1. Details of Module and its structure

Module Detail	
Subject Name	Sociology
Course Name	Sociology 01 (Class XI, Semester - 1)
Module Name/Title	Social Stratification- Caste, origin and changes – Part 2
Module Id	kesy_10202
Pre-requisites	Definition and Scope of Sociology
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: • Social stratification • Caste • Features of caste and varna system • Changes in caste sytem
Keywords	Social stratification, Caste, Origin of caste, Varna system, Sanskritization, Class, Hierarchy

2. Development Team

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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification refers to a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy. Individual, people or groups are placed in a hierarchy or ranked on the basis of greater status, power, and wealth than other groups.

Social stratification refers to the existence of structured inequalities between groups in society, in terms of their access to material or symbolic rewards. Thus stratification can most simply be defined as structural inequalities between different groupings of people. Often social stratification is compared to the geological layering of rock in the earth's surface. Society can be seen as consisting of 'strata' in a hierarchy, with the more favoured at the top and the less privileged near the bottom.

Social stratification on the basis of one or the other criteria has been existing since human society has come into existence. even primitive societies had some form of stratification. Stratification is differentiation of population, groups or individuals into categorised placed one above the other. Startification is asymmetry among the units. The rank in the hierarchy determines rights, privileges, social power and degree of influence of people in any given society. Stratification is manifest or visible interns of unequal access to resources, st of opportunities, duties, responsibilities, adherence, obedience and other social values.

According to Anthony Giddens, social stratification is defined as, 'The existence of structured inequalities between groups in society, in terms of their access to material or symbolic rewards. While all societies involve some forms of stratification, the most distinctive form of stratification in modern societies involves class divisions'.

All societies are stratified. Inequality of power and advantage is central for sociology, because of the crucial place of stratification in the organisation of society. Every aspect of the life of every individual and household is affected by social stratification. Opportunities for health, longevity, security, educational success, fulfillment in work and political influence are all unequally distributed in systematic ways.

Historically four basic systems of stratification have existed in human societies: slavery, caste, estate and class. Slavery is an extreme form of inequality in which some individuals are literally owned by others. It has existed sporadically at many times and places, but there are two major examples of a system of slavery; ancient Greece and Rome and the Southern States of the USA in the 18th and 19th centuries. As a formal institution, slavery has gradually been eradicated. But we do continue to have bonded labour, often even of children. Estates characterised feudal Europe. We do not enter into details about estates here but very briefly touch upon caste and class as systems of social stratification. We shall be dealing in greater detail with class, caste, gender as bases of social stratification in the later stages while studying this course.

Let us understand caste as a form of stratification, which is one of the fundamental characterisitcs of indian society.

Caste
As per definition in dictionary, A **caste** is a social category to which a person belongs involuntarily (one's social status is ascribed); a **caste** contrasts with a social class. A **caste** system, then, is a social structure in which people belong to such social categories; historically, an example is the **caste** system of India.

Anthony Giddens defines caste as, 'A form of stratification in which an individual's social position is fixed at birth and cannot be changed'. Caste system in India has been as old as Indian civilization itself. In caste system an individual's position totally depends on the status attributes ascribed by birth rather than on any which are achieved during the course of one's life. This is not to say that in a class society there is no systematic constraint on achievement imposed by status attributes such as race and gender. However, status attributes ascribed by birth in a caste society define an individual's position more completely than they do in class society.

In traditional India different castes formed a hierarchy of social precedence. Each position in the caste structure was defined in terms of its purity or pollution relative to others. The underlying belief was that those who are most pure, the Brahmin priestly castes, are superior to all others and the Panchamas, sometimes called the 'outcastes' are inferior to all other castes. The traditional system is generally conceptualised in terms of the four fold varna of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. In reality there are innumerable occupation-based caste groups, called jatis.

The origin of the caste system is not known with certainty. Hindus maintain that the proliferation of the castes (*jati*s, literally "births") was the result of intermarriage, which led to the subdivision of the four classes, or *varna*s.

