

1. Details of Module and its structure

Module Detail	
Subject Name	Sociology
Course Name	Sociology 03 (Class XII, Semester - 1)
Module Name/Title	Stratification, social inequality, exclusion – Part 1
Module Id	lesy_10501
Pre-requisites	Sociology, concepts, social institutions, stratification
Objectives	After going through this lesson, the learners will be able to understand the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social inequality• Social stratification• Social exclusion
Keywords	Indian society, social stratification, social inequality, social exclusion, prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination

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

Religion, family, caste, tribe, the market – these are instances of the social institutions that have been studied in the previous chapters. In Chapters 3 and 4, these institutions were seen from the point of view of their role in forming communities and sustaining society. In this chapter we will consider an equally important aspect of such institutions, namely their role in creating and sustaining patterns of inequality and exclusion.

For most of us who are born and live in India, social inequality and exclusion are facts of life. We see and also experience these facts in everyday life. We see beggars in the streets and on railway platforms. We see young children labouring as domestic workers, construction helpers, cleaners and helpers in streetside restaurants (*dhabas*) and tea-shops. We are not surprised at the sight of small children, who work as domestic workers in middle class urban homes, carrying the school bags of older children to school. It does not immediately strike us as unjust that some children are denied schooling. Some of us read about caste discrimination against children in schools; some of us face it. Likewise, news reports about violence against women and prejudice against minority groups and the differently abled are part of our everyday lives.

This everydayness of social inequality and exclusion often make them appear inevitable, almost natural. We tend to take it for granted or as natural, as if it was always there without questioning or wondering about its origin, causes and consequences. If we do sometimes recognise that inequality and exclusion are not inevitable, we often think of them as being ‘deserved’ or ‘justified’ in some sense. Perhaps the poor and marginalised are where they are because they are lacking in ability, or haven’t tried hard enough to improve their situation? We thus tend to blame them for their own plight – if only they worked harder or were more intelligent, they wouldn’t be where they are.

A closer examination will show that few work harder than those who are located at the lower ranks of society. As a South American proverb says – “If hard labour were really such a good thing, the rich would keep it all for themselves!” All over the world, back-breaking work like stone breaking, digging, carrying heavy weights, pulling rickshaws or carts is invariably done by the poor. And yet they rarely improve

their life chances. How often do we come across a poor construction worker who rises to become even a petty construction contractor? It is only in films that a street child may become an industrialist, but even in films it is often shown that such a dramatic rise requires illegal or unscrupulous methods.

ACTIVITY 5.1

Identify some of the richest and some of the poorest people in your neighbourhood, people that you or your family are acquainted with. (For instance a rickshawpuller or a porter or a domestic worker and a cinema hall owner or a construction contractor or hotel owner, or doctor... It could be something else in your context). Try to talk to one person from each group to find out about their daily routines. For each person, organise the information in the form of an imaginary diary detailing the activities of the person from the time they get up to the time they go to sleep on a typical (or average) working day. Based on these diaries, try to answer the following questions and discuss them with your classmates.

• How many hours a day do each of these persons spend at work? What kind of work do they do – in what ways is their work tiring, stressful, pleasant or unpleasant? What kinds of relationship does it involve with other people – do they have to take orders, give orders, seek cooperation, enforce discipline....? Are they treated with respect by the people they have to deal with in their work, or do they themselves have to show respect for others?

It may be that the poorest, and in some cases even the richest, person you know actually has no real 'job' or is currently 'not working'. If this is so, do go ahead and find out about their daily routine anyway. But in addition, try to answer the following questions.

• Why is the person 'unemployed'? Has he/she been looking for work? How is he/she supporting herself/himself? In what ways are they affected by the fact of not having any work? Is their lifestyle any different from when they were working?

It is also interesting to note some of the facts about inequality existing at the global level. Try to find out data regarding how much wealth is being held by what percentage of people. Make a list of top 5 richest countries in terms of their gdp per capita. Also look at the data and find out poorest countries. try to find out similarities and differences among these countries and what is the nature of society, politics and

economy in these countries. It will be interesting to find out about the nature of life and experiences here.

Activity 5.1 invites you to rethink the widely held commonsense view that hard work alone can improve an individual's life chances. It is true that hard work matters, and so does individual ability. If all other things were equal, then personal effort, talent and luck would surely account for all the differences between individuals. But, as is almost always the case, all other things are not equal. It is these non-individual or group differences that explain social inequality and exclusion.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND EXCLUSION?

