in relative order in societies which lay down the foundation of social stratification. Caste and class are principles of social stratification which illustrate respectively the role of status and wealth in the ranking of groups in societies. Caste is a prime example of a status group. Class, on the other hand, is based on the principle where groups are ranked on their access to wealth or their relative ability to have a control upon the wealth resources in society. There is a greater degree of consensus among sociologists about the processes by which status groups are formed and constitute the rank order in social stratification. But the same degree of consensus does not seem to exist about the processes which contribute to the emergence of classes by their differential

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

1.5 CASTE AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

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

1.5.1 Demography of Caste

The demography of caste or jati in India has remained extremely diversified over millennia. Studies show that beyond a radius of 20 to 200 miles, a jati is not recognized as social group; it is only recognizable with reference to the varna model. Hence, the significance of the varna as a sociological frame of reference. Also, jatis have always existed as regional or sub-regional groups numbering into thousands. The recent survey by the Anthropological Survey of India reports the existence of 4635 communities or caste-like groups in India; it also finds that almost all religious groups are divided into various communities which have jati-traits. Jatis also bear local and regional cultrual markers based on the ecology, local history or mythology. Traditionally, however, castes both in villages and the urban centres were bound into systemic relationship of reciprocities or work and economic exchange or exchange of services etc. In this sense, caste system functioned on the basis of mutual cooperation and interdependence. It formed an organic system. Both in villages and cities, castes had their panchayat organisations. Even though these had nucleus in a particular village or urban centre, such panchayats or guilds (in the cities) had a network of organization beyond a village or urban centre. If an inter-caste conflict emerged for any reason which violated the caste norms of reciprocity and if dispute could not be settle in the council of the village or the city (comprising elders from various castes) the matter was taken up in the caste panchayats. It functioned both as a body to protect rights and privileges of the caste as well as served as a mechanism for resolution of conflicts.

1)   Write a note on caste and social stratification. Use about five lines for your answer.

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

   i)   Status

   ii)   Wealth

   iii)   Feudal

   iv)   Power

   v)   Urbanization

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

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

1.5.2   Social Mobility

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

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

Box 1.01

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

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

1.5.3 Principles of Hierarchy

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

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

1.6.1   Summation of Status

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

Activity 2

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

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

1.6.2   Marxist Method and Concepts

The application of Marxist methods and concepts for the analysis of India's class structure has been more common among the economists, which has been later applied by sociologists. Since, Marxist method of social analysis locates class structure in the modes of production, such as the primitive, the feudal and the capitalist, debate about the nature of class structure in India has hinged mostly upon the debates about the modes of production that prevails in the rural and the industrial economy. In the rural context, much debate has followed as to whether its economy and social structure have feudal, semi-feudal precapitalist or capitalist features. These distinctions are based upon whether the analyst starts from the premise of feudal economy as the beginning point of analysis of its capitalist features in the agrarian economy. Broadly, the findings suggest that class structure of villages which are still located in the agricultural economy are fast moving

towards capitalist orientation. This implies, money wages instead of wages in kind, agriculture for profit rather than for livelihood, greater role of banking credit and cooperatives in investment for production; a movement from production cash crops rather than cereals with increased linkage with markets, etc.

Box 1.02

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

In the urban centres, class structure comprises generally the industrialists, traders and business classes, the professional or service classes, the semi-skilled workers and daily wagers. Since Independence, the number of the professional classes has increased and the service sector in the economy now occupies about 51 per cent of the share of the gross domestic product. Agriculture now contributes to about 28 per cent of its share in the gross domestic product. Evidently, the class composition of urban-industrial India is changing fast due to new technological advancement and the liberalization of economy. This change has increased the composition of the middle classes in both the rural and urban sectors of our society. Green revolution in villages which was led by the peasant castes (the backbone of the backward class movement) created a strong rural middle class; similarly the expansion of the service sector in our economy have added urban middle class numbers in our cities and towns as never before. It is estimated that middle classes taken as a whole number about 350 million now; this is likely to grow to 500 million or 50 per cent of our total population in the next two to three decades if the economy continues to grow.

Caste rank is indicated in the attire of an individual
— *Courtesy:* B. Kirnamayi

1.6.3 Service Oriented Economy

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

Check Your Progress 2

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

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2)   Say True and False.

    i)   Weber used the dialectical approach to stratification.

    ii)   A low caste status means a low place in the caste hierarchy.

    iii)   Class is an interest group while caste constitutes a community.

1.7   SOME CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

Issues related to concepts and theories of social stratification have essentially been oriented towards the relationship between social stratification and social order. Max Weber made a distinction among three orders of society: the social, the economic and the political. The complexion of social stratification, according to him varied with the nature of the 'order' of the society. The 'social order' has its primacy in the normative principle of 'honour' and its institutional structures are influenced by it. It is located in the 'status groups'. The institution of feudalism, aristocracy, the formation of different 'estates' in traditional European society were its example; hereditary rights and patrimony and various forms of ascribed privileges and authorities followed in this kind of social order. In India, the caste social stratification reflects this principle. It is operative in the principle of purity and pollution, hereditary occupation and caste privileges or sanctioned forms of discrimination; it can also be found in the principle of endogamy. Castes also constitute unlike class social communities. The 'economic order' is based on the normative principle of rationality and market situation. It manifest in the form of interest groups. Class, according to Max Weber is a product of market situation; it is competitive, it comprises social categories which do not constitute communities and one's social mobility in the class situation depends upon achieved skills or merits governed by the laws of supply and demand. Its manifestation as a institution could be seen in the rise of capitalism, which gives rise to the market situation. The third order of society is 'political'; it is based on the pursuit of 'power'. It makes institutional manifestation in the organised system of political parties and various associations which are orientated to its acquisition . The political order

of society and its institutional processes have a tendency to extend to the social institutions of other orders, such as the social and political orders.

1.7.1 Weber's Approach

The conceptual and theoretical approach of Weber is primarily interpretive and systemic. He considered that theoretical advancement in sociology could be achieved both for understanding and explanation of social phenomena by uses of the 'ideal type' concepts. These concepts are not based on empirical induction from observed reality, but are an abstraction from the 'historical individual' or a configuration of historical events over a period of time from which the sociologists constructs concepts by interpretive understanding. Ideal type concepts are thus not real types although they are derived from a certain understanding of reality. Even though ideal they are not normative (either desirable or undesirable; good / bad) but ideational or mental constructions. Weber believed, that sociological theories do have explanatory significance but still they did not have law-like power of generalization. His theory of social stratification should, therefore, be treated as such; it is based on comparative understanding of the typical manifestations of the principles of social stratification over a period of time. It makes significant contribution to both understanding of social stratification as system, as well as its processes of change.

1.7.2 The Dialectical Approach

The theory of 'dialectical and historical materialism' enunciated by Karl Marx is another very established theory of social stratification. Just as Weber uses the basic notion of 'order' to locate the type concepts for the understanding of social stratification, Marx uses terms of 'mode of production' and 'relations of production' for classification of the conceptual categories of social stratification. The important modes of production are: primitive, feudal and capitalist, These distinctions are based on modes of uses of or nature of labour power and means of technology for production of commodities. The primitive mode was characterized by communal or collective mode of labour with elementary tools as in the food gathering and hunting communities. As we have discussed, the institutions of social stratification could not have evolved at this stage. It institutional organs begin to develop with the rise of feudalism; accumulation of wealth and productive resources developed by this time; it led to the stratification in society with feudal landlord or aristocrat at the top, who exercised control over his estate (land and all other productive resources), and those dependent upon it which was indeed very inclusive. The peasants, serfs and traders and artisans were other social strata who were part of the system but entirely dependent upon the means of production and labour power which remained under the control of the landlord. Most these strata were in fact attached to the estate of the feudal lord. Feudalism evolved its own typical political, economic, social and cultural institutions but most of these were based on the principle of hereditary privileges and patrimonial authority. The feudal lord had a control on the means of productions and this led to a form of relationship between him and other social strata which was based on status obligations and privileges.

Box 1.03

According to Marx, conflict and tension were endemic to the system, may be in explicit or implicit form; often this conflictual relationship was not overt due to 'false consciousness' which prevailed; for example, between the relationship of the lord and the peasant which instead of being perceived by peasant as being exploitative, was seen as being patronage. One viewpoint also exists about the modalities by which wealth determines ranking of groups as social strata.

1.7.3 The Rise of Capitalism

The rise of capitalism ushered a new period in social evolution. The dialectical process of historical change both through the innovation of new technologies and social institutions made feudalism obsolescent and it was replaced by the institution of capitalism. Class structure emerges in full measure by this time by the industrial revolution. The growth in

the factory mode of production of commodities, massive migration of peasants and worker
from the rural areas to the urban centres and accumulation of capital by expanded use of
the market made possible by the new technology of transport and colonial expansion of the
European powers changed the system of social stratification. The main classes which
emerged in the new scheme of social stratification were; the capitalist entrepreneurs and
the working classes. A new form of acute antagonistic relationship now emerges between
these two classes; this relates to demand of reasonable working hours, reasonable wages,
better conditions of employment and work etc. These forces of conflict, according to Marx
should have culminated into the replacement of capitalism by its obsolescence like in the
case of feudalism by a socialist system of society, it would be, according to Marx based on
collective mode of production without private ownership of capital and pursuit of profit. In
many countries, socialist societies did come into existence by revolution of the peasants
and working classes; for example, former USSR, China, Vietnam etc., but as envisaged by
Marx, capitalism has not been rendered obsolete as yet. On the contrary it has shown new
resilience where as many socialist economies have either been weakened or have been
replaced by capitalist institutions.

The essence of Marxist theory, however, does not depend upon the processes of the
formation of social strata or its structural composition as much as upon its basic premise
on the nature of social order.. Marx treats social order as a product of historical-
materialistic conditions; these are defined by the modes of production and relations of
production, and are continually undergoing change due to technological innovations and
attempts within the society to resolve various social conflicts which are universal. Social
order is thus based on the relationship among various groups which are inherently
antagonistic, and cannot be resolved without basically altering the social order or system
itself. The process by which this takes place, and in which the exploited classes such as
the industrial workers and peasants are partners in class struggle against the capitalist
classes in termed as revolution. The new social order, the socialist society which emerges
through revolution does not have a place for strata based on inequalities which generate
antagonism, but has social differentiation of work without class or social stratification.
Such strata are called 'nonantagonistic'.

