

Social Stratification and Change
M.A.- 1st Semester (New Syllabus)

Course Code: SOC-C-103

Social Stratification and Change

UNIT(1-20)

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Course Code: SOC-C-103

Course Name: Social Stratification and Change

Credits: 6

Maximum Marks 100

Time: 3hours

Course Objectives: Social stratification besides being a persisting empirical reality is constantly changing. Social mobility and social movement acts as a reform and corrective measure to replace some of these inequalities. The students will learn how social inequality is structured, reproduced and experienced.

Course Outcomes:

- To acquaint students with the manner in which seemingly naturalised identities like race, caste, gender, and sexuality are constructed.
- To choose appropriate theoretical concepts to describe the real-world manifestations of social inequality and stratification and to produce coherent explanations of the mechanisms behind stratification systems.
- To critically evaluate empirical data to argue on the matters of social stratification
- To suggest mechanisms of mitigating the effects of social inequality through analyzing social processes on multiple levels.

Course Contents:

Block-I Social Stratification: Concept and Theories

Basic Concepts- Social Stratification, Social Inequality and Social Differentiation; Theories of Stratification- Karl Marx, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons and Davis & Moore

Block-II Forms of Social Stratification

Slavery (United States, South America and West Indies); Caste (Dumont, Hutton and Ghurye); Class (Industrial Societies- Capitalist System and Socialist System); Race and Ethnicity (South Africa, United States of America and United Kingdom)

Block-III Social Stratification and Change in India

Changing Dimensions of Caste- Structural, Cultural, Economic and Political; Decomposition of Social Class; Caste and Class Nexus; Emerging Middle Class; Changing Race, Ethnic and Minority Relations

Block-IV Gender and Social Stratification

Gender and Caste; Gender and Class; Gender and Inequality; Patriarchy and Power; Gender and Human Rights

Suggested Readings

1. Bendix, R and S. M. Lipset (eds.). 1970. Class, Status and Power. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
2. Beteille, Andre (ed.). 1969. Social Inequality. Penguin Books.
3. D'Souza, V.S. 1981. Inequality and its Perpetuation. New Delhi: Manohar Publications.
4. Dumont, Louis. 1970. Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications. New Delhi: Vikas Publications.
5. Eisenstadt, S.N. 1971. Social Differentiation and Stratification. London: Scott, Foresman & Co.
6. Ghurye, G.S. 2016. Caste and Race in India. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
7. Giddens A. 1980. The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies. London: Unwin Hyman.
8. Gupta, Dipankar (ed.). 1991. Social Stratification. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
9. Haralambus, M. 1981. Sociology – Themes and Perspectives. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
10. Hutton, J.H. 1969. Caste in India. London: Oxford University Press.
11. Johnson, D.L. (ed.). 1985. Middle Classes in Dependent Countries. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
12. Saunders, P. 1990. Social Class and Stratification. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.
13. Sharma, K.L. (ed.). 1986. Social Stratification in India. New Delhi: Manohar Publications.
14. Singh G. 1985. The New Middle Class in India: A Sociological Analysis. Jaipur: Rawat Publication.
15. Singer, M. and B.S. Cohen. (eds). 2001. Structure and Change in Indian Society. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
16. Singh, Yogendra. 1977. Social Stratification and Social Change. Delhi: Manohar Publications.
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BLOCK-I
UNIT-1
SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION, SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

STRUCTURE

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Human societies have long aspired to achieve egalitarianism—an ideal where all individuals are equal, free from hierarchy, exploitation, and oppression. However, true equality remains elusive, as power and advantage have historically been unevenly distributed. While the extent of inequality varies, some form of differentiation has existed in every society, even among early hunter-gatherers, where age and gender shaped social roles.

Social differentiation, inequality, and stratification are interconnected. Differentiation refers to the categorization of individuals into roles such as parent, teacher, or employer. Inequality arises from these distinctions when certain roles hold more power or resources than others. Stratification, a structured form of inequality, organizes society into hierarchical layers based on factors like occupation, wealth, and social status. Borrowing from geology, where stratification denotes rock layers, sociology uses the term to describe divisions within society. Ultimately, while differentiation is a natural aspect of social organization, inequality and stratification reflect systemic disparities that shape access to resources and opportunities.

1.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By engaging with this lesson, you will develop a comprehensive understanding of key sociological concepts related to social structure and hierarchy:

- **Social Differentiation:** You will explore its meaning and underlying causes, recognizing how societies categorize individuals into distinct roles based on factors such as age, gender, and occupation.
- **Social Inequality:** You will analyze its dimensions, understanding how disparities in wealth, power, and status emerge from social differentiation and influence life opportunities.
- **Social Stratification:** You will examine its meaning, functions, dysfunctions, and key characteristics, identifying how structured hierarchies impact social mobility and resource distribution.
- **Comparative Analysis:** You will learn to differentiate between social differentiation, inequality, and stratification, understanding their interconnections and unique attributes in shaping societal structures.

This lesson aims to provide a critical and analytical perspective on how societies organize themselves, highlighting both the systemic nature of inequality and the broader implications of social hierarchy.

1.3 SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

Human societies are inherently diverse, with differentiation serving as a fundamental characteristic. Variations exist across individuals and communities, shaping social structures based on factors such as age, gender, occupation, and personal attributes.

Social differentiation refers to the process of categorizing individuals into distinct roles—such as parent, teacher, or employer—each carrying specific rights and responsibilities. This system is essential for the effective functioning of society, ensuring that social roles contribute to stability and order. While all societies exhibit differentiation, they vary in the extent and nature of their divisions.