Inequality by majority of us is seen as natural and part of our life. But have you ever imagined that why we call this as social inequality or social exclusion. The question being asked in this section has three broad answers which may be stated briefly as follows. First, social inequality and exclusion are social because they are not about individuals but about groups. Second, they are social in the sense that they are not economic, although there is usually a strong link between social and economic inequality. Third, they are systematic and structured – there is a definite pattern to social inequalities. These three broad senses of the 'social' will be explored briefly below.

SOCIAL INEQUALITY

In every society, some people have a greater share of valued resources – money, property, education, health, and power – than others. These *social resources* can be divided into three forms of capital – *economic capital* in the form of material assets and income; *cultural capital* such as educational qualifications and status; and *social capital* in the form of networks of contacts and social associations (Bourdieu 1986). Often, these three forms of capital overlap and one can be converted into the other. For example, a person from a well-off family (economic capital) can afford expensive higher education, and so can acquire cultural or educational capital. Someone with influential relatives and friends (social capital) may – through access to good advice, recommendations or information – manage to get a well-paid job.

Patterns of unequal access to social resources are commonly called *social inequality*. Some social inequality reflects innate differences between individuals for example,

their varying abilities and efforts. Someone may be endowed with exceptional intelligence or talent, or may have worked very hard to achieve their wealth and status. However, by and large, social inequality is not the outcome of innate or ‘natural’ differences between people, but is produced by the society in which they live. Sociologists use the term *social stratification* to refer to a system by which categories of people in a society are ranked in a hierarchy. This hierarchy then shapes people’s identity and experiences, their relations with others, as well as their access to resources and opportunities.

According to MacIver and Page “Borrowed by analogy from the earth sciences, the term ‘social stratification’ has come into general sociological use only since about 1940. However, in contrast to its earth-science usage the sociological usage of the concept of stratification often includes, implicitly or explicitly, some evaluation of the higher and lower layers, which are judged to be better or worse according to a scale of values”. For them there are three principles that characterize social stratification.

- (i) A hierarchy of status groups;
- (ii) The recognition of the superior-inferior stratification; and
- (iii) Some degree of permanence of the structure.

Three key principles help explain social stratification:

1. *Social stratification is a characteristic of society, not simply a function of individual differences.* Social stratification is a society-wide system that unequally distributes social resources among categories of people. In the most technologically primitive societies – hunting and gathering societies, for instance – little was produced so only rudimentary social stratification could exist. In more technologically advanced societies where people produce a surplus over and above their basic needs, however, social resources are unequally distributed to various social categories regardless of people’s innate individual abilities.

2. *Social stratification persists over generations.* It is closely linked to the family and to the inheritance of social resources from one generation to the next. A person’s social position is *ascribed*. That is, children assume the social positions of their parents. Within the caste system, birth dictates occupational opportunities. A Dalit is

likely to be confined to traditional occupations such as agricultural labour, scavenging, or leather work, with little chance of being able to get high-paying white-collar or professional work. The ascribed aspect of social inequality is reinforced by the practice of *endogamy*. That is, marriage is usually restricted to members of the same caste, ruling out the potential for blurring caste lines through inter-marriage.

3. *Social stratification is supported by patterns of belief, or ideology.* No system of social stratification is likely to persist over generations unless it is widely viewed as being either fair or inevitable. The caste system, for example, is justified in terms of the opposition of purity and pollution, with the Brahmins designated as the most superior and Dalits as the most inferior by virtue of their birth and occupation. Not everyone, though, thinks of a system of inequality as legitimate. Typically, people with the greatest social privileges express the strongest support for systems of stratification such as caste and race. Those who have experienced the exploitation and humiliation of being at the bottom of the hierarchy are most likely to challenge it.

Often we discuss social exclusion and discrimination as though they pertain to differential economic resources alone. This however is only partially true. People often face discrimination and exclusion because of their gender, religion, ethnicity, language, caste and disability. Thus women from a privileged background may face sexual harassment in public places. A middle class professional from a minority religious or ethnic group may find it difficult to get accommodation in a middle class colony even in a metropolitan city. People often harbour prejudices about other social groups. Each of us grows up as a member of a community from which we acquire ideas not just about our 'community', our 'caste' or 'class' our 'gender' but also about others. Often these ideas reflect prejudices.

Prejudices refer to pre-conceived opinions or attitudes held by members of one group towards another. The word literally means 'pre-judgement', that is, an opinion formed in advance of any familiarity with the subject, before considering any available evidence. A prejudiced person's preconceived views are often based on hearsay rather than on direct evidence, and are resistant to change even in the face of new information. Prejudice may be either positive or negative. Although the word is generally used for negative pre-judgements, it can also apply to favourable pre-

judgement. For example, a person may be prejudiced in favour of members of his/her own caste or group and – without any evidence – believe them to be superior to members of other castes or groups.