1.7.4   Darhendorf and Coser

In addition to the Marxist formulation, there are other theoretical perspectives in sociology
of social stratification which treat conflict as the universal feature in form of social
gradations in society. Ralph Daharendorf and Lewis Coser are for example, a few among
many such western sociologists who accept the universality of conflict in all form of
stratification but locate these conflicts in the institutional anomalies within the system
rather than linking it with the theory of class struggle and revolution. Conflict according
to these sociologists arises out of antagonism of interests and exercise of power by one
stratum over the other which seeks upward social mobility. It represents, therefore,
internal dynamics of the stratification system rather than a movement towards its total
replacement or change of social order itself by revolutionary means as Marx envisaged.
Such theories of social stratification, which are known as conflict theories do not accept
the Marxist position of historical materialism which postulates invariable stages of social
evolution through series of revolutionary movements. The notion of social order in the
conflict theory is closer to functional viewpoint rather than dialectical materialist
interpretation.

1.7.5   The Functional Theory

The functional theory of social stratification which is very widely followed in the studies
of social stratification, particularly among the American sociologists takes a view of social
order very different from Marxist position. Instead of treating social order as being
inherently endowed with self-annulling contradictions or conflicts based on the
inequalities of social strata, the functional theory treats social order to be endowed with
inherent capacity of self-maintenance and self -regulation. It treats society and its
institutions, including social stratification to be constituted by inter-dependent sets of
social relationships with capacity to contain to and resolve conflicts which this theory does
not deny. This theory postulates an analogy between social order and organism; both have

internal mechanisms for self-regulation and self-corrections. Social stratification from a functional view point is a dynamic system characterized by social mobility and continual restructuring of the rules of consensus building. It acknowledges the role of competition and conflict but also postulates the existence of institutional mechanism much as, processes of socialization, education, empowerment by democratic participation etc. through which aspirations for social mobility are or can be realised and contradiction arising out of asymmetrical opportunities of various strata in society resolved with a meaningful degree of social consensus.

The studies of social stratification by Indian sociologists have employed all the theoretical approaches we have described above. Most studies of class structure and peasantry in India have employed Marxist theory of historical materialism and attempted to adapt it to the Indian historical conditions. Weberian perspective on stratification theory has also influenced many studies of rural and urban systems of social stratification. Caste, class and power have been used as conceptual typologies in many studies to measure the changes in social stratification arising out of the forces of social mobility, particularly education, policies of democratic participation, positive discrimination favouring SCs, STs and OBCs, industrial and entrepreneurial developments etc. of sociological interest in particularly the observation that due to processes of social mobility and policy of empowerment, the traditional congruence among factors such as economic status, ritual status and power status of strata within the caste system has broken down. In other words, higher castes no longer enjoy high economic status or power status only because they by tradition have been accorded a higher ritual status in the caste system. Sociologists have used in this context, class to define economic status, power to define political status and ritual to define caste status, and have concluded that due to social mobility during to past decades following Independence, social development policies have broken the summation of status principle in the caste mode of social stratification. The emergence of class and ethnic mobilization of caste and religion are new dynamic processes which today challenge the traditional forms and institutions of social stratification.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

It is obvious from the above analysis that social stratification within the Indian society in undergoing changes due to impact of technological innovations, modernization of agriculture, industrial and entrepreneurial development, political empowerment of the weaker sections of society and revolution in mass media. The policy of positive discrimination in favour of the SCs, STs and OBCs has also impacted significantly in bringing about social mobility among these sections of society. Studies show that the SCs and STs for whom reservation was provided in the Constitution have benefited from the policy and a significant section of middle classes has by now emerged from among them. But the process of mobility which this policy has brought about still remains highly constrained due to massive incidence of illiteracy, malnutrition and health problem among these people. Social mobility through positive discrimination is highly dependent upon the level of education of the concerned groups. For this reason, the reservation policy tends to only supplement but does not function as a decisive element in the process of social mobility. The need is for taking effective steps to augment the process of removal of illiteracy among these sections of society.

The OBCs are comparatively in a better position with regard to social mobility. Generally being peasants and endowed with landed resources, which does not obtain in case of the most of the SCs and STs, they have contributed to the green revolution and benefitted from it. They have now emerged in most parts of India as rural middle class and having gained better status in the realm of economy (agriculture) and political power seek through reservation now elevation of social status by entering into technological, professional and

managerial offices and entry into central government civil services, from which they have been relatively deprived. This seems to be provide the new momentum to the backward class movement and ethnicization of castes in this category (as also among the SCs and STs or Dalits) in India.

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

1.9 KEY WORDS

Demography: Concerned with various facets of a population such as gender ratios, distribution of a trait, gross numbers etc.

Dialectical: Taking into account the two opposing or antagonistic views on a topic and resolving them at a higher level of abstraction.

Hierarchy: A rank order of castes or groups from top to bottom.

Caste: An ascriptive grouping which is community based

Class: A achievement oriented interest group.

Power: The capacity of a group or persons to influence decisions in their own way in the group or community.

Status: Ranking of groups in a society on basis of their relative position in terms of honour or respect.

1.10 FURTHER READINGS

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

K.L. Sharma: *Social Stratification in India : Themes and Issues,* New Delhi: Sage Publishers, 1997.

1.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

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

2) iii)

v)

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

2) i)   False

    ii) True

    iii) True

UNIT 2 APPROACHES TO SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

On having studied this unit you should be able to:

● discuss the functional approach;

● delineate Weber's theory of Stratification;

● outline the dialectical theory; and

● summarize the anthropological approach.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Social stratification implies relations of superiority and inferiority among individuals, families and groups. Such relations are governed by a set of norms and values upheld and enforced by the state and the society. Talcott Parsons calls 'patterning' or 'ordering' of social relations a stratification system of society. A number of variables would be involved in 'ordering' of social relations including value-system, power structure, ascription, achievement, conformity/deviance to norms etc. Parsons considers social stratification as ubiquitous and inevitable because it ensures smooth functioning of society by way of defining different positions and their allocation to members of a society based on certain principles of recruitment and reward. He writes: "social stratification is regarded here as the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system an their treatment as superior and inferior to one another in certain socially important respects".

Obviously the Parsonian view is 'systemic' as its main emphasis is on ordering or integration of different aspects of society. No society can remain in a situation of conflict perpetually, and no society can every remain completely integrated. 'Dynamic equilibrium' is the essence of all human societies. Such a view is known as the 'functional' approach to the study of society. Contrary of this approach is the 'dialectical approach' in which emphasis is on the understanding for contradictions between the interests of the 'superior'

and the inferior' people whom Karl Marx designates as 'bourgeoisie' ands proletariat'. The dialectical approach also claims itself as historically valid and universally relevant. A critique of the functional approach is seen in the anthropological approach too in which emphasis is laid on the criteria such as age, sex and kinship as 'biological' as rather than 'social' even in the context of 'pre-industrial' societies. We propose to discuss there approaches alongwith these variations and ramifications to the understanding of social stratification. Further, these approaches have been applied discretely to the understanding of caste, class and tribe in India.

2.2   THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

The word 'function' refers to manifest positive consequences of aspects like economy, policy, religion etc. for the maintenance of the social system. Hence, the functional approach explains social stratification as inevitable phenomenon. Functional differentiation is inevitable because an individual cannot fulfill all his needs by himself/herself. A person is not equipped for meeting all the requirements, hence persons with different abilities are required. Different functions are not required in equal measure. The therefore, different persons are rewarded differentially according to the value attached to the functions they perform. Such a differential pattern of reward gives rise to stratification and hierarchy.

2.2.1   Davis and Moore

The functional theory of social stratification formulated by Kingsley Davis and Willbert E. Moore conforms to the above characterization. The salient features of their theory are as follows:

i)   Inevitability of social stratification;

ii)   Need for differential intent and ability for different functions;

iii)   Differential evaluation of different social positions and duties;

iv)   Reward on the basis of differential value attached with different functions; and

v)   Values and rewards constituting the social differential and stratification.

There are differences in individual status and power
Courtesy : B. Kiranmayi

Thus, social stratification is a consequence of inevitability of differentiation of roles and duties. Further, different duties and roles carry differential power and prestige. And the differentiation of roles and duties is inevitable for the survival of human society. Hence, stratification becomes inevitable in social life.

Box 2.01

Logically, though functional theory seems to be a sound proposition, it has received a wide range of criticism. Joseph Schumpeter accords significance to the formation, nature and basic laws of classes based on the significance of the function performed by a class and on the degree to which the class performs the function. Evaluation is relative. Performance of an individual as a member of a class is a decisive factor. Thus, Schumpeter accords significance to historical conditions in the emergence of classes.

2.2.2 Tumin's Critique

However, a scathing attack on Davis-Moore approach comes from Melvin M. Tumin who challenges social stratification as inherent feature of social organization. He doubts the historical validity of the functional importance for the necessarily of social stratification. The idea of positions with greater and lesser power and prestige as posited by Davis-Moore is a 'tautology and unsound procedure' in Tumin's understanding. Assignments and performances are the bases of rewards rather than positions. Distinction between the 'less functional' and 'more functional' as drawn by Davis-Moore is also misleading because an engineer alone cannot perform a task without equally important contributions of workers and other functionaries.

Activity 1

Discuss the functional theory with other students, at the study centre and pinpoint its strength and weaknesses. Write down your observations in your notebook.

Division of labour is a necessity, but not social differentiation as envisaged by Davis-Moore. The functional approach is also dubbed as a general and vague formulation because it does not spell out the range of inequality and the determinants of the rank in concrete societies. According to Ralph Dahrendorf stratification lies neither in human nature nor in a historically dubious conception of private property. It lies in 'authority structure' of a society which is necessary for sustaining norms and sanctions. 'Institutionalized power' based on norms and sanctions creates inequality and hierarchy.

2.3 MAX WEBER'S THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

More concrete formulation of social stratification is presented by Max Weber in his analysis of 'class, status and party'. Weber not only clearly distinguishes between economic structure, status system and political power, he also finds interconnections between these three in the form of the system of social stratification. 'Class' is an economic phenomenon, a product of the 'market situation' which implies competition among different classes such as buyers and sellers. 'Status' is recognition of 'honour'. People are distributed among different classes, so are status groups based on distribution of honour which is identified in terms of a range of symbols in a given society. Though analytically, classes and status groups are independent phenomena, they are significantly related to each other depending upon the nature and formation of a given society at a given point of time. The word 'party' implies a house of power, and power is the keynote of Weberian theory of stratification. Power may be for the sake of power or it may be economically determined power. And the economically determined power is not always identical with the social or the legal power. Economic power may be a consequence of power existing on other groups. Striving for power is not always for economic well-being. As we have mentioned it may be for the sake of power or for social honour. All power does not provide social honour, and power is not the only source of social honour. Sometimes even the propertied and the

properyless can belong to the same status group. Thus, status is determined by social honour, and the latter is expressed through different 'styles of life', which are not necessarily influenced by economic or political standing in society.