Unlike stratification, which arranges individuals hierarchically, differentiation does not necessarily imply inequality. It often operates horizontally, with distinct social groups coexisting without ranking,

as seen in linguistic, religious, or national identities. This distinction highlights that while differentiation is a structural necessity, it does not inherently lead to social stratification or hierarchy.

1.3.1 Causes of Social Differentiation

Talcott Parsons identified three key factors that drive social differentiation: **possession, qualities, and performance**. These factors shape societal hierarchies and contribute to inequality.

1. **Possession** refers to material assets such as wealth, income, and property. Access to these resources is uneven, creating disparities that influence social standing. The unequal distribution of material wealth plays a significant role in structuring societal divisions.
2. **Qualities** encompass inherent attributes such as intelligence, physical strength, courage, and loyalty. Since these traits are not uniformly distributed, individuals are ranked based on their perceived abilities, reinforcing differentiation.
3. **Performance** pertains to the execution of tasks under specific conditions. It is evaluated both by tangible outcomes and the manner in which the task is performed. Social norms regulate performance, and any deviation from these expectations can lead to devaluation, regardless of the actual results achieved.

These factors collectively shape social differentiation by determining access to resources, status, and opportunities, ultimately influencing broader patterns of inequality.

1.3.2 Social Differentiation and Social Stratification

Social differentiation evolves into **social stratification** through a structured process involving status differentiation, ranking, assessment, and reward allocation. These mechanisms establish hierarchies within society, leading to unequal access to resources and opportunities.

1. **Differentiation of Statuses** – Social positions, such as parent or teacher, are distinguished, each carrying specific roles, responsibilities, and rights. This differentiation forms the foundation of social organization.
2. **Ranking** – Roles and individuals are ranked based on the skills required to perform them and the personal attributes of those assigned to these roles. This ranking establishes a hierarchy of competence and authority.
3. **Assessment** – The significance of different roles is evaluated in terms of their contribution to societal well-being. Some roles are deemed more essential than others, influencing their perceived value.
4. **Rewarding** – Roles and statuses are assigned varying levels of rewards, including wealth, prestige, and power. These rewards reinforce social hierarchies, as individuals occupying higher-ranked positions receive greater privileges.

Through these processes, **social stratification emerges**, leading to the unequal distribution of scarce and valued resources. This structured inequality places individuals in different social strata, shaping their access to power, opportunities, and social mobility.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Talcott Parsons mention causal factors of social differentiation.

Q2. is the process to assess the relative importance of the various roles for the well-being of the society.

Social Inequality

Social inequality refers to the existence of structured disparities among individuals or groups within a society, often resulting in differential access to resources, opportunities, and privileges. These inequalities are not purely natural but are socially constructed, perpetuating systemic barriers that limit the upward mobility of disadvantaged groups while consolidating the dominance of privileged sections of society.

Historically, the first sociological explanation of social inequality was offered by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He argued that the emergence of private property marked the inception of social inequality, as it created distinctions between individuals in terms of wealth, power, and status.

1.4.1 Definitions of Social Inequality

Several scholars have defined social inequality from different perspectives:

1. **Schaefer & Lamm:** "The term social inequality describes a condition in which members of a society possess different amounts of wealth, prestige, and power."
2. **Davis & Moore:** "Social inequality is an unconsciously evolved mechanism through which societies ensure that the most important positions are occupied by the most qualified individuals."
3. **André Bêteille:** "The idea of hierarchy entails inequality, but inequality does not necessarily imply a rigid structure of high and low statuses."

1.4.2 Features of Social Inequality

Social inequality manifests in multiple ways, but it is broadly classified into two types:

1. **Biological or Natural Inequality:** Differences based on inherent characteristics such as age, physical strength, or cognitive abilities.
2. **Social Inequality:** Disparities created and reinforced by societal norms, institutions, and historical developments.

Interrelation of Biological and Social Inequality

Many stratification systems attempt to justify social inequalities by associating them with biological differences. For instance, in racially stratified societies, dominant groups have historically claimed

biological superiority to rationalize their privileges. However, Rousseau differentiated between the two, stating that natural inequalities (e.g., physical strength) are relatively insignificant, whereas socially created inequalities (e.g., wealth and status) serve as the foundation for stratification.

Despite this distinction, even minor biological differences can be transformed into social inequalities depending on how societies interpret them. For example, in medieval feudal societies, hereditary privilege dictated access to power and wealth. Similarly, the social meaning attributed to old age varies—traditional Australian societies revered elders for their wisdom, while many Western societies often marginalize them post-retirement.

Sociologist André Béteille critiqued the search for biological justifications for stratification, emphasizing that social hierarchies are constructed and shaped by historical and cultural contexts rather than inherent human attributes.

Key Characteristics of Social Inequality

- **Social Stratification:** Social inequality often results in stratification, where individuals are ranked based on status, class, or power.
- **Existence Without Stratification:** Some sociologists argue that modern industrial societies, particularly in the United States, no longer exhibit rigid class structures but instead display a continuous hierarchy of occupational statuses with varying levels of prestige and economic rewards.
- **Systematic Differences:** Sociologists focus on structural inequalities that affect groups rather than individual disparities. For instance, the differentiation between landowners and laborers or caste-based distinctions such as Brahmins and Dalits in India are of sociological interest.
- **Social Inequality as a Social Fact:** Inequality is a fundamental aspect of society but varies across cultures. The class structures of the United States and Scandinavian countries differ, and such structures evolve over time. For example, social hierarchies in the U.S. have transformed significantly since the Civil War era.
- **Historical and Contextual Variations:** Different forms of inequality dominate in various societies at specific historical moments. For instance, economic inequality may be the most pressing issue in capitalist societies, whereas caste-based inequality has been historically significant in India.