Features of caste and varna system

The most significant defining features of caste are the following:

1. Ascribed: Caste is determined by birth – a child is "born into" the caste of its parents. Caste is never a matter of choice. One can never change one's caste, leave it,or choose not to join it, although there are instances where a person may be expelled from their caste.

2. Endogamy: Membership in a caste involves strict rules about marriage. Caste groups are "endogamous", i.e. marriage is restricted to members of the group.

3. Social interactions: Caste membership also involves rules about food and food-sharing. What kinds of food may or may not be eaten is prescribed and who one may share food with is also specified.

4. Hierarchy: Caste involves a system consisting of many castes arranged in a hierarchy of rank and status. In theory, every person has a caste, and every caste has a specified place in the hierarchy of all castes. While the hierarchical position of many castes, particularly in the middle ranks, may vary from region to region, there is always a hierarchy.

5. Castes also involve sub-divisions within themselves, i.e., castes almost always have sub-castes and sometimes sub-castes may also have sub- sub-castes. This is referred to as a segmental organisation.

6. Occupational division: Castes were traditionally linked to occupations. A person born into a caste could only practice the occupation associated with that caste, so that occupations were hereditary, i.e. passed on from generation to generation. On the other hand, a particular occupation could only be pursued by the caste associated with it – members of other castes could not enter the occupation.

Caste system originates from varna system.

Although caste system is endemic to India but it is found in other south asian countries as well. Caste forms the fundamental fabric of hindu society, but it is present in non-hinds communities as well such as among muslims, sikhs, and christians. The caste system is based on varna system, the four fold classification of society into four categories. Varna literary means the colour. The varna system classifies society into four exclusive categories. According to Rig Veda the creator of the 4 groups is Lord Brahma. Each Varna sprang from the different body parts of the Lord. Different castes have originated from different parts of god's body, Brahmas body to be precise, the creator of humanity. Brahmins have originated from mouth and they looked after the spiritual needs of the society. In the ancient times, The brahmins performed rituals and carry out teaching. They were learned men, which rich wisdom who could guide those who ruled the society. They were usually the advisors in the royal courts.

The sages in the ancient times in India are all Brahmins. Besides they were wise men who imparted knowledge and wisdom to the society. They were highly respected in the ancient Indian society.

Kshatriyas from the arms and they were the warrior class or the ruling class. They were the protectors of the society. The Kshatriyas are portrayed as brave, fearless and intelligent also. They were seen as the true patriots, who would lay down their lives

for motherland. Over the centuries with the evolution and changes in the caste system their position more or less remained the same in society.

Vaishyas from his thighs, this group comprised of the merchants, artisans and craftsmen. In general this was the merchant class engaged in various occupations offering services of various types. They formed the backbone of village economy, moneyed class and contributed a great deal in the economic growth of the nation. The caste system had little effect on them. Through trade and commerce the Vaishyas were instrumental or medium for introducing Indian culture to other parts of the world or the other nations. Vaishya community did charity and social service, they constructed temples and other buildings such as rest houses or dhramshala, water dispensers or pioao, community halls etc. for social cause.