2.3.1 Appraisal of Weber's Theory

Thus, Weber's theory of 'class, status, and party' corresponds with his idea of three 'orders' in the society, namely, the economic, the social and the political. It also implies that social stratification is not fundamentally class-based on economically determined. In fact, by analysing social stratification from economic, social and political angles Weber provides a wider perspective than the economic determinism of Karl Marx about which we will discuss below.

To a considerable extent Weber's theory of social stratification accords adequate attention to individual and his/her attitudes and motivations i   termination of class, status and power. 'Subjective component' in status-determination is based on psychological grouping (a feeling of group membership), being effected through competition it plays an important part. As such classes are viewed as 'subjective' categories and social strata are 'objective' ones. A social class is a group by way of its thinking for a particular system of economic organization. The persons who are similarly concerned about their positions and interests, and have a common outlook, and a distinctive attitude belong to the same status group or class. Thus, following the logic of 'subjective' or psychological' dimension of social stratification, class is a psychological grouping of people dependent upon class consciousness (a feeling of group membership) irrespective of structural criteria such as occupation, income, standard of living, power, education, intelligence etc. The structural criteria are 'objective' in nature, hence, contribute to the formation of 'strata' (social and economic groupings and categories of people). Subjective identification of class is indicative of advanced economic and social development of a given society. Only in an advanced society a person's class is a part of his/her ego. Similarity of class consciousness generally does not emanate from a highly differentiated and economically and socially hierarchised society. Moreover, the distinction between 'stratum' and 'class' seems to be unconvincing because the objective criteria of stratum provide psychological expression of class.

Check Your Progress 1

1)   Write down Tumin's critique of Functionalism.

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2) Put down the core of Weber's position in social stratification. Use about five lines for your answer.

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2.4 THE DIALECTICAL APPROACH

Karl Marx is the foremost architect of the dialectical approach to the study of society and history. His theory is not restricted to economic understanding and analysis only, it is a wide structural theory of society. However, despite such a grand theorization Marx accords preeminence to class over status and power, which Weber largely does not accept. 'Base' is economic structure, and 'superstructure' includes polity, religion, culture etc. To clarify further, according to Marx stratification is determined by the system of relations of production, and 'status' is determined by a person's position in the very system in terms of ownership and non-ownership of the means of production. The owners are named as 'bourgeoisie' and the non-owners are called as 'proletariat' by Marx. These are in fact social categories rather than bare economic entities. Production is by 'social individuals', hence production relations imply a 'social context' rather than a mere economic situation. Extrapolating this understanding relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are 'social', and the two could be seen in terms of 'domination' and 'subjection', or as effective superiority-inferiority relationships. The basic features of the dialectical approach are:

2.4.1 Basic Features

i) Economic interests are the basis of all other types of relationship social, cultural, political, etc.

ii) There are two main classes: (a) owners of the means of production (bourgeoisie), and (b) wage-earners (proletariat). Marx refers to these classes also as Haves and Have-Nots.

iii) The interests of these two classes clash with each other, as the bourgeoisie exploit the proletaria., hence a class struggle.

iv) The bourgeoisie gets more than its due share, hence appropriate surplus, and this accelerates class struggle, which finally leads to revolution and radical transformation of the stratification system of society.

Classes to Marx are basic features of society; they are the product of the processes of the productive system which is in effect a system of power relations. To own means of production tantamount to domination and power and to render services, and to supply the human labour amounts to subordination and dependence. In this sense, class is a social reality, a real group of people with a developed consciousness of its existence, its position, goals and capabilities. Class is like a looking glass of society by which one can see its social fabric and internal dynamics.

2.4.2 Bourgeoisie and Proletariat

Karl Marx and F. Engels considered the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as polar opposites always involved in clash of interests. The two hostile camps also united against each other. Marx harped upon unity of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie to defend their interests

as a political organization. This was necessary as the ruling classes (bourgeoisie) suppressed autonomy of ideas, culture, religion and polity. Even the state became subservient to the hegemony of the owners of the means of production. Thus, class for Marx was a perspective, a method and concrete reality to understand structure and ramification of society and culture. In a nutshell, class is an all-inclusive concept and reality.

Box 2.02

The Marxist notion of dialectics imbibes two philosophies, namely, materialism and idealism. The two seem to be opposed to each other, but Marx brought them together in his understanding of history and society. The opposites are unified in Marx and Engels as they accord primacy to the 'material' over the 'ideal' (or mind). The conflict of the two being a reality turns into a historical process of constant progressive change. Hence, Marxist theory is both evolutionary and dialectical at the same time.

According to Marx and Engels the fundamental laws of dialectical materialism are: (i) the law of the transformation of quantity into quality; (ii) the law of the unity of opposites, which holds that the unity of concrete reality is a unity of opposites or contradictions; and (iii) the law of the negation of the negation (the scheme of thesis, antithesis and synthesis), which means that in the clash of opposite one opposite negates another and is in its turn negated by a higher level of historical development that preserves something of both negated terms.

2.4.3 Dialectical Approach: An Appraisal

Thus, Marx's theory of society is not materialistic and dialectical, hence also scientific. But there is also persisting shared reality in human life. Discontinuities along don't characterise history and human society. Hence Marx's eternal assertion becomes relevant: "the history of all hitherto existing society in the history of class struggles". But both Marx and Engels realised that class itself was a uniquely prominent feature of capitalist society, and hence bourgeoisie and proletariat constituted the entire social advice of modern capitalist era. However, the main question relates to social ranking or stratification in relation to these basic classes. Engels and also to certain extent Marx realised that there were intermediate and transitional strata. These would disregard the two-classes theory, and it would be quite consistent with the development of capitalism and modern state system.

Activity 2

Discuss the dialectical approach to stratification with other students at the study centre. Is this approach valid in the present day world ? Comment on this in your notebook.

Today, the newly emancipated developing states have a vibrant structure of middle classes, operating a sort of control mechanism on both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The non-capitalist formation having peripheral capitalism signifying crystallization of class structure in terms of bourgeoisie and proletariat has yet to emerge as a social reality. The controllers of the status apparatus in country like India are not the capitalists but the mandarins of political parties, bobbies and intellectuals. A new dominant class/elite drawn from the these categories of people has come to power. Bureaucracy plays significant role in controlling the state. Income, education and access to cultural goods have become in some societies the main basis of status and power. Economic standing along in terms of dichotomy of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat has yet to emerge as a social reality.

2.4.4 Dahrendorf's Critique

Ralf Dahrendorf, while agreeing with Marxian theory of society in general, questions the ubiquitous character of class-conflict. Conflict is context-specific; and 'coercion' is key to social ranking in the context of given institutions of authority. The two groups of people are: (i) which is coercive, and (ii) which is coerced. Such domination and subjugation are found in all the areas of social life –economic, political, industrial, social, cultural etc. And coincidence of one type of conflict into another has ceased to exist. 'conflict groups' rather than 'classes' characterize conditions of social structure. 'Authority' is a legitimate relation of domination and subjection. Authority relations are always relations of super-ordination and sub-ordination, hence stratification.

2.4.5 The Indian Scenario

No doubt Marxist notions of class and class-conflict have become hallmarks of the studies of India's agricultural and urban industrial formations. Marx himself, however, thought of specific character of India's economic and social formation. Caste and class existed side by side in India in the pre-capitalist era. Features such as feudalism, caste, joint family, subsistance economy etc. were peculiar to India even during the colonial period. Today, not the classes such as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but like the pre-capitalist, independent workers, employers, white –collar employee, and blue –collar workers are clearly identifiable groups of people, out of which about fifteen per cent are in the organised sectors of economy. The framework implying large-scale industrialisation and monopoly capitalism does not account for these myriad classes. Trade unions and collective bargaining of workers have softened the bold of the employers of the workers. Class harmony is also a reality to certain extent. Wage-earners are a nebulous category as it includes a wide range of workers earning from, say, 1000 rupees to 15000 per month. Finally, caste is not simply a ritualistic system of relations; it inheres elements of class and power. All these points restrict application of the Marxist approach to the study of social stratification in Indian society.

2.5 THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

Like concrete and analytic structures of membership units and generalised aspects of social process there are 'analytic' and 'concrete' concepts of stratification. Analytically, stratification is an abstract necessity of all societies, and concretely, it refers to empirical distributions of power and privilege, advantages and benefits in specific societies. As such stratification is a process as well as a state of affairs (arrangement of statuses and roleations). To understand a given system of social stratification process is more fundamental. The state of affairs (structure of statuses) is both a product and a condition of social process.

The anthropological approach thus highlights on the processual aspects of status in the pre-industrial societies. The functionalist perspective emphasizes mainly on the 'social' criteria of status-determination like income, occupation, education, authority and power, and leaves out the 'non-social' criteria such as age, sex and kinship. However, in the pre-industrial societies the so-called 'social' criteria are non-existent as they are more applicable to the modern societies, and the so called 'non-social' criteria are in fact socially relevant considerations of the process of social differentiation in the pre-industrial societies. M.G. Smith, the principal architect of this approach, analyses sex-roles and age-sets as determinants of status and position in the pre-capitalist social formations. Sex-roles and age-sets are not a state of affairs; the two continuously change in the life-time of a person and bring out corresponding change in status and role. From birth onwards till death sex-roles and age-sets change. Hence, both a state of affairs and process are basic to all societies including the least advanced ones. Age, sex and kinship have always been very significant criteria in perception and reality of social status. Age-based distinctions reflecting ramifications of social status, gendered social and hierarchical relations, and status distinctions based on kinship-based ties are found all over in all families and communities.
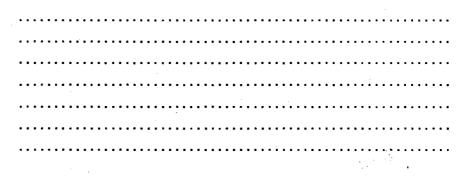
Check Your Progress 2

1) Write down the basic feature of the dialectical approach. Use about five lines for your answer.

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2) Outline the anthropological approach to social stratification. Use about five lines for your anwer.