- **Universality of Inequality:** While the forms and degrees of inequality differ, no society is completely free from it. Whether in terms of economic class, caste, race, or gender, disparities persist across cultures and epochs.

Social inequality is a persistent and complex phenomenon, shaped by historical, economic, and cultural factors. While biological differences exist, their significance is determined by social constructs rather than inherent superiority or inferiority. Sociological perspectives emphasize the structural nature of inequality and its evolving manifestations across societies. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing policies and interventions aimed at fostering a more equitable society.

1.4.3 Dimensions of Social Inequality

Social inequality manifests in multiple dimensions, shaping access to resources, power, and status within society. The key dimensions include:

- **Economic Inequality:** Differences in income, occupation, and education contribute significantly to social disparity. Unequal access to economic resources leads to disparities in wealth accumulation, job opportunities, and educational attainment, thereby reinforcing existing social hierarchies.
- **Political Inequality:** Disparities in power and authority determine who controls decision-making processes and governance structures. Those with greater political influence shape policies that often maintain or exacerbate existing inequalities, limiting opportunities for marginalized groups.
- **Status Inequality:** Social status, often determined by factors such as caste, race, gender, or family background, affects an individual's societal position. Differences in prestige, recognition, and societal esteem create hierarchies that impact personal and professional opportunities.

German sociologist **Ralf Dahrendorf** categorized social inequalities into four broad types:

1. **Natural Differences of Kind:** These are inherent biological variations such as age and sex. While they exist universally, their social significance depends on cultural interpretations. For instance, while age brings wisdom and respect in some societies, in others, the elderly may be marginalized.

2. **Natural Differences of Position:** This refers to ascribed statuses such as caste, which determine an individual's social standing at birth. In rigid caste-based societies, these differences often limit upward mobility and reinforce systemic discrimination.
3. **Social Differentiation of Position:** Differences in esteem and prestige arise from social roles rather than inherent traits. Certain occupations or social positions command greater respect, shaping societal hierarchies and interactions.
4. **Social Differentiation Based on Reputation and Wealth:** Economic success and social recognition often dictate one's position in society. Those with greater financial resources or cultural capital typically enjoy higher status and influence.

Social inequality is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, influenced by historical, economic, and political contexts. It is not merely about individual differences but about structural forces that perpetuate disparities over time. Understanding these dimensions is crucial in formulating policies aimed at fostering social justice and equity.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Ralf Dahrendorf conceptualises how many types of inequalities?

- (A) Five (B) Six (C) Four (D) Eight

Q2. Who defines "social inequality is an unconsciously evolved device by - which societies ensure that most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons".

- (A) Schaffer and Lamf (B) Davis and Moore (C) Andre Beteille
(D) Max Weber

1.5 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification refers to the structured and hierarchical division of society into unequal groups based on differential access to resources, power, and prestige. It is a system of ranked statuses and roles that tends to persist across generations, reinforcing social inequality in a systematic manner.

While all societies exhibit some degree of inequality, stratification emerges when these inequalities become institutionalized—when they are embedded in social norms and practices that determine access to resources and opportunities. This structured ranking of individuals and groups leads to disparities in economic rewards, social status, and political influence.

Distinction Between Social Inequality and Stratification

Social inequality refers to differences in access to wealth, power, and prestige that exist within a society. However, when these differences are organized into a hierarchical system where certain groups consistently enjoy more privileges than others, it becomes social stratification. Stratification is thus a specific form of inequality where individuals or groups are ranked based on ascribed or achieved characteristics.

Members of the same social stratum typically share similar **life chances**, opportunities, and social experiences. Their awareness of common identity often leads to a sense of group consciousness, further reinforcing stratification.

Conditions for Stratification

Inequality transforms into stratification when two key conditions are met:

1. **Institutionalization:** The inequality is legitimized and reinforced by long-standing social norms, traditions, and legal frameworks. This makes it an accepted part of the social structure rather than a temporary phenomenon.
2. **Status-Based Differentiation:** The inequality is linked to social statuses rather than individual characteristics. For instance, a person's caste, class, or occupational group determines their access to privileges, rather than personal abilities or efforts alone.

Key Advantages of Privileged Groups in a Stratified System

Social stratification leads to the concentration of advantages in the hands of certain groups. These advantages typically fall into three categories:

1. **Life Chances:** These include material benefits such as wealth, healthcare, education, and job security, which significantly impact an individual's quality of life.
2. **Social Status:** Prestige and respect in society are key aspects of stratification. Certain groups or professions command higher social recognition than others, reinforcing existing hierarchies.
3. **Political Influence:** The ability to shape decision-making processes and exert control over governance structures gives privileged groups an upper hand in maintaining their status.

Stratification is an enduring aspect of complex societies, shaping the distribution of opportunities and constraints among different groups. While some scholars debate whether small or tribal societies exhibit structured stratification, it is universally recognized that in large societies, social ranking and institutionalized inequality are deeply embedded in social systems. Understanding the mechanisms of stratification is essential for addressing social inequalities and working toward a more equitable society.

1.5.1 Definitions of Social Stratification

Different scholars have defined social stratification in various ways. Some notable definitions include:

- (i) T.B. Bottomore describes social stratification as the categorization of society into different strata or classes, arranged in a hierarchical structure based on prestige and power.

- (ii) Melvin M. Tumin explains social stratification as the organization of society into hierarchical layers, where individuals or groups hold varying levels of wealth, authority, and social status.
- (iii) According to Macdonald, social stratification is a structured system through which groups within a society are ranked in an order of hierarchy.
- (iv) Anthony Giddens defines stratification as the presence of systematic inequalities among different social groups.
- (v) Schaffer and Lamm associate social inequality with disparities in wealth, privileges, and power among members of a society.