And the last in the hierarchy are shudras who came from the feet. Shudras formed the lowest rung of caste hierarchy, base of the ancient Indian society. Carpanters, Peasants, cobblers, iron smith, servants and other service providers came from this section of the community. As lowest strata of hierarchy they did menial and unclean jobs. But these very jobs that were seen as menial or unclean, they are essential for healthy living of other members in society. Later this stratum got divided into another category called as untouchables. They were outcaste and exploited.
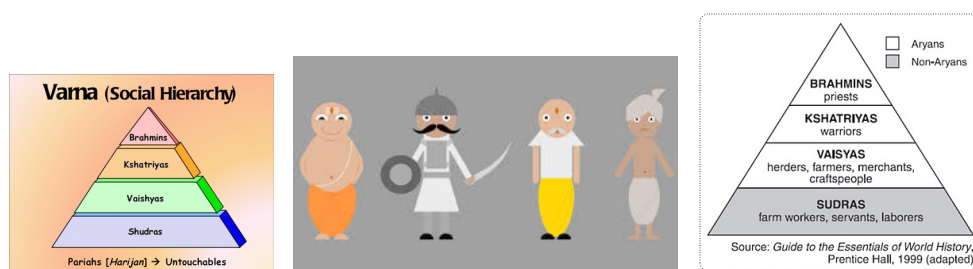
The four categories are called as varna, these are based on colour, class, and guna. The varna system accorded asymmetrical status to people and grops as per their location in the caste hierarchy. Each varna has number of jatis. Each of these social categories is engaged in specific occupation. These occupations or professions for each caste is more or less fixed.

Male members of the top three varnas are "twice-born" (dvija): after undergoing the ceremony of spiritual rebirth (upanayana), they are initiated into manhood and are free to study the Vedas, the ancient scriptures of Hinduism.

Changes in caste system

The caste system is considered to be a rigid form of stratification. It is seen as inflexible. An individual is born into a particular caste and he/she can not change his caste position or identity through out his life. Caste is ascribed status which means that we get this status or identity at birth. However, caste is not that rigid as it is assumed to be. Despite strict rules of social interaction between castes there have been enough examples and instance of intercaste marriages, social intermingling, and challenges to the rigidity of caste system. There are types and forms of marriage that describe the situation if an individual marries above or below his caste category.

An important concept that explains dynamism in caste system is given by MN Srinivas, it is concept of sanskritisation.

'Sanskritisation' refers to a process whereby members of a (usually middle or lower) caste attempt to raise their own social status by adopting the ritual, domestic and social practices of a caste (or castes) of higher status.

M.N. Srinivas characterized sanskritisation as a procedure by which "a low or center Hindu position, or tribal or other groups, changes its traditions, custom belief system, and lifestyle toward a high and regularly twice-born castes. By and large such changes are trailed by a case to a higher position in the standing progression than that generally yielded to the petitioner class by the nearby group ... ."

In modern times caste has undergone transformation. The seemingly fixed occupation of a particular caste is no longer practiced in urban, industrial cities and towns. Even in villages people are occupied in different professions and occupations which are not determined according to their caste status. In other domains also caste is not strictly adhered to. People are increasingly marrying outside their castes. There is social

interaction. The modern, secular, democractic societies, caste is no longer a constraint for individuals to achieve their true potential.

The caste system in India has undergone considerable changes over the years. Endogamy and ritual avoidance of contact with members of so-called lower castes were considered critical for maintaining purity by the so- called upper castes. Changes brought in by urbanisation inevitably challenged this. Read well known sociologist A.R. Desai's observations below.

Other social consequences of urbanisation in India are commented upon by sociologist A.R. Desai as:

Modern industries brought into being modern cities honey- combed with cosmopolitan hotels, restaurants, theatres, trams, buses, railways. The modest hotels and restaurants catered for the workers and middle classes became crowded in cities with persons belonging to all castes and even creeds... In trains and buses one occasionally rubbed shoulders with members of the depressed classes... should not, however be supposed that caste had vanished (Desai 1975:248).

While change did take place, discrimination was not so easy to do away with, as a first person narrative suggests.

In the mill there may be no open discrimination of the kind that exists in the villages, but experience of private interactions tells another story. Parmar observed...

They will not even drink water from our hands and they sometimes use abusive language when dealing with us. This is because they feel and believe they are superior. It has been like that for years. No matter how well we dress they are not prepared to accept certain things (Franco et. al. 2004:150).

Even today acute caste discrimination exists. At the same time the working of democracy has affected the caste system. Castes as interest groups have gained strength. We have also seen discriminated castes asserting their democratic rights in society.