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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Introduction:

As has already been stated the present study focusses on the plausible influence of social stratification on Social Behaviour Disposition and Learning Style. This necessitates an appreciation of social stratification as a sociological phenomenon. This chapter attempts to analyse social stratification as a sociological fact.

Stratification:

Structural Analysis in Sociology focusses on the network of social relationships, which though culturally distinct share common and comparable attitudes at a higher level of abstraction called social structure (Jayaram, 1981).

Etymologically the term stratification has been derived from the word 'Stratum' which refers to a layer of rock or earth lying between similar layers of different texture. Thus social stratification refers to the differentiation of a given population into hierarchically superposed classes manifested in the existence of upper and lower layers. The basis and essence of social
stratification are construed by an unequal distribution of rights and privileges, duties and responsibilities, social values and privation, social power and influences among the members of society (Sorokin, 1959).

The caste, kinship, class, occupational groups, factory and administrative structures that constitute distinctive fields of social interaction constitute structural realities. They originate for the needs and existential condition of human being and could be compared both intra culturally and cross culturally. Innumerable particularities of values, customs and cultures are underlying the structural realities and form their basis (Singh, 1973). Structural analysis presupposes formulation of abstract concepts over the ethnographic details through which the facts of social life are not only described but also explained (Homans, 1964).

In large societies stratification is universal phenomenon. Essentially stratification and education are connected. This is because stratification is the social ordering of inequalities of power and advantage while education has been looked upon as the major instrument of distributing individuals into places in the system of stratification (Halsey, 1985).
Stratification includes macro as well as micro social structures. Changes in micro structures can be analysed as a result of spread effect of transformations in macro structure of society such as industrialisation, politicisation, bureaucratization and urbanisation. The micro structures include caste, family and village community (Singh, 1973). Abstraction of relationship with reference to the mode of production has given rise to the concept of social class (Marx) Sorokin (1959) recommends that though a real picture of social stratification in any society is very complex only the most fundamental traits must be taken to facilitate analysis. It would be fairly said that caste, class and rural/urban distinctions provide a fair analysis of social stratification of present day Indian society. (Singh, 1973; Jayaram, 1981).

Caste:

Even to an young boy or girl atleast in rural India caste is a matter of fact in social interaction. Etymologically the term caste (Jati) is derived from the Spanish term 'Casta' which means breed, race, strain or a complex of hereditary qualities. Hutton (1951) was able to list atleast 5000 published works on caste.
It is easy to distinguish one caste from another even though it is impossible to define an individual caste and the validity of application of the term in description of any society other than Indian is debatable. Sociologically caste may be regarded as an extreme form of social stratification characterised by fixed birth status, social discrimination, and a complete absence of vertical mobility for individuals, notions of ritual purity and religious sanctions are seen not as fundamental but rather as rationalization by the dominant castes to justify and maintain their superiority. Here caste may be viewed as the extreme case of absolutely rigid social class.

Ghurye (1969) identifies the outstanding features of caste system with segmental division, hierarchy, restriction on feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities and privileges attached with different sections, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation and restriction on marriage.

Casta should be distinguished from Varna. Varna represents a theoretical ordering of Hindu society into four orders called Brahman or priests, Kshatriya or warriors, Vaisya, farmers and traders and Sudras, the servile classes. Synoptive descriptions of the caste
system since Vedic period till modern period are available in literature (Ghurye, 1967; Mundoch 1977; Punit, 1978; Singh, 1973). Srinivas, et al (1959) have presented a trend report on caste covering the period up to 1959. Subsequent review of researches on caste during the period up to 1970 with accent on studies done during the period of 1950-70 has been done by Sinha (1974).

Yogendra Singh (1973) has described the structural changes in caste in Indian society. Due to modernisation process in India a few changes have occurred in the structural features of caste in recent time. Firstly changes have occurred in the institutionalised circumscription of the spheres of social interaction and secondly changes have also occurred in the unequal distribution of power among the castes. Indeed the factors that reinforce endogamy and interdining and other forms of social relationships are to be identified with factors associated with inequality of access to power.

To-day, as the formal closure of the systems of rural and urban communities is being rendered open through demonstration and politicization of the social structure at large and through land reforms and development measures in villages and industrialisation in
cities, the former configuration of power of caste is also changing. This constitute a potential area of structural changes in caste system in India.