1.5.2 Functions of Social Stratification

Social stratification is essential for maintaining societal order and organization. Its key functions include:

- **Assigning Essential Roles in Society:** It aids in the allocation of responsibilities necessary for the smooth functioning of society. By distributing tasks based on skills and status, it ensures that important roles are effectively fulfilled.
- **Structuring Social Interactions and Engagements:** Stratification establishes a framework that shapes interactions among individuals and groups, guiding behavior according to their respective social positions.

1.5.3 Dysfunctions of Social Stratification

While social stratification has its advantages, it also leads to several dysfunctions, which include:

- **Inefficiency in Role Allocation:** The system does not always ensure that individuals with the necessary skills and competence occupy essential roles. Instead, ascribed status may take precedence over merit.
- **Neglect of Essential Roles:** Some socially significant roles may be undervalued or subordinated when status is assigned based on non-functional criteria rather than the actual contribution to society.
- **Social Conflict:** When access to resources and rights is unevenly distributed, tensions arise between different social strata, particularly when lower strata demand equal opportunities.
- **Challenges in Social Conformity:** Stratification can make it difficult for individuals to adhere to societal norms, particularly when disparities create dissatisfaction and resistance.
- **Concentration of Power:** The dominant class may monopolize resources, using their position to benefit at the expense of marginalized groups, leading to exploitation and systemic inequality.
- **Cultural Fragmentation:** Each social class often develops distinct values, behaviors, and lifestyles, which may hinder societal unity and mutual understanding.

- **Hindrance to Personal Development:** Individuals in lower strata may face barriers to realizing their potential due to limited access to education, opportunities, and resources.

1.5.4 Characteristics of Social Stratification

Melvin M. Tumin and John Macdonald identify key characteristics of social stratification:

- **Socially Constructed:** Stratification is a social phenomenon rather than a biological one. While factors like intelligence, age, or strength can influence status, societal recognition and institutional structures ultimately determine power, prestige, and resource distribution.
- **Historically Established:** Stratification has existed across civilizations, from early hunter-gatherer groups to modern industrial societies. In ancient times, distinctions were based on age and gender, evolving into more complex systems like feudal hierarchies and class-based divisions.
- **Universal but Variable:** Social stratification is present in all societies, but its form and intensity vary. Every society has distinctions between privileged and underprivileged groups, though the criteria for division differ.
- **Diverse in Form:** Stratification has taken various shapes throughout history. The Roman society was divided into Patricians and Plebeians, the Aryan society into Varnas, and the Greek society into freemen and slaves. Contemporary societies categorize individuals based on class, estate, or caste.
- **Consequential for Life Outcomes:** Stratification impacts both life chances and lifestyle.
 - *Life chances* refer to opportunities such as access to healthcare, education, and employment, influencing mortality rates, well-being, and social mobility.
 - *Lifestyle* encompasses housing, recreation, education, and even family dynamics, shaping individual experiences and aspirations.
- **Persistent Across Generations:** Social status is often inherited, with advantages and disadvantages passed down through family lineage, making upward mobility challenging for lower strata.
- **Sustained by Beliefs and Ideologies:** Every stratification system is supported by cultural and ideological justifications. For example, caste systems rely on religious beliefs, while capitalist societies justify inequality through the idea of meritocracy.

By analyzing social stratification critically, we recognize both its role in maintaining social order and the inherent inequalities it perpetuates, which call for policies aimed at fostering social mobility and reducing systemic disparities.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Who says "stratification can be defined as structured inequalities between different groupings of people".

- (A) Macionis (B) Melvin M. Tumin (C) Anthony Giddens
(D) Scfaffer and Lamm

Q2. Which of the following means prestige or high standing in the eyes of other members of the society.

- (A) Life Chances (B) Political influence (C) Social Status
(D) Caste

1.6 SUMMARY

Social stratification is a distinct form of social inequality, marked by the hierarchical arrangement of social groups based on factors such as power, prestige, and wealth. Individuals within the same stratum develop a shared sense of identity and common interests. The shift from social differentiation to stratification occurs through processes such as distinction, ranking, evaluation, and the distribution of rewards. This structure arises due to the unequal allocation of scarce and valuable resources among various societal groups. When individuals are systematically placed within a hierarchy based on specific dimensions of inequality, social differences transform into stratification. As a result, members of each stratum tend to have similar life experiences, highlighting the strong link between social differentiation, stratification, and inequality.

1.7 GLOSSARY

- **Natural Inequality:** Differences arising from inherent attributes such as age, health, or physical characteristics.
- **Social Differentiation:** The process through which roles and social positions (e.g., parent, teacher, employee) are identified and distinguished within a society.
- **Social Inequality:** The unequal allocation of social benefits and access to resources within a society.

- **Social Stratification:** The organized categorization of society into hierarchical levels based on factors like wealth, authority, and social status.

1.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Three

A2. Assessment

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Four

A2. Davis and Moore

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Anthony Giddens

A2. Social Status

1.9 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READINGS

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1.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- Define social stratification and discuss its fundamental characteristics.
- What is social inequality? Describe its features and various aspects.
- Differentiate between social differentiation, social inequality, and social stratification, highlighting their similarities and differences.

