

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- Class, Race and Ethnicity, Gender – Part 3
Module Id	kesy_10203
Pre-requisites	Social stratification and culture
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Social stratification2. Social class3. Caste4. Ethnicity and Race5. Gender
Keywords	Social stratification, Class, Hierarchy, Ethnicity, Gender, Social inequality

2. Development Team

Role	Name	Affiliation
National MOOC Coordinator (NMC)	Prof. Amarendra P. Behera	CIET, NCERT, New Delhi
Program Coordinator	Dr. Mohd. Mamur Ali	CIET, NCERT, New Delhi
Course Coordinator (CC) / PI	Dr. Sheetal Sharma	Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Subject Matter Expert (SME)	Dr. Sheetal Sharma	Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Review Team	Ms. Seema Banerjee	Laxman Public School, Sarav Priya Vihar, New Delhi

Social Stratification

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.

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 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 have already discussed caste system as a form of stratification. Caste is rigid form of stratification. The status in caste is ascribed by birth in specific caste community some of the central features of caste are hierarchy, principle of purity and pollution, endogamy, occupational division of labour, and asymmetrical set of power and privileges.

Let us look at other forms of stratification also. In this module we will discuss about class, race, ethnicity and gender.

Class

One of the most simple definition of class is that it is a broad group in society having common economic, cultural, or political status. **Social class** refers to a group of people with similar levels of wealth, influence, and status.

The term *class* first came to widely used in the early 19th century, replacing terms such as *rank* and *order* as descriptions of the major hierarchical groupings in European society.

With Industrial revolution and establishment of democracy the feudal distinctions in Europe were declining. As a consequence new groups or categories of people were developing. These people were the capitalists, the workers, the labour, those who were working in factories and industries in various capacities. In fact it was an urban working class, which was defining character of industrial societies. Although the term has been used to refer to social groups and categories in ancient city-states, empires and feudal society, but its used most appropriately to refer to social divisions in modern industrial societies.

Social Class is different from status groups. While income is an indicator of class, or class divisions are based on economic status, status is about group refers to the honour or prestige of an occupation, a cultural position, social background, family and descent. Some common concepts related to class are

- Working class
- Labour class
- Professional class
- Upper class
- Middle class
- Lower class
- The capitalist class

And many other variants of the concept of class.

There have been many attempts to explain class. We mention here, very briefly just the central ideas of Marx, Weber and that of, functionalism.

In the Marxist theory social classes are defined by what relation they have to the means of production. Questions could be asked as to whether groups are owners of means of production such as land or factories? Or whether they are owners of nothing but their own labour? Weber used the term life- chances, which refers to the rewards and advantages afforded by market capacity. Inequality, Weber argued might be based on economic relations. But it could also be based on prestige or on political power.

The functionalist theory of social stratification begins from the general presupposition or belief of function- alism that no society is “classless” or unstratified. The main functional

necessity explains the universal presence of social stratification in requirements faced by a society of placing and motivating individuals in the social structure. Social inequality or stratification is thus an unconsciously evolved device by which societies ensure that the most important positions are deliberately filled by the most qualified persons. Is this true?

In a traditional caste system social hierarchy is fixed, rigid and transmitted across generations. Modern class system in contrast is open and achievement-based. In democratic societies there is nothing to legally stop a person from the most deprived class and caste from reaching the highest position.

Activity 7

Find out more about the life of the late President K. R. Narayanan. Discuss the concept of ascription and achieved status, caste and class in this context.

Such stories of achievement do exist and are sources of immense inspiration. Yet for the most part the structure of the class system persists. Sociological studies of social mobility, even in western societies are far removed from the ideal model of perfect mobility. Sociology has to be sensitive to both the challenges to the caste system as well as the persistence of discrimination. Significantly those, at the lower levels of the system, are not just disadvantaged socially but also economically. In rural India, more than half of the Scheduled Tribes population lives below the poverty line. This proportion is only slightly less for the Scheduled Castes at about 43 per cent, and lesser still for the Other Backward Classes at about 34 per cent (Deshpande 2003:114).

* Separate Section on Caste ?

Caste and class nexus in India

We have already discussed about caste system in detail in the previous section of this chapter. Caste is an occupational division of labour which is one of the core characteristic on Indian society. Caste has been in existence since centuries and it has determined nature and structure of Indian society, particularly the among the Hindus. But caste is also prevalent among other religious categories present in south Asian continent.

