

Social Stratification

Heena

Abstract

No society is classes or without strata. Social stratification is part and parcel of social life. Every society defines a means of categorizing each person into a particular social group. The placement of each individual in turn determines his value, as defined by the larger society: hence, the greater role of society in defining every person's value. Differences in values and statuses of individual engender stratification in the society. If social stratification affected only such matters as who gets elected as president or who becomes the chief executive officer, separate chapter might not be dedicated to its discussion. But social stratification does much more: it results in some members of society benefiting greatly and others suffering. We shall discuss the characteristics of social stratification, forms of social stratification, and social stratification in India.

Keywords: Caste, Social Class, Social Stratification, Strata, Ethnicity

Introduction

Social stratification refers to a society's categorization of its people into groups based on socioeconomic factors like wealth, income, social education, ethnicity, gender, occupation, social status or delivered power. Social stratification is the relative social position of persons within a social group, category, geographic region or social unit. The term 'stratification system' refers to the complex of social institutions that generate observed inequalities of this sort. The components of such systems are (a) the institutional processes that define certain types of goods s valuable and desirable; (b) the rules of allocation that distribute these goods across various positions in the division of labor (e.g., doctor, farmer, housewife) and (c) the mobility mechanisms that link individuals to positions thereby generate unequal control over valued resources. Social stratification is the process in which the society has been divided into many layers. It can be compared to a another of layers beneath the ground. The top most layers are rigid and as we more down the layers become more softer. Today in India social stratification is not only because of castes but also class. Another type of stratification which is found in the cities is that of classes. we find lower class-which falls below the poverty line. Then there is the middle class which comprises of the significant part of the society and is a major pillar of society. The middle class is made up of three parts-the lower middle class, the middle class and the upper middle class.

Characteristics of Social Stratification

1. It is Social

Stratification is social in the sense it does not represent biologically caused inequalities. It is true that such factors as strength, intelligence, age and sex can often serve as the basis of strata are distinguished. But such differences by themselves are not sufficient to explain why some statuses receive more power, poverty and prestige than others. Biological traits do not determine social superiority and inferiority until they are socially organized and give importance.

2. It is Ancient

The stratification system is quite old. According to historical and archaeological records, stratification was present even in the small wandering bands. Age and sex were the main criteria of stratification then, women and children last was probably the dominant rule of order. Differences between the rich and poor, powerful and humble, freemen and slaves was there in almost all the ancient civilizations. Ever since the time of Plato and Kautilya, social philosophers have been deeply concerned with economic, social and political inequalities.

3. It is Universal

The stratification system is a world wide phenomena. Difference between the rich and the poor or the haves and the have nots is evident everywhere. Even in the non literate societies stratification is very much present.

4. It is Diverse Forms

The stratification system has never been uniform in all the societies. The ancient roman society was stratified into two strata the patricians. The ancient Aryan society into four Varnas, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Sudras, the Ancient Greek society into freemen and slaves, the ancient Chinese society into the mandarins, merchants, farmers and the soldiers and so on.

5. It is Consequential

The stratification system has its own consequences. The most important, most desired, and often the scarcest things in human life are distributed unequally because of stratification.

Forms of Social Stratification

There are four basic forms of social stratification:

(1) Slavery

Slavery is an extreme form of inequality in which some individuals are literally owned by others as their property. The legal conditions of slave ownership have varied considerably in different societies. There are different variants old slavery. Bonded Labour is one such form of slavery in India. In all parts of world slavery, as a form of stratification has become extinct.

(2) Caste

Caste system is extremely elaborate and varies in its structure from area to area-so much so the it does not really constitute one system at all, but a loosely connected diversity of varying beliefs and cultural practices, though certain principles are shared by all the castes.

(3) Estate

Estate are the feudal clusters with varying obligations and rights towards each other. Estates have developed in Europe, the United States of America and Asia. In our country, jagirdars and zamindars were the traditional estate holders. With the abolition of Zamindari and jagirdari systems these groups of people do not legally exist.

(4) Class

Classes are not established by legal or religious provisions. Nor memberships to class is based on inherited position as specified either legally or by custom. Class systems are typically more fluid than the other types of stratification and the boundaries between classes are never clear cut. There are no formal restrictions on inter-marriage between people from different classes. Thus, class is a large scale grouping of people who share common economic resources which strongly influence the types of lifestyle they are able to lead. Ownership of wealth, together with occupation, the chief basis of class differences. The major classes that exist in India are (1) upper class, (2) middle class, (3) working class.

Social Stratification in India

Every complex society faces the difficult task of placing its members into roles that are necessary for the society to survive. These roles must be filled with as little conflict and confusion as possible. There must be people willing to perform jobs (roles) with little status and those that carry a great deal of prestige. In your community there are people who are doctors, lawyers and teachers. Others collect trash, direct traffic, and put out fires. Although these roles do not all carry the same prestige there is very little conflict involved in determining who will perform which one. In India, caste is one set of role and perhaps the most important one. One's caste is ascribed; that is children inherit the status and functions of their parents. At birth Indians are dealt their caste card. This is alien to what many people in the United States of America believe about the "good society". Our parents, relatives, teachers and friends tell us in a thousand ways that what we make of our lives depends on our efforts, and many of us think all societies should play by the same rules, or at least strive to do so. But it is important to remember that there is no society where individual effort is the sole criteria for status. There is also the possibility of achieving political power in India quite apart from class or caste status. A poor person might be very good at winning elections and becomes a member of central government. Preparing and sharing of food reveals how castes are ranked. Food cooked in oil and prepared by a Brahmin can be accepted and eaten by any caste below it. Food cooked in water can generally be accepted by one's own caste members of inferior castes. Leftover, uneaten food almost always is taken only by the very low castes. Food that can be eaten raw is the most freely distributed and can be accepted by any caste from any caste. In addition, Prasad blessed food that is often offered from religious offering is given to anyone regardless of castes.

Advantages of Social Stratification

- Social stratification provides motivation for different positions, particularly those which carry higher statuses and rewards. By distributing resources unequally, society motivates people to work harder and better in order to achieve a higher status.
- Social stratification can include efficiency and certainly, since people know their role within society.
- Provided that there is flexibility to move between strata on the basis of competence social stratification is also an incentive to work hard and improve society.

Disadvantages of Social Stratification

- It affects life chances, lifestyles and prestige; it creates emotional stress and depression for the people belonging to lower social stratum as they have unequal access to wealth power and prestige.

Conclusion

Each complicated society faces the hard mission of setting its contributors into roles which are important for the society to live on. these roles ought to be full of as little war and confusion as feasible. There ought to be human beings inclined to carry out jobs with little reputation and those that carry a superb deal of status. On your community there are folks that are medical doctors, legal professionals and teachers. Others collect trash, direct visitors, and positioned out fires. Social stratification lies at the core of society and of the discipline of sociology. Social inequality is a fundamental aspect of virtually all social processes, and a persons position in the stratification system is the most consistent predictor of his her behavior, attitudes and chances. Social stratification links almost all aspects of society together, and therefor understanding what is happening to social stratification helps us to understand a wide range of other changes in society.

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