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

The functionalist and the dialectical perspectives have influenced to a large extent the studies of social stratification, particularly caste and class, and these two approaches have also resulted in certain field-work traditions in India. For example, the synchronic analyses have been rooted into the functionalist perspective giving primacy to equilibrium or harmony of social structures at different levels of stratification. On the other hand, social change, replacement/ alteration of social structure is the prime concern of the dialectical approach. Social stratification is viewed according to this perspective moving from closed to open or from harmonic to disharmonic system of social relations. 'Integration' is inevitably existent in 'conflict' and vice-versa. 'Harmony' or 'unity' sustains the system, and the process/ change rekindles the static arrangements of social relations. Social stratification is multidimensional and a 'composite' phenomenon. Structural changes attack established hierarchies and bring about both downward and upward mobility. Differentiated evaluation at the group, family, and individual levels occurs due to basic structural transformation of society. But at no print of time a complete overthrow of the system takes place. This is why caste is found as an adaptive and resilient system. Family centred cooperation among members of three or more generations persists because of the resistance to the onslaught of some externally imposed forces of change. Community as an axis of primary relations is considered as a desirable mechanism of harmonious living. Thus, the functionalist, the dialectical, and the anthropological perspectives need to be applied discretely and not one as an alternative of the other. Their context-specific application can be quite fruitful and enriching for a better understanding and analysis of a given society.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Anthropological : The approach which highlights the processual aspects of status in pre industrial societies.

Dialectical : The approach which takes into account the antogonistic relationship between have's and have not's.

Functional : The approach which refers to manifest positive consequences of aspects like economy, polity, religion etc.

Proletariat : This refers to that section of society which does not own the means of products but works as wage labourers.

2.8 FURTHER READINGS

Smith, M.G., 1964, 'Pre-industrial Stratification Systems', S.M. Lipset and N.J. Smelser (ed.) *Social Structure and Mobility in Economic Development,* London, Routldege and Kegan Paul, pp. 141-76.

Tumin, Melvin M., 1953, 'Some Principles of Stratification', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 18, pp. 387-97.

Weber, Max, 1947, 'Class, Status, Party, in H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills (ed.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology,* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 180-94.

2.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Tumin challenges that Social Stratification is an inherent feature of social organization. He finds that the functional theory uses circular reasoning (tautology). According to him assignments and performences have more to do with rewards than positions. According to Tumin division of labour is necessary but not social differentiation as envisaged by Davis and Moore.

2) Stratification according to Weber involves the 'inter relationships between economic structure, status system, and political power'. In Weber's theory class is an economic phenomenon, status is a recognition of honour and power is also economically determined. Economically determined power is not always identical will social or legal power. The inter relationship of these factors leads to different styles of life. This may not be necessarily influenced by economic and political standing in Society.

Check Your Progress 2

1) The dialectical approach comprises of :

   i) economic interests are regarded as the basis of all other types of relationships

   ii) there are two main classes (a) the owners of the means of production and (b) the workers

   iii) the interests of owners and workers are clashing

   iv) the beorgeoisie create a surplus and get more than their due share.

2) The anthropological approach stresses processual aspects in pre-industrial society. M.G. Smith analyses sex roles and age-sets as determinants of status and position. Further sex roles and age-sets are dynamic and keep changing during the life time of a person. Thus both a state of affairs and process are basic to any society.

UNIT 3   CASTE AND CLASS IN INDIA

Structure

3.0   OBJECTIVES

In order to understand social stratification caste and class are both very important. After reading this unit you will be able to :

- understand the jati model and explain the role of class in social stratification;

- know the relationship between caste and class;

- understand the role of caste in mobility and elections;

- explain the various facets of caste in social strafication; and

- discuss caste hierarchy and class conflict.

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter attempts to handle the many difficulties which emerge in the analysis of caste. In fact, the literature on the subject has created more doubts than clarity. One finds a lack of distinction between varna and jati, while different perspectives develop one aspect of analysis at the cost of the other. Conjectural theories too have not been absent, particularly in the writings of the colonial ethnographers who continue to be used today to substantiate evidence. Several analysts popularized the view of Indian society as a "caste society" ignoring the dynamics of existing conditions. They perceived caste to be a logical opposite of the class system which was associated along with individualism, and particularly with the West.

3.2   BASIC FEATURES OF CASTE MODEL

Andre Beteille has outlined the basic features of this perspective of the caste model of Indian society, while examining its usefulness as a scheme of analysis. The features of the 'caste model' are:

i)   It is based on the ideas held and expressed by certain sections of the people and not on observed behaviour, although secondary empirical materials have been used.

ii)   It attaches kind of primary and universal significance to caste in India as this has been conceived in the classical texts.

iii) The entire system is viewed as being governed by certain more or less explicitly formulated principle or 'rules of the game'.

iv)   The different castes which are the basic units in the system are conceived as fulfilling complementary functions, and their mutual relations are seen as being non-antagonistic.

Andre Beteille points out two dangers emanating from this model. Firstly, that it is so general a theory, that it can actually be applied to any society, and secondly, it fails to take into account the details of economic and political life.

Box 3.01

Beteille observes that the caste model, associated primarily with the work of Louis Dumont, has been found useful in the interpretation of beliefs relating to Hinduism. He considers the study of "interests" equally important in understanding of political and economic problems, and his analysis of caste in a Tanjore village is a good example of such a concern. Yogendra Singh's work has attempted to understand change, where class factors operate within the framework of caste categories with a new sense of identity. In such events, caste violations also occur, pointing to contradictions which were not so visible earlier.

M.N. Srinivas' concept of 'Sanskritization' is one such dominant process of change in the caste system. Sanskritization could be observed in terms of the specific contexts in which it occurs and secondly, as a historical process of change in the caste system as a whole.

Another process of cultural change described by Srinivas is called 'westernization'. It brings about changes in values, norms and very the cultural roots of the people. Yogendra Singh sees these to have implications for 'structural changes' in the caste system in particular and in Indian society in general, epitomized as 'revolt' against hierarchy, or captured in the modernization process.

3.3   STRUCTURAL CHANGES

These structural changes appear as land reforms, the spread of education, social legislation, democratization, industrialization and urbanization. The effect of these on the caste system is that often, adaptive mechanisms such as caste associations appear as mechanism of social mobilisations. These organizations strive mainly for the fulfillment of materialistic and mundane goals for their members, thereby making them more aware of their deprivation and structural impediments. These associations are often concerned with non-caste like- functions, but they are not classes, since members range across several class situations. Intra-caste contradictions are not allowed to come up, and this may also create a notion of shared deprivations and class consciousness.

3.3.1   Economic Relations

The caste system has also been considered to be a system of economic relations. Joan Mencher writes that for those at the bottom, the caste system has worked as a very systematic tool of exploitation and oppression. One of the functions of the system has been to prevent the formation of classes with any commonality of interest of unity of purpose. Mencher has used "class" in the Marxian sense and adopted the Marxian model to analyze caste relations. As such, caste is a system of exploitation rather than a system of interdependence and reciprocity. Caste stratification has been a deterrent to the development of "class conflict" or "proletarian consciousness". This is because "caste

derives its validity from its partial masking of extreme socio-economic differences".

The most crucial point for consideration is that "classes" are not found as a system of stratification in the same way as castes are entrenched in Indian society. Further, that most of the "problems" created by the caste system are still of a class nature, related to economic domination and subjugation, privileges and deprivations, conspicuous waste and bare survival. These problems are essentially those of the privileged and the dis-privileged and one cannot locate these as concrete groupings in a strictly Marxian sense, as class antagonism, class consciousness and class unity are not present. Thus, India's situation is very different from other societies in the sense that the problems are of a "class" nature, but "classes" as divisions of society are not found as concrete socio-economic-units.

3.3.2 Power and Dominant Caste

Andre Beteille observes that power has shifted from one dominant caste to another and it is shifted from the caste structure itself, and come to be located in more differentiated structures such as panchayats and political parties. Yet Beteille does not reflect upon the consequences of this shift. Can we study changes in caste structure without examining the consequent patterns of "distributive justice" or "equality/ inequality"? If we cannot analyse the flexibility inherent in the norms of the an egalitarian system, it would be difficult to interpret the emergence of formal institutions and structures as indicators of a "shift" from caste areas to "caste-free" structures. Even if a caste as a whole is not "dominant" and the "dominant group" comprises families of several caste, it does not mean that the magnitude of inequality has substantially reduced.

3.4 CASTE-CLASS NEXUS

My observation is that the change is from one kind of structure of inequality to another. Earlier also caste was characterised by inter-caste differentiation of roles as well as differentiation within particular castes. Thus, differentiation is not necessarily related to the reduction of caste inequalities. Differentiation of roles may bring about certain new inequalities which might strengthen the existing ones, and in such a situation, differentiation becomes a double -edged weapon for the lowest groups in a caste system or for that matter in any type of system. We have a few "proletarian Zamindars" or landlords on the one hand, and also neo-rich "neo-influential" neo zamindars on the other, as a result of the emergence of new structures in the village community.

3.4.1 Synchronic Analysis

Studies on caste have paved the way to a certain fieldwork tradition, which produced 'synchronic' analysis. The emphasis had been on presenting caste as an equilibrating, harmonic, stable and consensual system. Change was often presented as a shifted in relations from organic to segmentary, closed to open, harmonic to disharmonic. Yet, empirical evidence seems to suggest that change in the caste system has been adaptive - evolutionary.

Activity 1

Discuss about Synchronic analysis with other students in the study centre. Pen down your findings in your notebook.

Changes in the caste system can be analysed from one structure of inequality and hierarchy to another structure of inequality. To understand this problem of change in the caste system, we should analyse the "composite status" of people of a given society, either taking 'family' or individual' as the unit of analysis of or both. Such an approach calls for the consideration of caste as a dynamic process, hence we need methodology for the understanding of the process of transformation. It is in this context that I will now discuss the caste-class nexus.

Both caste and class have been debated from narrow ideological standpoints. According to

the 'caste model' perspective, caste is viewed as an overarching ideological system, encompassing all aspects of social life, of Hindus in particular and of other communities in general. One of the implications of such a view is that caste is basically a part of the infrastructure of Indian society. Thus occupation, division of labour, rules of marriage, interpersonal relations are elements of superstructure, expressing the reproduction of the ideology of caste.

3.4.2 Caste as a Normative System

Following from this we ask the question: In what way is caste a normative system? Why in certain spheres caste adheres to its normative sanctions whereas in other domains, caste groups and their members have taken up activities which depart from traditional sanctions of the caste system? I may be noted that members of a caste compete with each other, but they also co-operate with one another. Class-based distinctions within the caste have always been found in a pronounced form. Members of a caste in a given village can sometimes be representatives of Indian class divisions for while observing all the pertinent rules of marriage, they may actually define pertinent negotiations along the axes of class conditions.

All castes can worship now in Hindu temples
Courtesy: T. Kapur

Caste refers to inequality both in theory and practice. Dumont, in his classic work Homo Hierarchicus considers inequality based on the caste system as a special type of inequality. For him the idea of the pure and the impure is basic to the understanding of caste; it is the very basic framework of hierarchy in India. He analysed the "ideal type" of the caste system based on ethnographic and ideological descriptions.