It is also reported that caste associations have come into existence and play a vital role in politics (Rudolph, 1954). Srinivas also suggests that in Gujarat Orissa, Andhra, Madras, Mysore, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh caste consciousness has increased rather than decreasing. Yogendra Singh has shown that castes on communal groups structurally persist while changes do take place at other levels of their functional differentiation, such as their articulation as interest-groups, as political micro-structures and as communication networks for modernization. These functions caste largely performs either owing to the structural constraints or because caste alone in India provides an immediate and pre-existing structural frame work for diffusion and mobilization of new role structures. He also asserts that for a long time to come caste will continue to provide an institutional foundation for the operation of modernizing social structures in the realms of politics.

The official classification of caste adopted by the Government of India as well as State Governments provide an useful frame of reference in discussing caste
as a structural variable. Presently the official classification of caste recognizes a three tier classification that includes the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the Backward castes and Castes that are not included among the two categories just mentioned.

The term 'Scheduled Castes' is the expression standardised in the Constitution of the Republic of India. Art 341 of the Constitution empowers the President, after consulting the Head of a particular State, to notify by an order "the castes, races or tribes or parts or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be declared to the Scheduled Castes in relation to that State". The Art 341 clause ii empowers Parliament to pass a law to include or exclude from the list so notified by the President "any caste, race or tribe or part of or group with in any caste, race or tribes". Ghurye (1969) defines the Scheduled Castes as those groups which are named in the Scheduled Castes order in force for the time being. The expression 'Scheduled Caste' has been covered by the Simon Commission and embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935, Section 309. A few tribal communities have been also identified in line with the criteria adopted for notifying Scheduled Castes for the purpose of inclusion into the list of
Scheduled Tribes posted by the Government. The State Governments are empowered to notify certain communities/castes as belonging to Backward Caste in view of the need to extend special privileges and assistance for developing such communities/class in terms of economic, educational and social progress.

It is evident that the Castes that are not included in the list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and backward castes are regarded by Government as constituting communities and castes that are already enjoying adequate social, educational and economic progress.

The problem of extending special assistance or reservation in educational and occupational strata purely in terms of birth in certain communities presently followed in India by the Central and State Governments have stirred agitations in recent times. In 1985 several agitations were sponsored in Gujarat State by different sections of Community opposing Government's Policy of reservation on the basis of the Caste of the individual determine in terms of birth in the particular castes. The Government of Tamilnadu attempted in 1983 to replace the criteria
for special assistances given in terms of caste by an economic criteria. However, the efforts of the Government have been defeated by agitation by political parties. The case of Gujarat suggests the dominance of castes other than Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward castes while the case of Tamilnadu suggests a support of public for sustaining the classificatory system of caste for social development. In general caste continues to be significant principle of stratification in Indian society. However certain flexibility has come into stay in a structure as fostered by the Government in India.

**Class:**

Popularly, class is conceived in terms of differences in economic advantage or disadvantage enjoyed or suffered by a homogenous group of people. But, sociologically only such of those economic differences that are socially significant are counted to construe class. It is to be borne in mind that not all economic differences are significant for a society and that not all societies value the same economic differences as socially relevant and significant.
Karl Marx (Runciman, 1969) defines class in terms of property. This holds good in societies based on free enterprise capitalism. In such societies fundamental distinction exists between the propertied and propertiless. In this context individuals who share the same economic situation constitute an objective class; no class consciousness is involved in the class thus conceived. Every society has to organise itself to supply basic goods and services to its members and this is done by the societies through the system of production. It is the system of production that is seminal for creation of class in societies. The forces of production, such as technology and science, and the relations of production constitute the system of production in a capitalistic society. The basic relations to production are construed in owning and controlling of production, and acting as the labour. These two types of relations to production lead to the emergence of the two classes in most of the societies. Thus, historically we have inherited such distinctions as the master and the slave, the feudal lord and the serf, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The economic system and the class relations that springs from it lay the foundation for social structure according to Marx.
Max Weber (Runciman, 1969) agree that class refers to a group of persons who share a common situation in regard to their chances in the market place. But, he disagrees with Marx to restrict the economic chances only in terms of ownership and control of the means of production and property. Weber holds that the chances also include the services one could offer. Scare skills, Weber contends, also could be counted in the market place. Administrative or technical capacities could indeed gain high returns in the market place.

The case of the social structure of Kibutz (Israeli collectives) elucidates the value of rare skills in a class society (Rosenfeld, 1951). However differential social status exists in the Kibutz society. All property and the means of production belong to the commune and members who leave have no claim on any part of it. Managerial positions are attached with high prestige in Kibutz society. Members whom the group deem most capable and trustworthy are entrusted with managerial positions. Associating high status ranks with managerial positions has undergone a complex history. Historically managerial positions gained high prestige of the persons who became elected to fill them.