With modernisation if on one hand caste system started to break down, then on the other

hand class as form of stratification began to take its hold. Caste is ascribed status, but class is achieved status. Class is based on economic criteria but caste is social hierarchy and occupational division of labour. With society undergoing transformation or changes one can see a connection between caste and class. Caste is an over-arching ideological system encompassing all spheres of social life of India. Despite signs of breaking down caste continue to exert its pressure at the time of deciding about important issues and events in life. Say for e.g. at the time of marriage, caste is one of the foremost consideration while choosing a partner. But along with that class has also become an important consideration. At the same time one can also notice a clear correlation between caste and class. Most of the fruits of development,

This means that those who belong to upper castes have invariably got better opportunities, access to resources, education, income generation opportunities, social positions, and privileges. Hence the higher caste people constitute major part of upper class by the virtue of being socially forward and privileged. Both caste and class are interrelated. Both are hierarchical in nature and rank individuals and groups. Both tend to determine status and position of individuals their lifestyles and life choices. It is interesting to see correspondence between caste and class, in the sense that those who belong to upper castes tend to occupy upper class positions. Or one may also say that those who belong to upper castes have set of advantages that enables them to compete with other with an edge due to their superior caste status. Thus they tend to excel in modern competitive world, which is achievement oriented, and achieve higher class positions. They perform better in education due to access to good sources of education and by virtue of their social capital.

In conclusion we can sum up that although caste and caste are two distinct forms of stratification yet they are inseparable. Both operate in social life and are closely related to one another. There are class distinctions in caste and caste distinctions within class. Look for examples around and relate this understanding to your everyday life. learning about caste and class will become interesting.

Ethnicity and Race:

Ethnic means relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background. It means being a

member of a specified ethnic group <an *ethnic* German>

Encyclopedia Britannica defines **Ethnic group**, as a social group or category of the population that, in a larger society, is set apart and bound together by common ties of race, language, nationality, or culture.

The word ethnicity comes from the word ethnic which means race. An ethnic community does not necessarily have a racial connotation only it is more than that. Ethnic diversity is one form of the social complexity found in most contemporary societies.

Ethnicity includes the sense of self consciousness of a group of people united by common language, religion, belief system, history, heritage, experiences etc. The ethnic identity of a group becomes psychologically and socially important for a member or members of a community to define themselves as distinct from other ethnic groups. It gives the members a sense of belonging.

Ethnicity is socially mobilised and has a set of symbols with which the members of a particular group express their solidarity and adhere to its rules and norms.

Ethnicity relates to ascriptive identities that an individual gets by virtue of birth such as religion, caste, language, and associated set of values, customs and rituals. Ethnic groups often attempt to place themselves in a superior status which results into conflict. The tendency to treat one's ethnicity as superior to the others is called as ethnocentrism.

Thus ethnicity refers to shared cultural practices, history, perspectives, experiences and cultural way of life that sets one group of people apart from another Ethnic features and status is ascribed. The ethnic differences add to cultural diversity of any country. Almost all the countries in contemporary times are multicultural, or plural or one may say ethnically diverse. People from different ethnic groups and races live together on a common platform, under the umbrella of social equality and rights guaranteed by their respective constitutions. While ethnicity is about cultural differences, race refers to groups of people who have similar set of biologically traits of features.

Race is defined according to physical differences, which are mostly inherited. Although

scholars identify many racial groups but anthropologists recognize that there are four major race classifications in the world, which are caucasian, mongoloid or asian, negroid or black and australoid.

Scientifically speaking, races are defined as a group of people that are separated and grouped together because they have common inherited physical traits that distinguishes them from other groups. Race is biologically determined, but it has acquired social meaning and significance. What do we mean by this?

The differences between physical traits have become basis for social grouping, discrimination, social prejudice, and ranking culture and values system of communities belonging to different races. Thus racism is the prejudice based on socially significant physical features. Racism is asymmetrical or discriminatory treatment of some people as superior or inferior. Racism or racist behaviour approves social segregation, marginalisation and discrimination of the people from different races.

Gender

What is meant by gender?

Gender refers to an individual's anatomical sex, and the cultural and social aspects of being male or female. Gender is defined as a set of social expectations about behaviour regarded as appropriate for the members of each sex, conventionally as masculine or feminine. There are many concepts and terms associated with gender. Let us look at them and their definitions.

Gender inequality The differences in the status, power and prestige that women and men have in groups, collectivities and societies.