T.N. Madan upholds Dumont's view regarding hierarchy as a universal necessity. He points that society in India has remained largely static, change in society has taken place, but there has been no radical transformation.

3.4.3 Caste as an Emprical Reality

The basis of the understanding the caste system as an empirical reality is to locate caste groups such as jatis in a specific rural/urban context. It is a source of placement and of identity in society. At the latter level, identity is not a function necessarily of informal day to day relations. Caste, for instance, does not usually become a basis of marriage between a Tamil Brahmin and a Kanyakubja Brahmin of Uttar Pradesh. Yet, they may have a sense of belonging to what they perceive as the same stock, and may even co-operate in situations of crises and challenges. Therefore, one may ask: Is caste an interest group? Can common interests bring together more smoothly men of different castes from various regions than those of the same caste? Caste in certainly a resource, but the nature of this resource varies from caste to caste depending upon the status of a given caste in a given area. Caste identity/membership has become a liability for the members of the upper and middle castes because a certain percentage of jobs, seats in parliament and state legislatures, as well as admissions into institutions of higher learning have been reserved for the other backward castes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

The view that caste and class are ideological opposites is not correct. The assumption that class can emerge as a social reality when caste has been destroyed in an erroneous conception of the relationship between the two. Both have been inseparable parts of India's social formation, and hence the study of their nexus, continuity and change.

Caste is a very complex system, for it is not simply a system of power relations and economic activities in a nominal sense. If it gets weakened in one aspect, it also gets strengthened in another, no doubt with certain alternations, additions and accretions. We need to seriously analyse the dynamics of the system. There is after all a class basis to rituals, pollution -purity and other non-material aspects of social life. For example, an organization like Jat Sabha is not a simple caste association, but in effect, it is an organization of peasants. Similarly, the Kisan Sabha is not a simple organization of peasants, it is very much an association of castes engaged in agriculture, particularly of Jats in northern Indian, and their counterparts in other states.

Further, to consider caste mainly as a rural phenomenon, and class as a reality belonging to the towns and cities is a myth. Let us look at look at caste elections in Jaipur city to substantiate our position.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Write a note on power and the dominant caste. Use about five lines for your answer.

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2) Discuss, caste as an empirical reality. Use about five lines for your answer.

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3.5   CASTE ELECTIONS

The annual elections of Khandelwal Vaishya Mahasabha were held in the heart of the city on Station Road about fifteen years ago. Hundreds of cars, jeeps autorickshaws and twowheelers were deployed in the elections. About 60 stalls were installed for electioneering on both sides of the road. Traffic was diverted and police pickets were posted to control the situation. It was not only a show of casteism, but also of factionalism within the caste. What would those elected get out of all this by spending lakhs of rupees on the elections? One should seriously engage in empirical analysis to understand how caste and class interact to seek an answer to this question.

Box 3.02

There is no uniform pattern of caste structure in actual terms throughout India. There are thousands of castes in India with different names and nomenclatures, but there exist only five or six classes throughout the country. It is important to remember that these apparently distinct bases of social division in Indian society are not realistically very different from each other. There are numerous middle classes which are not directly related to production processes and they are an off-shoot of the modern Indian state apparatus.

In India, class-struggle is also in effect caste-struggle and vice-versa. Separation of the two seems to be superfluous and mechanistic. A nomological plea that the two are distinct as they refer to different "social" and "economic" realities cannot be accepted because of the lack of ample substantive support and evidence about the two as separate entities.

This approach which focuses on the caste-class nexus for studying India's social formation would focus on the understanding and analysis of structure, culture, history and dialectics both from the upper levels of strata, as well as the marginalized communities.

Nexus does not imply a correspondence or symmetry between caste and class. Interdependence, contradictions, symmetry and hegemony of social relations are integral features of this nexus. Andre Beteille notes that the hierarchies of caste and power in the village overlap to some extent, but also cut across.

Beteille also states that many areas of social life are now becoming to some extent "caste-free". Besides the Brahiminic tradition, the idea of the martial Rajput, the traditions of the Indian craftsman, the Indian merchant, and class and cultural traditions existed side by side in the Indian society.

We admit that due to the multi-dimensionality and complexity of the caste system, one encounters numerous difficulties in giving a precise definition of caste. The structural aspect of the caste is explained by describing it as a general principle of stratification. Caste as a cultural system in understood in terms of the prominence of ideas on pollution and purity and notions of hierarchy, segregation and corporateness.

F.G. Bailey views caste as a closed system of stratification, whereas Beteille considers aspects of the caste system as both 'closed' and 'open'. We have seen that Bailey finds that caste is becoming increasingly segmentary because of the emergence of differentiated structures in India. These analytic variations hinder a common definition of caste.

3.5.1   Caste and Mobility

Although caste is not really a very flexible system, yet a caste permits mobility mobility in certain areas to its members. A given caste in guided by the norms of the caste system regarding inter-caste dependence. However, any given caste has also its autonomy with regard to the observance of its practices, rituals and rights in relation to other castes.

Srinivas notes that even today agricultural production requires co-operation of several castes. The use of the caste idiom is quite widespread (1966). Marx related the Asiatic

mode of production to the stability of the caste system in India . Beteille blames Dumont in particular for encouraging a "caste-view" of Indian society. Such a 'caste model' according to Beteille does not provide an analysis of material interests along with the study of ideas and values. There is a dialectical relationship between the two, and Dumont and Pocock's notion of 'binary opposition' is far form the notion of 'dialectics' as given by Marx. Beteille also suggests that economic and political conflicts occur with a certain degree of autonomy of their own, hence they could be studied independent of caste and religious beliefs and ideas. The caste model would not permit such a path of undetstanding. Edmund Leach's understanding that co-operation refers to caste, and competition refers to class is naïve and unconvincing. Not only families of dominant castes compete with each other to extend patronage to the lower castes for maintaining their dominance, but the lower caste families too compete to seek favours from the families of the dominant castes. Such competition is really not a new phenomenon. Even feuds due to conflicting claims on territory were quite common among the Kshatriyas and Brahmins for seeking power in ancient and medieval India. Leach's view that caste was merely 'caste' and a 'class-like situation' emerged only when the patrons started competing with each other (1960: 1-10) ignores the fact that inter-caste conflicts and revolts by lower castes against the upper castes have been a historical fact.

3.6   EXPLAINING CLASS

Marxist notions of class and class-conflict have become hallmarks of the studies of India's agricultural and urban-industrial structures. Marx himself discussed caste and the traditional ethos of village community in his two articles on India. Initially Marx characterised the Asiatic mode of the production as an absence of private property in land and the static nature of economy (1947) due to a certain tie-up between caste, agriculture and village handicrafts. However, C.T. Kurian observes that that the analysis of the Asiatic mode does not deny the role of class contradictions and class structures. India's pre-capitalist economic formation was based on both caste and class side by side.

Two questions are relevant for a discussion on class: (i) what method can we use for analysing the class structure in Indian society? And (ii) what is the class-caste nexus, and its ramifications and inter-relations in each region? The purpose of discussing these questions in not to accept or reject the Marxian approach but to see what useful insights it provides us.

Ashok Rudra, while analyzing the class composition of the Indian agricultural population, observes that there are only two classes in Indian agriculture — the big landlords, and the agricultural labourers. These two classes are in antagonistic relationship with each other, and this constitutes the principal contradiction in Indian rural society (1978: 916-23). Similar to Rudra's view is that held by A.R. Desai (1975).

Box 3.03

Rudra emphatically argues that Indian agriculture has capitalist relations and capitalist development. Hence, there are two classes — 'haves' and 'have-nots'. The State in India has assumed the norms of capitalist society as the axis of its developmental strategy. One of the implications of this formulation is that the frame of reference which applies to the rest of the world also applies very well to the Indian society. The other inference is that the dominant variable for analysis of Indian society is the economic in all situations and contexts.

In India, V.M. Dandekar observes that strikes by wage earners is a very common feature, and they include those earning from two hundred rupees to those who have salaries upto several thousands. Hence wage-earners must be seen as a heterogeneous category.

About three-fourths of the workforce are left out by the Marxian yardstick. The Indian state, being a welfare state, is the largest employer today. Is the Indian state a capitalist, exploitative and oppressive agency just like an industrialist or an employer of wage earners? About 10 million workers are engaged in small industries and family-owned

concerns, and these workers generally do not witness class-antagonism and strikes. The organised labour is one-ninth of the total workforce. Can we accept the Marxian approach? Overlapping of class, caste and occupation, elite conflict, pressure groups and factions, influence of middle classes and the prevalence of 'mixed classes' and 'gentlemen farmers' are some the important elements to be taken into account for a serious analysis of India's class structure. The jajmani system too can be explained in terms of class relations and the mode of production. Let us now look at caste hierarchy and occupation.

3.7 CASTE HIERARCHY AND CLASS-CONFLICT

The dalits have been attacked, murdered, their women-folk raped and inflicted upon with various indignities. Arun Sinha observes that it is 'class war' against Harijans and not haphazard atrocities. In a dispatch to Economic and Political Weekly, Sinha observes that 'in the villages of Bihar, the rise of a rich peasant class has driven agricultural labourers of all castes–Chamars, Dusaudhs, Kurmis, Yadavs, Bhumihars and so on, to forsake their caste organizations and fight along trade union lines. This is to read as "class war" cutting across caste lines. But the fact is that Harijan or Chamar agricultural labourers cannot simply by equated with his Brahmin or Bhumihar counterpart because the two have the same position in the class structure.

The real situation in post-independent India is that a class of rich peasants from the backward castes is at the top of the class hierarchy. This class is struggling against the social and political domination of the upper castes. The backward classes received encouragement for accelerating their struggle against the upper castes during the Janata government regime in Bihar. The backward classes are at level in the caste hierarchy and so is their position in class structure.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Explain class as a social phenomenon. Use about five lines for your answer.

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2) Outline caste hierarchy and class conflict. Use about five lines for your answer.

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The Janata rule brought about a shift in the structure of dominance in Bihar having implications for the political economy of the State. The Brahmins lost their political dominance substantially.