Weber proposes that class is only one dimension of a complex stratification structure and argues that status and political order, along with class, need to be
given full consideration. He stresses the distinctions between the three dimensions viz., economic situation (class), social honour accorded by the community (status) and power exercised in the political or legal realm though often closely interrelated and not always remain necessarily so. The three dimensions of stratification remain distinct. But the differences in ranking of these dimensions are observed in the real world and different patterns of influence are possible in each. Instead of attempting to reduce the complexities of stratification by tracing them to a simple economic cause one could adopt an useful framework for analysing them (Weber, 1958).

Status is regarded as honour accorded by a community to individuals on innumerable basis; Royal or aristocratic family background, ethnicity, occupation property, education and so on. A status group represents a community of persons granted a certain level of prestige on the basis of the criteria operating in the larger community, for example, property, race or religion. Members of a status group consider each other social equals and interact socially in a somewhat exclusive manner; they also pursue similar life styles that set them apart from others in one sense, class is determined by relation to the production of goods, while status is a matter of their consumption.
Status groups are to be distinguished from one another primarily by their styles of life. The style of life is expressed through one's activities and consumption of goods and services. Class and status are vitally linked. Class positions, or one's market situations is a prime determinant of what one is able to consume. In the long run, class position and status position tend to become comparable. Proper manipulation of status symbols and opportunities for interaction in status communities can be extremely useful in maintaining and improving one's situation with respect to the market.

Inspite of being closely associated class and status are two different realities. Possession of wealth does not automatically insure acceptance into a status community; loss of wealth does not inevitably lead to rejection and loss of status, at least not in the short run. Especially in areas of the community where families of old wealth reside, families with the same standing may not share the same social status. It is to be noted that not only are there structural inequalities in the stratification variables of economic standing and status but there are inequalities in the capacity to impose direction and control over events and people, viz: power,
**Class and Caste:**

One of the most striking features of the stratification system in India to be found is the close correspondence between caste and class (Bhatt, 1975). The approach in the study of caste has traditionally been definitional. The earlier ethnographers were interested in the question whether one can call caste also as class and whether they are interchangeable. A few sociologists hold that caste and class are two distinct entities; that caste system is unique to India and it would be misleading to apply it to other societies. A British civil servant in India during 1900s observed that in India the division into castes has no direct relation with the division into classes and the castes came into existence independently without regard to classes (The Census of India, 1911). It is argued that class as an entity composed of several endogamous groups, while caste is socially bonded on all sides (Cox, 1948).

The principles of caste rank rest essentially on conceptions of social honour or esteem which in turn is attached to particular styles of life, and groups are ranked as high or low according to how or whether they pursue much styles. The things highly esteemed varies from one society to another and the things that are
valued in a society ultimately depend on the value-system of society. Ritual elements have historically occupied an important place in styles of life which have enjoyed high social esteem, in India (Beteille, 1971). It is to be argued that status honour in a caste hierarchy is based partly upon wealth but not entirely. It is based upon wealth to the extent that the possession of a certain minimum of wealth is a necessary condition to the pursuit of a certain style of life and beyond this minimum possession of more wealth do not lead to position of superior social rank.

Status honour has in every society a strong traditional bias. Adopting a particular style of life do not help achieving higher social rank. To achieve high status a caste has to establish its association with the style over a number of generations. It is true that people do not rank different castes in terms of a rational application of particular standard. Further the standards themselves are ambiguous, variable, and subject to change over time. There are conflicting claims among castes to superior rank, and often it is impossible to speak of a consensus.

The caste system is also the basis of an elaborate division of the labour. Every caste or jati
however broadly or narrowly defined evinces two characteristics viz., autonomy in certain spheres such as marriage and kinship; and dependence upon other castes in other spheres, such as economic and ritual services (Betelile, 1971).

In making a qualitative distinction between caste and class it is assumed that caste hierarchy is qualitatively different from the class hierarchy. The former is attributed to variables, such as status honour, purity and impurity, and intrinsic worth of groups and the latter is derived from the variables of economic and political power. Both caste hierarchy and class hierarchy are basically determined by the same variables as occupational prestiges. The modes of expression of status differences among castes in their interaction could be identified with the essential features of caste system. These features depend upon the particular cultural milieu and hence vary from culture to culture. Hence, it is argued by a few that there is no difference between caste and class (Desouza, 1981).