UNIT- 2

FUNCTIONALIST THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION:DAVIS & MOORE AND TALCOTT PARSONS

STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Theory of Social Stratification: Davis and Moore
 - 2.3.1 Central Arguments of Davis and Moore's Theory of Social Stratification
 - 2.3.2 Criticism of Davis and Moore's Theory of Social Stratification
- Self-Check Exercise-1
- 2.4 Theory of Social Stratification: Talcott Parsons
 - 2.4.1 Basic Postulates of Parsons' Theory of Social Stratification
 - 2.4.2 Criticism of Parsons' Theory of Social Stratification
- Self-Check Exercise-2
- 2.5 Summary
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 2.8 References/Suggested Readings
- 2.9 Terminal Questions

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Social stratification has been examined through various theoretical lenses, with the functionalist perspective being one of the most influential. Scholars like Talcott Parsons and Davis and Moore assert that stratification is essential for maintaining social stability by fostering integration and cohesion. From this viewpoint, hierarchical divisions within society are seen as necessary for ensuring order and functionality.

In contrast, conflict theorists emphasize the inequalities embedded in differences in access to resources, power, and economic opportunities. They argue that stratification arises from exploitation and the concentration of power among a privileged few, rather than serving as a mechanism for social unity.

A theory of social stratification provides a comprehensive framework for understanding:

- The underlying causes of stratification
- The structural organization of hierarchical divisions
- The effects of stratification on individuals and society
- The universality and desirability of stratification

Functionalists attribute stratification to individual performance, suggesting that rewards are allocated based on contributions and abilities. This perspective assumes that differences in performance naturally lead to unequal outcomes. However, critics argue that it overlooks structural factors, such as inherited privilege and systemic obstacles that restrict social mobility.

Additionally, functionalist theorists emphasize the positive aspects of stratification, claiming it enhances social cohesion by assigning individuals roles that align with their abilities. They view stratification as a universal and necessary element for maintaining social balance. However, this perspective is challenged by those who argue that stratification often perpetuates inequality rather than fostering unity. By disregarding issues of power and privilege, the functionalist approach presents an overly optimistic view of social hierarchy, failing to acknowledge the struggles of marginalized groups.

2.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By engaging with this lesson, you will gain a thorough understanding of the functionalist perspective on social stratification. Specifically, you will be able to:

- **Analyze the Functionalist View of Social Stratification:** You will explore how functionalist theorists perceive stratification as a vital and integrative component of society, contributing to stability and order.
- **Examine the Core Arguments of Davis and Moore's Theory:** Their theory suggests that stratification is crucial for assigning roles and motivating individuals, emphasizing that social positions should be determined by merit and skill. You will delve into their reasoning behind the necessity of hierarchy within societies.
- **Critically Assess the Criticisms of Davis and Moore's Theory:** While their theory frames stratification as a functional requirement, it has been criticized for ignoring structural inequalities, power imbalances, and inherited advantages. You will evaluate these critiques and analyze the theory's limitations.
- **Interpret and Evaluate Talcott Parsons' Views on Stratification:** Parsons associates stratification with shared societal values and the legitimization of inequality. You will critically examine his argument that stratification fosters social integration and assess whether it sufficiently considers issues of power, exploitation, and systemic disparities.

By the end of this lesson, you will not only grasp the functionalist approach to stratification but also develop the ability to critically evaluate its assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses in explaining social hierarchies.

Theory of Social Stratification: Davis and Moore

The functionalist perspective on social stratification was introduced by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore in their seminal work, *Some Principles of Stratification*, published in the *American Sociological Review* in April 1945. Their theory seeks to establish a connection between social stratification and the broader social structure. They begin with the premise that no society is devoid of stratification, as hierarchical divisions exist universally. Their primary objectives include:

- Explaining, from a functionalist standpoint, why stratification is a necessary feature of all social systems.
- Analyzing the relatively uniform distribution of prestige among different social positions across societies.
- Understanding the factors that contribute to social inequality and the variations in its manifestations.

However, it is important to note that Davis and Moore's theory focuses on the stratification of positions within society rather than on the individuals who occupy them.

Functional Necessity of Stratification

Davis and Moore argue that stratification serves a crucial function in society, primarily ensuring that individuals are effectively placed and motivated to fulfill roles within the social structure. They outline two essential reasons for the necessity of stratification:

1. **Role Allocation** – Every society comprises various positions that must be occupied to ensure smooth functioning.
2. **Motivation Mechanism** – Society must establish incentives to ensure that individuals not only accept these positions but also perform their responsibilities effectively.

This motivation operates at two levels:

- Encouraging capable individuals to aspire to and train for specific roles.
- Ensuring that individuals perform their assigned tasks with dedication.

Since every society requires a continuous supply of individuals to fill these roles, it must provide ongoing motivation. This necessity exists in both competitive and non-competitive systems.

Determinants of Positional Rank

Davis and Moore argue that the ranking of social positions is determined by two key factors:

1. **Functional Importance** – Positions that contribute significantly to societal stability and development tend to be ranked higher.
2. **Scarcity of Talent or Training Requirements** – Roles that require exceptional abilities or extensive training receive higher status and rewards.

Differential Functional Importance

Davis and Moore emphasize that societal rewards do not always correlate strictly with a position's importance. If a role is crucial but can be easily filled, it does not require high rewards. Conversely, if a role is both essential and difficult to fill, it must be accompanied by substantial rewards to attract qualified individuals.

Differential Scarcity of Personnel

Every social position requires some level of skill or competence. The rarity of individuals

possessing the necessary qualifications arises in two ways:

- **Innate Ability** – Some roles demand extraordinary natural talent, making qualified individuals scarce.
- **Training and Skill Development** – Other positions require specialized training, which can be expensive and time-consuming, further limiting the number of eligible candidates.