3.7.1   Incidence of Violence and Exploitation

The incidents of massacre, loot and rape of the women of scheduled castes in Belchi, Agra, Pantnagar, Marathwada and Bajitpur, among other places, show the role of the the caste system vis-à-vis class struggle and class organization as reported by the Atyachar Virodhi Samiti . The Samiti investigated the nature and extent of repression of scheduled castes in Maharashtra. The SCs were also poor peasants and agricultural labourers. The specific oppression and exploitation of the rural poor women, both sexually and materially particularly of the dalit women, have been highlighted in the report by the Samiti. The findngs and observations of the Samiti on caste are quite meaningful as caste is seen as a system of relations of production. The ongoing conflict between Ranbir Sena and an ultra-left outfit in Bihar has led to killings and counter-killings of the poor low caste people and the upper caste Bhumihars in particular. The following points may be noted:

i)   The caste system functions as an extremely effective method of economic exploitation. The dominant class also acquires political power and social prestige which further perpetuates and consolidates caste hierarchy. Thus, caste hierarchy reflects ownership of land, and economic hierarchy is closely linked with social hierarchy.

ii)   Caste determines a definite relation to the means of production and subsistence specially in rural areas. Caste riots reflect the conflict of class interests.

iii)   Caste also refers to the relations of production as it controls the access of groups and individuals to the conditions of production of production and to the resources, and provide the social framework for politico-ritual activity.

iv)   B.R. Ambedkar rightly observed that the caste system was not merely a division of labour, but also a division of labourers. However, caste prevents labourers from being a class-for-itself. Hence caste is to be viewed as an ideology in the manner of 'false consciousness". I have observed that both caste and class have played a significant role in the emergence of dalit identity and movement.

v)   Caste and religion are used to perpetuate a particular class structure.

vi)   Caste persists as a part of feudal ideology.

Activity 2

With reference to the points i) ——vi) above discuss with other students the present state of the caste system. Note down your answer in a notebook.

The Samiti further states that "caste is one of the most important aspects of Indian society. It represents a specific form of oppression at the level of relations of production". To say that there are only class issues, and there is nothing like questions pertaining to caste, is totally absurd. Because caste divisions beyond purely 'economic' class do still persist. So issues around specific caste questions must be taken by all the progressive and leftists, dalits and non-dalits and organizations. The reality today is of class interest, developing alongside caste oppression and class exploitation.

3.8   LET US SUM UP

The structural aspects of caste, namely, economic and political dimensions have remained underestimated. So also analysis of the cultural aspects of social stratification can provide a deeper understanding of India's social formation, since the two are in fact inseparable from each other. As we have noted, classes function within the contexts of castes, caste conflicts are also class or agrarian conflicts. The rifts between the upper the and the lower castes to a large extent correspond with conflicts between landowners and sharecroppers or agricultural labourers.

Four basic points for the understanding of caste and class relations and their transformations may be noted. These are: (i) dialectics, (ii) history, (iii) culture, and (iv) structure.

Dialectics do not simply refer to binary fission in the cognitive structure of the society. It refers to the effective notions which being about contradictions and highlights relations between unequal segments and men and women. History is not conjectural based on mythology, scriptures and idealistic constructions, but it provides a substantial account of existent conditions of work and relationships. Culture does not include just cultural practices, rituals, rites of passage etc., it defines the rules of the game, the nature of relations between the privileged and the deprived, and modes of resistance or consensus. Structure is no doubt a product of dialectical contradictions, historical forces and certain rules of the game, but it becomes 'formation' once it has emerged, and in return, becomes a sort of 'force' to determine in some way the course of history. Thus structure refers to relations between social segments as a point of time, but more as a historical product and reality. Having these elements as the kernel of structural-historical approach, changes in caste and class structure could be considered as "transformational processes".

The following processes of structural changes emanating from the above paradigmatic explanations may be noted:

i) Downward mobility and prolectarianisation,

ii) Upward mobility and embourgeoisiement,

iii) Urban income for rural people and mobility in the village.

iv) Rural non-agricultural income and mobility.

These are themes which require much attention if we are to achieve a more complete understanding of caste and class in India.

3.9 KEY WORDS

Caste: An ascriptive grouping with several characteristics including an allegiance to the varna all-India scheme.

Synchromic: An event or analysis which is happening, or done simultaneously with another event or analysis.

3.10 FURTHER READINGS

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3.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) Beteille has observed that power shifts from one dominant caste to another. Further power has how come to be located in move differential structures such as panchayats

and political parties. It has been observed by K L Sharma that the change has been from one kind of structure of inequality to another.

2) To understand caste system as an empirical reality is to put caste groups such as jatis in a specific rural/urban context. This creates a placement in society and provides identity. Identity may not be a function of day to day interactions. Thus while two caste groups may not intermarry they may have a sense of belonging to the same stock and cooperate in crises and challenges.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Marxist notions of caste have been widely used in the study of India's agricultural and urban industrial structures. It has been pointed out that India's precapitalist formation was based both on caste and class. Various writers have used class in their analyses in agriculture including Rudra and Dandekar.

2) It is found that those at the lower end of the caste hierarchy have been systematically attacked. Sinha feels that this is a 'class war' and not incidental atrocities The actual situation in post-independent India is that a class of rich peasants of the backward classes is at the top of the class hierarchy. This class is struggling against the social and political domination of the upper classes, with some success.

UNIT 4 STRATIFICATION: IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER AND ETHNICITY

Structure

4.0   OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will be able to :

- define the relationship between gender and ethnicity;

- understand the meaning of gender and ethnicity in a plural society;

- describe the relationship between hierarchy and difference;

- define the relationship between ethnicity and stratification; and

- analyse the relationship between gender and stratification.

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This unit seeks to address the new issues of gender and ethnicity in the context of stratification. Terming them as new is in a sense right and in a sense wrong. It is right in the sense that these issues have emerged as salient concerns in contemporary times. They have interrogated existing principles of stratification in manner quite differently from any time before. But it is wrong in the sense that ethnicity and gender always existed, were embedded in the stratification system everywhere but yet went unnoticed. This is an important point. Sociology is perodically forced to seek a review of its concepts and categories when social movements beg the question.

Before I dwell on questions that gender and ethnicity have raised I would therefore very briefly look at some points that are pertinent in discussing both in relation to stratification.

4.2   GENDER AND ETHNICITY

In this section we take up three issues that could be seen as common between gender and ethnicity.

4.2.1 Who Are Minorities?

The United Nations Report (1980) declares:

Women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two thirds of its work hours, receive one tenth of the world's income, and own less than one hundredth of the world's property.

The same perhaps could have been said about the Blacks in South Africa. They are minorities in a very substantive sense. I find it useful therefore to agree with Helen Mayer Hacker's adoption of Louis Wirth's definition of a minority group which reads: A minority group is any group of people who because of their physical and cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.

By comparing the situations of American Blacks and women, Hacker indicates some of the advantages of classifying women as a minority group. Firstly, both groups have 'high social visibility', Blacks in terms of their 'racial' characteristics and to some extent their styles of dress, women in terms of their sexual characteristics and feminine clothes.

Other scholars however disagree with this formulation. Anthony Giddens for example contends that it seems a little contradictory to term what could consist the majority of the population a minority group. He opines:

Some have suggested that, since the notion is sociological rather than numerical, a minority group might in certain circumstances consist of the majority of the population. In South Africa, for example, a relatively small proportion of whites dominatea much larger number of blacks. However, to use the term 'minority' in such circumstances seems more than a little contradictory. The fact that blacks are in such a majority makes a difference to the overall make-up of the society. Similarly, we sometimes hear the phrase 'women and other minorities' in discussion of inequalities in the Western world, although women form over half the population. It seems least likely to confuse us if we use the term 'minority group' only where the people discriminated against do not make up the bulk of the populace.

4.2.2 Ethnic Minorities

Giddens however emphasised that the notion of ethnic minorities or minority groups so widely used in Sociology involves more than mere numbers. But feels that the three features that define minority groups in sociology would not hold water so far as women are a numerically majority group like the Blacks of South Africa are concerned. The three features of a minority group would be:

i)   Its members are disadvantaged, as a result of discrimination against them by others. Discrimination exists when rights and opportunities open to one set of people are denied to another group.

ii) Members of the minority have some sense of group solidarity, of 'belonging together'. Experience of being the subject of prejudice and discrimination usually heightens feelings of common loyalty and interests. Members of minority groups often tend to see themselves as 'a people apart' from the majority.

iii) Minority groups are usually to some degree physically and socially isolated from the larger community, They tend to be concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, cities or regions of a country. There is little intermarriage between those in the majority and members of the minority group. People in the minority group might actively promote endogamy (marriage within the group) in order to keep alive their cultural distinctiveness.

> **Activity 1**
>
> Discuss with various people and students at the study centre the notion of minorities including the ethnic minorities. Note down your results in your notebook.

Significantly Giddens emphasises the fact that minorities in sociological terms is not a matter of numbers. If we take the first point of 'discrimination' or 'disadvantaged', yes, this holds true for women as a group, however sharp the differences within the group are concerned. While the form and intensity of discrimination varies widely, it would not be wrong to state that in all societies women are disadvantaged in relation to men. Matrilineal societies like the Khasis are often cited to rebuff the idea that women in all societies are discriminated. Recent writings have shown how even among a matrilineal society like the Khasis, control of property and decision making within the family (the private domain) often resides with the male head-the brother instead of the husband. And significantly in the public domain women are woefully represented in the political structures and processes. The second point is of some interest for with the womens' movement the sense of solidarity and 'belonging together' has become a social fact of some consequence. Perhaps writing this unit itself is a fall out of this development. Governments, law making bodies, international organisations have responded in some measure or the other to the 'solidarity' of the womens' movements. Universities have realised that new perspectives that have emerged as a fall out of the women's movement should be incorporated within the syllabus. The third point about physical and social isolation, this matter has been of crucial significance for the women's' movements.

> **Box 4.01**
>
> Activists and theorists have been acutely aware of the fact unlike some 'minorities' women are not segregated from men. Indeed often women and men in families are involved in deep emotional relationships which are at once oppressive and sometimes violent. Giddens is right when he contends that women do not live in segregated parts of a town or city or village. Many minorities do but many do not. It need not be the defining characteristic of a minority.

The point being made is that despite important differences in a very important sense ethnic groups and women are marginal in decision making, less powerful, less visible, and more often than not prejudiced against. Therefore percieving them as a minority is a step in recognition of their disadvantageous position.

4.2.3 Inequality and Difference

There has been a tendency to assume in stratification studies that stratification implies heirarchy and inequality. Dipankar Gupta has sought to clarity that the common textbook analogy of stratas to geological layers within the earth's crust is misleading. It is misleading because in Guptas' words:

> It might figuratively persuade one to believe that stratification always implies layers that are vertically or hierarchically arranged. For a true understanding of stratification we should be able to conceptually isolate it from hierarchy, as the latter is but one of the manifestations of the former. (Gupta 1991: 6)

Gupta argues not all systems of stratification are hierarchical. Some are, but many are not.