Prejudices are often grounded in **stereotypes**, fixed and inflexible characterisations of a group of people. Stereotypes are often applied to ethnic and racial groups and to women. In a country such as India, which was colonised for a long time, many of these stereotypes are partly colonial creations. Some communities were characterised as ‘martial races’, some others as effeminate or cowardly, yet others as untrustworthy. In both English and Indian fictional writings we often encounter an entire group of people classified as ‘lazy’ or ‘cunning’. It may indeed be true that some individuals are sometimes lazy or cunning, brave or cowardly. But such a general statement is true of individuals in every group. Even for such individuals, it is not true all the time – the same individual may be both lazy and hardworking at different times. Stereotypes fix whole groups into single, homogenous categories; they refuse to recognise the variation across individuals and across contexts or across time. They treat an entire community as though it were a single person with a single all-encompassing trait or characteristic.

ACTIVITY 5.2

Collect examples of prejudiced behaviour from films or novels.

1. Discuss the examples you and your classmates have gathered. How are prejudices reflected in the manner a social group is depicted? How do we decide whether a certain kind of portrayal is prejudiced or not?

2. Can you distinguish between instances of prejudice that were intentional – i.e., the film maker or writer wanted to show it as prejudiced – and unintentional or unconscious prejudice?

If prejudice describes attitudes and opinions, **discrimination** refers to actual behaviour towards another group or individual. Discrimination can be seen in practices that disqualify members of one group from opportunities open to others, as when a person is refused a job because of their gender or religion. Discrimination can

be very hard to prove because it may not be open or explicitly stated. Discriminatory behaviour or practices may be presented as motivated by other, more justifiable, reasons rather than prejudice. For example, the person who is refused a job because of their caste may be told that they were less qualified than others, and that the selection was done purely on merit.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Social exclusion refers to ways in which individuals may become cut off from full involvement in the wider society. It focuses attention on a broad range of factors that prevent individuals or groups from having opportunities open to the majority of the population. In order to live a full and active life, individuals must not only be able to feed, clothe and house themselves, but should also have access to essential goods and services such as education, health, transportation, insurance, social security, banking and even access to the police or judiciary. Social exclusion is not accidental but systematic – it is the result of structural features of society.

It is important to note that social exclusion is involuntary – that is, exclusion is practiced regardless of the wishes of those who are excluded. For example, rich people are never found sleeping on the pavements or under bridges like thousands of homeless poor people in cities and towns. This does not mean that the rich are being ‘excluded’ from access to pavements and park benches, because they could certainly gain access if they wanted to, but they choose not to. Social exclusion is sometimes wrongly justified by the same logic – it is said that the excluded group itself does not wish to participate. The truth of such an argument is not obvious when exclusion is preventing access to something desirable (as different from something clearly undesirable, like sleeping on the pavement).

Prolonged experience of discriminatory or insulting behaviour often produces a reaction on the part of the excluded who then stop trying for inclusion. For example, ‘upper’ caste Hindu communities have often denied entry into temples for the ‘lower’ castes and specially the Dalits. After decades of such treatment, the Dalits may build their own temple, or convert to another religion like Buddhism, Christianity or Islam. After they do this, they may no longer desire to be included in the Hindu temple or

religious events. But this does not mean that social exclusion is not being practiced. The point is that the exclusion occurs regardless of the wishes of the excluded. India like most societies has been marked by acute practices of social discrimination and exclusion. At different periods of history protest movements arose against caste, gender and religious discrimination. Yet prejudices remain and often, new ones emerge. Thus legislation alone is unable to transform society or produce lasting social change. A constant social campaign to change awareness and sensitivity is required to break them.

You have already read about the impact of colonialism on Indian society. What discrimination and exclusion mean was brought home to even the most privileged Indians at the hands of the British colonial state. Such experiences were, of course, common to the various socially discriminated groups such as women, *dalits* and other oppressed castes and tribes. Faced with the humiliation of colonial rule and simultaneously exposed to ideas of democracy and justice, many Indians initiated and participated in a large number of social reform movements.

In this chapter we focus on four such groups who have suffered from serious social inequality and exclusion, namely Dalits or the ex-untouchable castes; adivasis or communities referred to as 'tribal'; women, and the differently abled. We attempt to look at each of their stories of struggles and achievements in the following sections.