Gender relations The societally patterned interactions between men and women.

Gender roles Social roles assigned to each sex and labelled as masculine or feminine.

Gender socialization The processes through which individuals develop different gender characteristics in the course of socialization.

But why gender is so important. Women constitute almost half of the population of the world.

But is it surprising that across the world at all the points of time in history, women have been discriminated against men. Men have always dominated women. Societies have been segregated into separate groups of men and women, irrespective of their status, income, caste, religion or any other affiliations, women across strata have been treated as subordinate sex. The division between men and women give both of them asymmetrical access to power, prestige, property, authority, and autonomy for decision making. This asymmetry is called as gender inequality, where divisions have always gone in favour of men.

Let us understand gender as form of stratification and make sense of this discrimination through some facts.

Worldwide, men outnumber women by some 62 million. More baby boys are born than baby girls.

Women spend at least twice as much time as men on domestic work, and when all work – paid and unpaid – is considered, women work longer hours than men. ([The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics](#))

Worldwide women are paid less than men, in most countries earning on average 60 - 75% of men's wages. ([World Bank Gender Data Portal, 2015](#))

In 2013, the global employment-to-population ratio was 72% for men and 47% for women ([International Labour Organization, 2014](#))

Women bear disproportionate caring responsibility for children, the elderly and the sick, spending twice to ten times more time a day on unpaid care work than men. ([World Bank, 2012](#))

Women are more likely than men to work in informal employment. In South Asia, over 80% of women in non-agricultural jobs are in informal employment, in sub-Saharan Africa, 74%, and in Latin America and the Caribbean, 54%. ([UN Women, 2015](#))

In a study of 173 countries 155 have at least one legal difference restricting women's economic opportunities. Of those, 100 have laws that restrict the types of jobs that women can do, and in 18 husbands can prevent their wives from accepting jobs. ([World Bank, 2015](#))

Women farmers control less land than men. Less than 20% of landholders are women. ([Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011](#))

Bringing women's wages into line with men's would add \$28 trillion to global GDP ([McKinsey Global Institute, 2015](#)).

7.4% of countries have had female heads of states over the last 50 years. ([World Economic Forum, 2013](#))

In August 2015 there were 37 countries in which women make up less than 10% per cent of parliamentarians. ([Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women, 2015](#))

In January 2015, only 17% of government ministers globally were women. ([Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015](#))

Over 700 million women alive today were married when they were under 18, and of those some 250 million were married before they were 15. ([UNICEF, 2014](#))

Think for a while do you find these trends and data disturbing? The statistics presented above pertains to status and condition of women in our society.

Difference between sex and gender are defined. Sex refers to biological difference between males and females. These differences are natural. Gender on the other hand is a social construct. It is more than biology and it is social and cultural in nature. What do we mean by this? Under means the set of roles, expectations, ideas, mechanisms, constraints, and behaviour patterns that are expected from both males and females. These roles, expectations, ideas, mechanisms, constraints, and behaviour patterns are based on the belief that men are superior to women. This roles, expectations, ideas, mechanisms, constraints, and behaviour patterns are biased and unjust towards women and do not let women realise their true

potential. This gendered thinking creates hurdles for women in all aspects through out their lives.

Think for a while and write down 4 ways in which your life would have been different if you would have been born as a male rather than female, or female rather than male. Try to share your list with your friends and discuss with them their ideas.

Now think logically and note that which of these differences are due to biological differences between males and females, and which are the actions which are due to the gendered nature of our society, or in other words, how social values, patriarchy, and gendered socialisation influence our thought and practice.

This belief that ones sex is superior to another has been extended to cosily, cultural sphere as well. The result is that there are gendered roles and expectations. This perspective justifies gender inequality and sexism in society. This is root causes of masculine and feminise divisions in society which have guided the way social life is asymmetrically designed in all walks of life.

Gender roles and expectations are learned through process of socialisation which is called as gendered socialisation. Different social mechanisms, constraints, controls and means are used in order to make young girls conform to their gender boundaries. Thus gender is considered to be most universal form of stratification and has possibly existed since humanity.

Gender ideology refers to attitudes regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of men and women in society. This has defined the work that men and women do, preferred occupations for women, working time, dress pattern, forms of speech and use of words, time to be spent outside house, whom to mix with, and what not.

As a student of sociology you must start thinking critically of those aspects in life which reflect gender inequality and do injustice to capabilities of women around you.