> **Differences** rather than hierarchy are dominant in some stratificatory systems. In other words, the constitutive elements of these differences are such that any attempt to see them hierarchially would do offence to the logical property of these very elements. The layers in this case are not arranged vertically or hierarcically, but horizontally or even separately. (Gupta 1991: 7)

As an illustration of such a form of stratification where differences hold supreme Gupta writes:

Such an arrangement can be easily illustrated in the case of language, religion or nationalities. It would be futile, and indeed capricious, if any attempt was made to hierarchize languages or religions or nationalities…India again is an appropriate place to demonstrate this variety of social stratification. The various languages that are spoken in India speak eloquently of an horizontal system of social stratification where differences are paramount. Secular India again provides an example of religious stratification where religions are not hierarchized or unequally priveleged in law, but have the freedom to exist separately in full knowledge of their intrinsic difference. (ibid)

The point being made is that there is no logical reason to hierarchise difference such as linguistic, religious, ethnic or gender for that matter. But as Gupta himself acknowledges, "In the eyes of most people religions, languages, sexes, nationalities are all hierarchized-though it would be difficult to get an unambigous statement of the criteria on the basis of which these hierarchies are constructed. In fact, a worthwhile question for a sociologist is to ask: Why is it that people tend to hierarchize horizontal differentiations whose logical property is equality? (Gupta: 1991:9)

4.2.4 Hierarchy and Difference

The importance of logical distinctions notwithstanding, differences are hierarchised. Both ethnic minorities and women face a great deal of antagonism, prejudices and discrimination. Prejudice operates mainly through the use of stereotypical thinking. All thought involves categories by means of which we classify experience. Sometimes, however, these categories are both ill-informed and rigid. And where stereotypes are associated with fear and anxiety, the situation is difficult. A white person may feel that all blacks are lazy and stupid. A man may believe all women are foolish and hysterical. An uppercaste Hindu, may feel that the minority is pampered. Sociologists have used the concept of displacement for such exercises of scapegoating.

Stereotyping is often closely linked to the psychological mechanism of displacement. In displacement, feelings of hostility or anger become directed against objects that are not the real origin of these anxieties. In other words what it means is that in times of acute unemployment, other ethnic groups or women may be blamed, scapegoated, for taking up jobs that should have been otherwise theirs.

To return to our moot point, even though differences are not necessarity unequal or hierarchical, in practice both gender and ethnicity are attributed with features of both heierachy and inequality.

4.2.5 Gender and Ethnic Differences

Both women and ethnic groups have high visibility. They 'look' different. While a minority ethnic group in the United States of America may look different by colour, hair and facial features, a woman ought to look different. Not only is she supposed to be shorter than 'her' men folks, be weaker, weigh less but also dress, walk, speak, gesticulate differently. Both the ethnic minority and women are also attributed with other qualities which are not selfevidently obvious. All of you, I am sure will know of some proverb or the other in your languages/dialects where women are described as unreliable, loose mouthed, frivolous, cunning, manipulative, weak. The list can go on. The point being made is that the lines between natural differences and socially acquired differences are blurred. And once the differences are seen as natural, it also implies that they cannot be changed.

Feminist scholarship has emphasised the importance of differentiating sex from gender. Giddens writes:

The word 'sex' as used in ordinary language, is ambiguous, referring both to a category of person and to acts which people engage— that is, when we use the word in phrases like 'having sex'. For the sake of clarity, we must separate these two senses. We can distinguish 'sex' meaning biological or anatomical differences between women and men from sexual activity. We

need also to make a further important distinction between sex and gender.
While sex refers to physical differences of the body, gender concerns the
psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females.
This distinction between sex and gender is fundamental, since many
differences between males and females are not biological in origin.

While western social science is very sensitive to the race/ethnic question, it is still not an
entirely uncommon practice to conflate cultural and natural differences. Giddens writes:

> **Ethnicity** refers to cultural practices and outlooks that distinguishes a given
> community of people. Members of ethnic groups see themselves as culturally
> distinct from other groupings in a society, and are seen by those others to be
> so. Many different characteristics may serve to distinguish ethnic groups
> from one another, but the most usual are language, history or ancestry (real
> or imagined), religion, and styles of dress or adornment. Ethnic differences
> are wholly learned, a point which seems self evident until we remember how
> often such groups have been regarded as 'born to rule' or, alternatively, have
> been seen as 'unintelligent, 'innately lazy and so forth. (Giddens 1989: 244)

The important point to notice that in both the case of women and ethnic minority, the
tendency of the dominant sections of society is to attribute qualities as naturally given,
biologically endowed. It is also important to state that the ethnic group in question or
women are compliant in accepting a self definition that has been endowed socially on them.
This would explain a Black girls' preference for white dolls in America where notions of
beauty are deeply ingrained. Or an Indian woman would be empowered with the birth of a
son and look down on other women who in her eyes were not so fortunate.

Apart from the important distinction between 'gender' and 'sex', other feminist scholars
have argued that gender is a set of performances. From the time we are born a baby learns
how to perform in the right gendered manner. They have also argued that the gendered
differences are arbitrary and often what is considered 'male' and what is considered
'female' behaviour vary widely both across cultures and in time. The basic point is that
gender is a social construct not a natural given. The same is true for ethnic group. Black is
different from white. It seems a natural and self evident fact. But the meaning which we
given 'black' and 'white' are social. And what is social is often power loaded. Hence since
the dominant groups in the world perceive white to be good and fair, even the black tends
to think so just as the woman learns to be the 'weaker' sex.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Write a brief note on ethnic minorities. Use about five lines for your answer.

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2) Briefly outline gender and ethnic differences. Use about five lines for your answer.

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4.3   ETHNICITY AND STRATIFICATION

Most modern societies include numerous different ethnic groups. In Britain, Irish, Asian (many within Asian), West Indian, Italian and Greek immigrants live. The question that arises however is when we refer to a society, are we necessarily referring to a state ? Most often yes, we do. Hence we refer to an Indian society, A Pakistani society, an American society and so on. What we are essentially referring to are plural entities with many 'societies and cultures' and one state. Many argue that the different cultural groups are 'nations'. Others call them 'ethnic groups'. Are they the same?

It will be of interest to review some of the formulations. Giddens writes:

> Many societies in the world today, in the industrialised and non-industrialised world alike, are plural societies. Plural societies are those in which there are several large ethnic groupings, involved in the same political and economic order but otherwise largely distinct from one another. (Giddens 1989: 244)

Anthony Smith thinks nationalism emerged from common bonds of religion, language, customs, shared history and common myths of origin; '....in a later work he refers to modern ethnic revivals taking the from of nationalism and defines '..."ethnic" or ethnic community as a social group whose members share a sense of common origin, claim a common and distinctive history and destiny, possess one or more distinctive characteristics and feel a sense of collective uniqueness and solidarity'

Does this mean there is no distinction between nation and ethnic and hence ethnicity and nationality? Not quite says Smith. Ethnic is a passive notion and nationality is active ethnicity because ethnic revival is '...the transformation of passive, often isolated and politically excluded communities into potential and actual nations, active, participant and self-conscious in their historic identities' . Despite this overlap Oomen feels that there is a crucial difference between them which can be located in the territorial dimension.

4.3.1   Nationalism and Ethnicity

Nationalism is also a form of ethnicity but it is a special form. It is the institutionalisation of one particular ethnic identity by attaching it to the state. Ethnic groups do not necessarily act together except when they have a special interest to secure. When those interests are to obtain a state of its own (or part of a state) the group is a nationality.

Where does stratification fit in?

Women's clarification helps answer this to a certain extent. The salient feature Worsley mentions are deprivations emanating out of inequality, material deprivation and denial of cultural identity. His argument is that if there is no common language and territory ethnicity cannot constitute itself into a nation. This aspect is not of immediate concern to us here. What is of importance that groups are disadvantaged not just because of class or caste. But also because of ethnicity.

In India therefore studies of stratification have to address not just issues of caste, class but tribes and communities-religious/linguistic/regional. The last decade or more has witnessed a surge of ethnic/national revivals. One may identify several situations where 'ethnicity' or outsider identity becomes salient vis-à-vis 'nationality' or insider identity.

i)   The demand for a distinct homeland based on religion (e.g. the demand for a sovereign state by a section of the Sikhs) or language (e.g. the Tamil demand for an independent state).

ii)   The demand for a political-administrative unit within the Indian state (e.g. Gorkhaland for Nepalis, Jharkand state for the tribes of Central India).

iii)   The demand for expulsion of 'outsiders' when the entire state is engulfed by migrants

from other states or neighbouring countries (e.g. in Assam and Tripura).

Stratification : Implications of
Gender and Ethnicity

iv) The demand for the expulsion of vides his (foreigners) belonging to other folk regions within the state (e.g. the Chotanagpur tribal demand to expel fellow Biharis of the plains) or from other state (Bengalis or Marwaris).

v) The demand to expel those who do not belong to the same cultural region although they are from the same state (e.g. the demand for the expulsion of Andhras from the Telangana region).

vi) The demand to expel migrants from other linguistic states who come to work and reside in metropolitan centres (e.g. mobilization against Tamils in Bombay and Bangalore).

4.3.2   The Nature of Ethnic Groups

The examples that have been drawn from the Indian context and the international context makes one thing clear. Ethnic groups, however one defines them tend to be disadvantaged in someway to both the state and the dominant group. As suggested by some, ethnicity has assumed many diverse meanings. In the Middle East, the more substantive research on ethnicity has shown that this term has replaced the notion of minorities employed. It has been suggested that there exists a core Arab identity whose hallmarks are on the ethnic dimension, Arab language and culture and on the religious dimension Islam. The others are minorities in the sense that they are disadvantaged to the core Arab. Interestingly, The Oxford English Dictionary (1961) defines the adjective 'ethnic' as 'pertaining to nations not Christians or Jewish; Gentile, heathen, pagan.

Whatever may be scholarly differences between how we ought to define ethnicity, the moot point is that generally ethnic groups are those groups in a society which are located at a disadvantage either to the state or the dominant droup of society or more often to both. In a plural country like ours we have to take ethnicity as a principle of stratification. Some people may belong to an economically affluent class and yet be culturally disadvantaged for not belonging to the dominant group which is often perceived as the norm. The Japanese American of three generations may be still asked if he is an American. An English American of one year migration will be accepted as American because he is white, Christian and English speaking. As a Manipuri student expressed it on TV that while in Manipur nobody asked him whether he was or not an Indian, in Delhi people did.

Box   4.02

Studies on ethnic groups whether in a developed society like the United States of America or whether in India raise issues linked to the basic question of relations with the majority culture, of assimilation versus accomodation, and of poverty, inequality, isolation and discrimination. The relevance of the discussions on these issues need not be overemphasised for the contemporary Indian society where the cliched phrase, most often used for a recalcitrant ethnic group, like 'drawing them into the mainstream', has been increasingly questioned. The American experience does not seem to have been too different for there is a prevailing American ethos that members of ethnic groups should assimilate into the mainstream culture. Members of diverse ethnic groups who operate in the mainstream are expected to become bicultural, while few whites feel that need.