Rural - Urban settings:

Rural and Urban settings suggest different patterning of life styles characterised by varying
degrees of relationships to production and status.
Sorokin and Zimmerman (1959) have identified the distinguishing dimensions of rural and urban with such characteristics as occupation, environment, size of community, density of population, heterogeneity and homogeneity of the population, social differentiation and stratification, mobility and system of interaction. Growth of cities or urbanisation is regarded as one of the sources of structural differentiation in a society.

Weber (1958) identifies the only common element among the many definitions of the city with that the city consists simply of a collection of one or more separate dwelling but it is a relatively close settlement. City often represents the locality and dense, settlement of dwellings forming a colony so extensive that personal reciprocal acquaintance of the inhabitants is lacking. The inhabitants of city line primarily of trade and commerce rather than agriculture and are often versatile. Local inhabitants of a city satisfy an economically substantial part of their daily want in the local market by products which the local population and that of the immediate hinterland produced for sale in the market or acquired in other ways; the city is essentially a market settlement. According to Weber the economic
The concept of city should be distinguished from the political administrative in the political, administrative sense that a special area belong to the city.

In India, growth of cities with industrial character or modern demographic features began to take place only after its contact with the West. Modern facilities of health and sanitation, a rational structure of public utility services, stabler, security and modern firms and industries that are the products of Industrial Revolution have provided incentives for the growth of cities. Still, the rate of urbanization from 1881-1941 in India has been very slow; the decade 1941-51 saw a marked increase in urbanization and urbanward migration (Singh, 1973). The slow rate of urbanization in India was not due to the cultural inhabitation of people with regard to physical mobility as in the stereotyped view. Rather access to the city was considered a mark of social prestige and upward social mobility.

Cultural modernization and urbanization and industrialization are assumed to be related to one another due to logical necessity. Urbanization and industrialization necessarily modernise the social life and economic life although variations could be found in its extent.
and pattern among different centres. Urban culture has existed through centuries. Guidelines for planning and construction of various types of cities are found in Hindu tradition. The principle of caste and rank hierarchy followed in traditional form of urbanisation established cultural pattern and cities in India continued to be dominated by cultural and structural attributes which are far different from those considered typical for a city. Formalisation, atomisation, lack of familism and kinbound groupings and predominance of secular ideologies, etc. continue to exist in urban centres in India. For this reason it is argued that in Indian context a rural-urban dichotomy is untidy if not irrelevant; (Lambert, 1962). Comparatively larger number of persons are found engaged in primary industries even in Indian metropolitan cities, not to say of others.

Even some of the largest Indian cities show sizeable quarters which have preserved their rural character and in which life is carried on under general conditions only little different from those of the villages. Urbanization in India is commented to be a process of urbanization without breakdown in the traditional patterns (Lewis, 1952).
Persistence of the traditional cultural patterns in the cities or often an invigoration of the traditional ways have been reported in many urban studies (Gadgil, 1909; Singh, 1973).

Studies on Indian urbanization suggest that urbanization does not necessarily change traditional structural forms. Yet it does serve the goals of modernization through new structural innovations in the spheres of industry, transport and communication, leisure and recreation and the mode of pattern of social interaction. Modern means of communication and modern media are increasingly employed in cities for the perpetuations of traditional institution. At the same time urbanization also introduces breakdown in the functioning of traditional institutional pattern. The forms often continue to persist, but the function undergo major re-adaptations; many new roles, often rational and modern in orientation, are added to the traditional institutional forms. This applies to institutions including caste.

Sex:

Sex may be regarded as a biogenetic phenomenon with implication for social cultural implications. Inspite of consistent efforts by UNO and other organisations to fight our discrimination based on sex,
sex based distinction continued to persist in all the cultures of the world. Findings of researches show that sex as a sociological factor contribute to differential role expectations among people in general in Indian society (Ramanamma, 1968; Chauhan, 1968). In India typical role expectations exist with regard to boys and girls. Boys are expected to get educated and develop a career while girls are expected to mainly turn out to be housewives. Even in cases of girls being sent to educational institution the parents do not expect the girls to go for permanent employment. Even when girls go for vocation their career is more often terminated after marriage. However a small number of girls continue in their employment if the career is not interfering with their family life. This has obvious implication for education (Sunandini, 1985).

Summary:

Structural analysis focusses on the network of social relationships conceived in the obstruction called social structure. Caste, class, rural and urban settings and sex are regarded to provide valid dimension to understand and analyse social stratification. In Indian setting significant interaction is found between caste and class. The analysis also suggests that it is possible that the different social stratification factors interact among themselves in complex manners.