Central Arguments of Davis and Moore's Theory

M.M. Tumin identifies the fundamental principles of Davis and Moore's theory as follows:

- Certain roles in society are more crucial than others and demand specialized skills.
- Only a select group of individuals possess the innate talent required to develop these specialized skills.
- Developing these skills necessitates a training period that requires sacrifices, such as time and resources.
- To incentivize individuals to undergo this training, their future roles must offer exclusive privileges and disproportionate access to valuable societal rewards.
- These rewards can be categorized as:
 - **Sustenance and comfort** – Access to material resources and economic stability.
 - **Recreation and leisure** – Opportunities for enjoyment and entertainment.
 - **Self-respect and personal growth** – Prestige and recognition within society.
- The unequal distribution of these rewards leads to social stratification, institutionalizing inequality within society.
- Stratification is seen as an evolutionary mechanism ensuring that vital positions are occupied by the most qualified individuals.
- Consequently, disparities in wealth, power, and status are deemed both inevitable and functional.

Criticism of Davis and Moore's Theory

Despite its influence, Davis and Moore's theory has faced substantial criticism, particularly from M.M. Tumin, who challenges its assumptions on multiple grounds:

- **Limited Opportunity for Talent Discovery** – Stratification restricts access to education, training, and opportunities, preventing society from fully utilizing its talent pool.
- **Inefficient Resource Distribution** – By prioritizing certain groups over others, stratification can lead to the underutilization of productive resources.
- **Reinforcement of Elite Power** – Those in dominant positions use their influence to maintain control, promoting ideologies that justify existing inequalities.
- **Unequal Distribution of Self-Worth** – Stratification creates disparities in self-esteem and self-actualization, limiting personal development for many individuals.
- **Social Divisions and Conflict** – Since inequalities in rewards are often perceived as unjust, stratification fosters hostility, suspicion, and social unrest, rather than cohesion.

- **Unequal Sense of Belonging** – Social status directly impacts an individual's sense of significance within society, leading to disparities in membership and belonging.
- **Disproportionate Loyalty and Participation** – Individuals who feel marginalized may develop weaker ties to society, reducing their motivation to contribute to its welfare.

While Davis and Moore's theory remains influential in explaining the functionalist view of stratification, it has notable limitations. By focusing solely on merit and functionality, the theory overlooks systemic inequalities and inherited privilege, which often prevent equal competition for high-status roles. Critics argue that stratification is not always a rational or necessary mechanism but often a reflection of entrenched power structures. Despite these critiques, the theory continues to provide a foundational framework for understanding how social hierarchies emerge and persist.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The functionalist theory of social stratification was initially introduced by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore in their paper titled

Q2. Functional importance is a necessary factor, but not the cause for a high rank being assigned to a position.

2.4 THEORY OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: TALCOTT PARSONS

Talcott Parsons, a leading functionalist sociologist, offered a structured perspective on social stratification. According to the functionalist viewpoint, every society must fulfill certain essential functions to sustain its existence. Stratification, in this context, is analyzed in terms of how it meets these fundamental societal requirements. Functionalists argue that various components of society form an integrated whole, and stratification is seen as a mechanism that contributes to this integration.

Parsons, like other functionalists, believed that social order, stability, and cooperation stem from a shared system of values, known as **value consensus**. He proposed that stratification is a result of disparities in wealth, power, and prestige, with individuals who align more closely with a society's dominant values receiving higher rewards and status.

2.4.1 Basic Postulates of Parsons' Theory of Social Stratification

The basic postulates of Parsons' theory of social stratification are :-

- **Stratification is based on shared values:** Parsons posited that social stratification emerges from a society's value system. Individuals are evaluated based on how well they align with and exemplify these values, leading to a ranking system within the social order. He defined stratification as "the ranking of units in a social system in accordance with the common value system."

- **Successful Performance Leads to High Status:** Those who perform well according to a society's values achieve higher status and receive various rewards. At the very least, they are accorded prestige as they embody the ideals of the society. For instance, in the Sioux Indian tribe, bravery and generosity were highly valued, and those who excelled in these traits attained high social status.
- **Stratification Varies Across Societies :** Since different societies uphold different sets of values, the means of attaining high status also differ. For example, American society places high importance on individual achievement and economic productivity, whereas other societies might prioritize lineage, religious devotion, or military prowess.
- **Stratification is Inevitable:** Parsons argued that social stratification is an inherent feature of all human societies. Since value consensus is a fundamental requirement for social order, individuals will always be ranked based on these shared values, leading to stratification.
- **Stratification is Perceived as Just and Necessary:** Because stratification is derived from widely accepted values, Parsons believed that most individuals perceive it as fair and justified. Societies function under the assumption that hierarchical differentiation is both natural and essential.
- **Interdependence Within the Stratification System:** The system of cooperation and interdependence extends across social strata. Different classes and occupational groups rely on one another to maintain social and economic stability. For example, in Western societies, the middle class is often responsible for planning, organizing, and managing the activities of the working class. This relationship fosters integration, as both groups depend on each other to achieve large-scale economic and social objectives.
- **Power and Prestige as Tools for Social Coordination:** Parsons argued that disparities in power and prestige are necessary to coordinate and integrate a complex division of labor. In highly industrialized societies, certain individuals specialize in leadership, planning, and organization, while others execute these plans. This inevitably results in inequalities in power and prestige, but these disparities are considered essential for efficient societal functioning.
- **Stratification Benefits Society as a Whole:** Parsons maintained that inequality in power and prestige benefits all members of society, as it ensures the effective coordination of resources and labor. The ranking system, driven by shared values, ultimately serves the collective interest.