4.3.3   Ethnicity and Family

Ethnicity cannot be separated from our families for the diverse process of socializing children in ethnically diverse families has far reaching consequence. This in part explains the the concept "ethclass" which explains the role that social class membership plays in defining the basic condition of life influenced by ethnicity at the same time that it accounts for differences between groups at the same social class level.

Studies of Stratification-Unequal access to resources which are both material and non-

material have to therefore take account of ethnicity. As Sharma says "an ethnic groups may be considered as a stratum in a given system of social stratification. It is possible because ethnicity is accompanied with class and power".

4.4 GENDER AND STRATIFICATION

Studies of stratification were for many years 'gender blind'– they were written as though women did not exist, or as though for purposes of analysing divisions of power, wealth and prestige, women were unimportant and uniteresting. Yet gender itself is one of the most profound examples of stratification. There are no societies in the world in which men do not in some aspects of social life, have more wealth, status and influence than women.

There are many reasons for this matter of gender to be ignored. To return to our discussing the similarities in the gender and ethnicity issues, women for the very large part are considered to be naturally inferior. The phenomenon of women being marginal and the weaker sex was taken so literally that a womens' movement was needed to challenge the assumption. That is to question inequality of gender and ask why women are unequally placed. Studies on stratification have for the most part assumed that the position of women can be derived from the position of her husband, father, brother or whosoever happens to be the male head of the household. That the head of the household would be a male went unquestioned. Actually it is not such a taken for granted matter. Recent studies have found many women headed household. Credit organisations have found it more productive to lend out money to women rather than to men. Success stories of women-not just big entrepreneurs but poor village women (fisherwoman, agriculturalist, weaver) have increasingly come to be known. The mistaken assumptions of the inequalities being naturally derived from biological facts and of men being natural and universal head of households have led studies of stratification to ignore gender as a principle of stratification.

As this lesson shows, academics now realise that gender has to be taken serious note of as a principle of stratification. Sharma has introduced the new issue of gender and ethnicity in his recent work on stratification. Debates have sought to sort out whether inequalities in modern times revolve around class. Or does gender play a critical role.

4.4.1 Inequalities of Gender

Inequalities of gender are more deep-rooted historically than class systems; men have superior standing to women even in hunting and gathering societies, where there are no classes. In modern societies however so fundamental are class divisions, they tend to overlap substantially with gender differences. The material position of women tends to reflect that of their fathers or husbands. Hence some scholars argue that gender equalities can be explained mainly in class terms. Frank Parkin has expressed this aspect very well.

Female status certainly carries with it many disadvantages compared with that of males in various areas of social life including employment opportunities, property ownership, income and so on. However, these inequalities associated with sex differences are not usefully thought of as components of stratification. This is because for the great majority of women the allocation of social and economic rewards is determined primarily by the position of their families and, in particular, that of the male head. Although women today share certain status attributes in common, simply by virtue of their sex, their claims over resources are not primarily determined by their occupation but, more commonly, by that of their father or husbands. And if the wives and daughters of wealthy landowners, there can be no doubt that the differences in their overall situation are far more striking and significant. Only if the disabilities attaching to female status were felt to be so great as to override differences of a class kind would it be realistic to regard sex as an important dimension of stratification.

Activity 2

Why are there gender inequalities? Talk to various people including students in the study centre regarding this topic. Note down your findings in your notebook.

At face value there seems no error in the above formulation. Indeed most women know that their everday lives are defined in terms of fathers and husbands. A senior government officer's wife who may be employed will tend to be known by her husbands position, rather than her own public position. The status of the family would be derived from that of the male head. The matter does not rest here however if we pursue the point more closely.

4.4.2 Patriarchy and Gender

i)   The ideas which we have about families are drawn mostly from our immediate experience. And if we happen to belong to the middle class or the lower and upper midder class urban dweller the male headed nucleur family is a normative fact. By normative I mean that not only will this pattern be empirically true for many, but that the other kind of families will be seen as an anomaly. A woman headed household would be seen as an aberration.

ii)   Following from this normative aspect, the state will have various laws derived from a model of male headed nucleur family as the norm. Many women who are heads of households, thereby had to face a situation where they were not entitled to be a beneficiary under an anti-poverty scheme on the grounds that since she was a woman she could not be the head of household. Here is an instance where the normative reality edges out the empirical reality.

iii) The formulation that since the earnings of the male head is the most significant factor, the status of the women, even if she is earning, would not alter the situation can be criticised in several ways.

iv)   In a substantial proportion of the households the income of the women is essential to maintaining the family's economic position and mode of life. In these circumstance women's paid employment in some parts determine the class position of the households.

v)   A wife's employment may affect the status of the husband, not simply the other way around. Although women rarely earn more than their husbands, the working situation of a wife might still be the 'lead' factor in influencing the class of her husband. This could be the case, for instance if the husband was a semi skilled blue-collar worker and the wife employed in a garment factory. The wife's occupation may set the standard of the position of the family a whole.

vi)   Many 'cross-class' households exist, in which the work of the husband is in a higher class category than that of the wife or (less commonly) the other way around. Since few studies have been carried out looking at the consequences of this, we cannot know if it is always appropriate to take the occupation of the male as the determining influence.

vii) The proportion of families in which women are the sole breadwinners is increasing.

It is worthwhile to explore the implications for this emerging trend. There are many dimensions to this phenomenon. Often it is stated that in the west because of the changing sexual norms and women's independence there are more single parent, women headed households. Indeed this is true. But not fully. Even in earlier decades both our and their society had plenty of cases of deserted women, abducted and then stranded. 'Fallen women' very often were heads of households too. Stratification theories were not equipped to analyse this occurrence because they did not use gender as an analytical category to understand how patriarchy was reproduced through both class and family and ethnicity.

The male headed normative family could retain its purity and authenticity by affording a space for the men to have liasons outside both class. Women from the middle class, uppercaste on the other hand would fall outside the class and family if she had liasons outside marriage. The caste system in India with its rule of hypergamy meant that a woman could only marry within the caste or a caste above. The reverse could not take place take place. Gender as a principle of stratification therefore has to take into account not only if women members in a family have a status derived from the male head but also

how patriarchy operated differentially to men and women. Issues of control of sexuality, norms of chastity, social sanction against women seen as violators of family, class, ethnic norms, double standards to male and female sexual practices should all be taken account of when discussing stratification and gender.

4.4.3 Ethnicity and Cultural Deprivation

When discussing ethnicity and stratification we found that ethnicity was important in determining material and cultural deprivation just as much as class or caste was. This is true even in the case of gender. In India womens' movements have taken up the issue of access to and control of land. While women worked on the fields and in extended agricultural work in rural areas, law and custom denied them right to land. In the early years of communist China land rights to women were a major issue. With land reforms and the resultant issue of land deeds, policy makers realised that though the unit for the land deed was the family, it had to be explicitly taken into account that both men and women have equal rights to land.

This brings us to the important question about the family and gender related to basic issues of stratification like unequal access to resources — cultural and material. Many landed families in our country would educate their sons but not their daughter. Many landless family may take their sick son to the doctor, not their sick daughter. Many middle class families may educate their daughter enough to teach her children if required but not to earn a living. In other words even though men and women belong to the same family of the class, they are differently located in their access to material and non-material resources.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Discuss nationalism and ethnicity. Use about five lines for your answer.

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2) Write a note on patriarchy and gender. Use about five lines for your answer.

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4.5   LET US SUM UP

Living in India , it is not easy to be unaware of differences in wealth and power, statuses and privileges. Distinctions are all around us. It is not therefore surprising that sociology of India has concerned itself so much with issues of stratification. India has long been reckoned as the most stratified of all known societies. Sociologists have observed that the

caste system with its many forms of superordination and subordination is perhaps most responsible for this. Anthropologists and sociologists have provided detailed studies of different castes and tribes. Policy makers and sociologists have engaged with questions of cultural diversity and economic inequality— central issues of social stratification. As Dipankar Gupta observes:

This is reflected in our Constitution which makes any discrimination based on caste, language, religion or creed illegal. Clearly the founders of independent India had pondered deeply over the cardinal features of social stratification in our society. (Gupta 1991: 1-2)

The Constitution has also clearly mentioned that discrimination based on sex is illegal. However unlike other principles of stratification, gender was given a short shrift. In a sense it retreated from the public discourse. As for studies on stratification, gender did not seriously feature as a principle at all. The last twenty years have seriously altered this. Feminists have interrogated the concepts of class and caste, household and family to explore how they operated on a gender blind principle. The Constitution has also decried discrimination based on caste and creed. The last twenty years have also seen an assertion of ethnic groups to make good the promise of the Constitution. Sociologists have recognised that assertions of ethnic identities are closely linked with unequal access to material and non-material resources. It is therefore the stuff of inequality and stratification.

4.6   KEY WORDS

Ethnicity : This refers to cultural practices and outlooks that distinguishes a given community of people.

Gender : This refers to the Cultural and Social ideas that 90 with the upbringing which themselves create the notions of male/female; man/woman.

Hierarchy : This is a ladder of command which indicates in itself the status of a group. The highest status group is often at the top of the hierarchy.

Patriarchy : A social group like the family with authority rested in a male head.

4.7   FURTHER READINGS

Giddens, Anthony 1989 *Sociology* (Polity Press: Cambridge)

Gupta Dipankar ed. 1991 *Social Stratification* (Oxford University Press: New Delhi)

4.8   SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1)   Ethnic minorities are minority groups which has several features which are:

   1) Its members are disadvantaged as a result of dicrimination against them. ii) members of the minority have a sense of groups solidarity, iii) they are isolated socially from the majority community.

   2) Both women and ethnic groups have a high visibility. They look different and behave in a different way. Thus what happens is that natural and social differences get less distinct. Further natural differences seem to viewed as ingrained. However it must be made clear that gender is not a natural condition (biological) but a cultural one.

Check Your Progress 2

1) We must point out that nationalism is itself a form of ethnicity. It is made so by institutionalization of one ethnic identity with the state. However the difference is which ethnic groups may not act together, unless required the state is expected to be one. On the other hand ethnic groups have often had movements for statehood.

2) Patriarchy always favours men and had men as authority figures. It follows the state ends up favouring males. Usually men earn move than women and this reinforces their authority. However in cases where the woman is earning substantially this reinforces the man's position and it is usually not the other way around finally in the case where the woman is the only learning member the whole structure of patriarchy is threatened.

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