2.4.2 Criticism of Parsons' Theory of Social Stratification

Parsons' theory has faced considerable criticism, particularly from Marxist scholars who challenge the notion that stratification fosters social integration. Key criticisms include:

1. **Stratification Generates Conflict, Not Integration:** Marxists argue that social stratification is not based on shared values but rather on economic power. Instead of promoting societal unity, it deepens divisions by creating hierarchical structures where the wealthy and powerful exploit the lower classes.
2. **Economic Factors, Not Values, Determine Stratification:** According to Marxist theory, stratification is not a result of cultural values but is rooted in economic inequalities. Those who control the means of production—such as land, industries, and financial institutions—dictate the terms of stratification, often to their advantage.

3. **Exploitation and Class Domination:** Marxists contend that the ruling class, or the "haves," dominates society and systematically exploits the "have-nots." This system is maintained through economic control, political influence, and ideological manipulation, ensuring the continued subjugation of the working class.
4. **Stratification is a Source of Social Instability:** Rather than promoting harmony, social stratification fosters tension and conflict between different social groups. Workers and marginalized populations frequently resist the structures imposed upon them, leading to struggles for social justice, labor rights, and economic equality.
5. **Inequality is Not Functional, But Oppressive:** While Parsons viewed inequality as necessary for social organization, critics argue that it primarily benefits the elite while suppressing opportunities for the lower classes. The rigid nature of stratification limits social mobility and prevents a fair distribution of resources.
6. **Stratification Perpetuates Systemic Inequalities:** Marxists assert that stratification is not a neutral ranking system based on merit but a mechanism of social control that reproduces existing power hierarchies. The wealthy and powerful use their status to maintain dominance over political, economic, and cultural institutions, further entrenching inequality.

Parsons' theory presents a functionalist view of stratification, emphasizing its role in maintaining social order and integration. He argued that stratification emerges from shared values, ensuring that individuals who contribute the most to societal goals receive higher rewards. However, his perspective has been heavily criticized for overlooking the exploitative and conflict-ridden nature of stratification. While functionalists view stratification as a necessary and beneficial system, Marxist critics highlight its role in perpetuating inequality and social division. Ultimately, the debate surrounding social stratification continues to shape sociological discourse, reflecting the complexities of hierarchy, power, and social justice in human societies.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Parsons argument suggests that stratification is an part of all human societies.

Q2. Stratification is result of unequal wealth, power and

2.5 SUMMARY

Stratification ensures that the most capable individuals occupy positions essential for the functioning of society by providing incentives such as higher rewards, prestige, and authority. This system, proponents argue, motivates individuals to develop their talents and skills, ultimately benefiting the collective structure of society.

However, critics challenge this perspective, contending that stratification creates more harm than good by institutionalizing inequality. They argue that unequal access to resources and opportunities prevents a fair competition for high-status roles, often privileging those from already dominant social backgrounds. Furthermore, the concentration of power among elites leads to systemic exploitation, where policies and institutions are designed to maintain existing hierarchies rather than promote

genuine meritocracy. Additionally, stratification reinforces social divisions, fostering alienation and weakening societal cohesion rather than enhancing stability.

Despite these critiques, the functionalist perspective remains influential in sociological discourse. It provides a framework for understanding how societies organize themselves and why certain roles receive greater recognition and rewards. However, a nuanced approach is necessary—one that acknowledges both the functional aspects of stratification and its potential drawbacks in perpetuating systemic inequalities.

Glossary

- **Functionalism:** A theoretical perspective that views all aspects of society as interconnected, serving essential roles in ensuring the long-term stability and survival of the social system.
- **Social Inequality:** The uneven distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges among different social groups, leading to disparities in wealth, power, and status.
- **Social Stratification:** The hierarchical organization of individuals within a society based on socio-economic aspects like wealth, prestige, and authority, leading to structured patterns of inequality.
- **Values:** Cultural ideals that define what is considered important, desirable, and worthy of pursuit within a society, shaping individual and collective behaviour.

2.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES:

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Some Principles of Stratification

A2. Sufficient

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Inevitable

A2. Prestige

2.8 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READINGS

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2.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Explain Parsons' functionalist perspective on social stratification.
- (ii) Provide a critical analysis of Davis and Moore's functionalist theory of social stratification.
- (iii) Describe the functionalist theory of social stratification and support your discussion with relevant examples.

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UNIT- 3

CONFLICT THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: MARX AND WEBER

STRUCTURE

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Learning Objectives
- 3.3 Theory of Social Stratification: Karl Marx
 - 3.3.1 Theory of Class Struggle
 - 3.3.2 Criticism of Marx's Theory of Social Stratification
- Self-Check Exercise-1
- 3.4 Theory of Social Stratification; Max Weber
 - 3.4.1 Weber's Differences with Marx
 - 3.4.2 Weber's Concept of Status
 - 3.4.3 Weber's Concept of Party
- Self-Check Exercise-2
- 3.5 Summary
- 3.6 Glossary
- 3.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 3.8 References/Suggested Readings
- 3.9 Terminal Questions

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Conflict theorists contend that social stratification is not an essential function of society but a system that sustains inequality, serving the interests of dominant groups while disadvantaging marginalized populations. From this perspective, stratification is not a system that rewards merit but rather one that maintains power structures, ensuring that those at the top continue to control resources while those at the bottom remain disadvantaged.

One of the key criticisms posed by conflict theorists is that stratification creates systemic barriers that prevent fair competition. Individuals from privileged backgrounds have access to better education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, reinforcing their dominance in society. Conversely, those in lower socioeconomic positions often struggle to break free from the cycle of poverty due to structural limitations rather than a lack of ability or effort. This results in a rigid social hierarchy where capital and authority remain concentrated among a select few.

Max Weber and Karl Marx are two prominent scholars associated with the perspective of conflict on stratification. Marx viewed stratification primarily through an economic lens, arguing that capitalist civilizations are separated into two main classes: the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production)

and the proletariat (workers). According to Marx, the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat by extracting surplus value from their labor while paying them minimal wages. This exploitation leads to class conflict, which he believed would ultimately result in a revolution and the establishment of a classless society.

Max Weber expanded on Marx's analysis by introducing a multidimensional approach to stratification. He asserted that social stratification is influenced not only by economic factors but also by status (social prestige) and power (political authority). Unlike Marx, Weber believed that these three dimensions could intersect in complex ways, leading to a more nuanced understanding of social hierarchy. For example, individuals in high-status professions, such as academics or religious leaders, may wield considerable influence despite lacking significant wealth.

From a conflict theory standpoint, stratification is inherently divisive and exploitative rather than integrative or beneficial. It reinforces disparities in wealth, power, and privilege, creating systemic inequalities that hinder social mobility. While functionalists argue that stratification ensures societal stability, conflict theorists maintain that it perpetuates injustice and limits opportunities for those at the bottom. Consequently, addressing these inequalities requires structural changes that promote greater economic and social equity.

3.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Comprehend the concept and significance of conflict theories in understanding social stratification.
- Analyze the fundamental principles of Karl Marx's perspective on social stratification.
- Critically assess the limitations and critiques of Marx's theory of stratification.
- Explain Max Weber's multidimensional approach to social stratification and its implications.

3.3 Karl Marx's Theory of Social Stratification

Karl Marx was among the first scholars to systematically examine social stratification, though his primary focus was on critiquing capitalism rather than formulating a distinct theory of stratification. His views on social inequality were shaped by his study of 19th-century European society, where he observed that all societies, except primitive ones, were structured into classes based on economic disparities. According to Marx, these economic inequalities serve as the foundation of social stratification, arising from unequal access to the means of production.

Marx's critique of capitalism acknowledged the complexity of stratification, recognizing the presence of multiple social classes across different societies. However, he argued that class structures would eventually become polarized into two primary groups—the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who rely on selling their labor to survive. He believed class conflict would emerge when the proletariat became conscious of their exploitation, leading to organized resistance. Marx maintained that stratification would continue as long as class divisions persisted and that true social equality could only be achieved when the proletariat gained control over the means of production.

Marx's theory of stratification provides a framework to explain:

- **The Basis of Stratification:** Economic inequality, driven by private ownership of production.
- **The Structure of Stratification:** Class divisions intensify due to wealth and power accumulation.
- **The Consequences of Stratification:** The exploitation of the working class fuels social conflict and eventually leads to the collapse of capitalism.
- **The Universality and Desirability of Stratification:** Stratification is not a necessary or permanent feature of society; rather, it is a product of historical economic systems.

From a Marxist perspective, stratification is not an integrative system but a tool of oppression, where one class dominates another. Unlike functionalist theories that view stratification as necessary for social stability, Marxism considers it a mechanism of exploitation that benefits the ruling class at the expense of the working majority. Marx argued that society has evolved through different economic structures, each defined by distinct forms of stratification:

1. **Primitive Communism:** Early human societies were classless, as people shared resources collectively.
2. **Ancient Society:** Based on slavery, where masters owned slaves as property and controlled their labor.
3. **Feudal Society:** Characterized by serfs working under feudal lords, with land ownership as the primary source of power.
4. **Capitalist Society:** The modern industrial system in which the bourgeoisie owns the means of production, while the proletariat relies on selling their labor for wages.

In each of these stages, society was divided into a dominant ruling class and a subordinate working class. Marx believed that this class struggle was the driving force behind historical change.

3.3.1 Theory of Class Struggle

Class struggle is central to Marx's analysis of social stratification. He famously stated that "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle." He argued that every society (except communism) is characterized by inherent class conflicts arising from economic disparities.

Core Elements of Class Struggle

1. **Development of the Proletariat:** Capitalism creates a working class with shared economic hardships, fostering a collective class consciousness.
2. **Importance of Property:** A person's relationship to the means of production determines their class status. The bourgeoisie controls resources, while the proletariat owns only their labor.
3. **Economic and Political Power:** The ruling class uses political institutions to maintain its dominance and suppress the working class.
4. **Polarization of Classes:** Capitalism leads to the concentration of wealth among a small elite while impoverishing the majority, increasing class antagonism.
5. **Theory of Surplus Value:** Capitalists profit by extracting surplus value from workers, forcing them into exploitative labor conditions.
6. **Pauperization:** With continued exploitation, workers become increasingly impoverished, while capitalists accumulate greater wealth.

7. **Alienation:** Workers become estranged from their labor, their products, and their own humanity, leading to social discontent.
8. **Class Solidarity and Conflict:** As awareness of inequality grows, the working class unites against the ruling class, leading to revolutionary struggle.
9. **Revolution:** A proletarian uprising dismantles capitalist structures and redistributes power.
10. **Dictatorship of the Proletariat:** Temporary working-class rule abolishes private property and class divisions.
11. **Communist Society:** The final stage, where class distinctions disappear, and collective ownership replaces private control of resources.

Marx believed that capitalism contained inherent contradictions that would eventually lead to its collapse, resulting in a socialist revolution that would pave the way for a classless, communist society.

3.3.2 Criticism of Marx's Theory of Stratification

Despite its influence, Marx's theory has faced several criticisms:

- **Oversimplification of Class Structure:** Marx's prediction of class polarization into only two groups ignores the complexities of modern class structures, including the middle class.
- **Economic Determinism:** His theory primarily attributes social change to economic factors, neglecting cultural, political, and ideological influences.
- **Failure to Predict the Evolution of Capitalism:** Contrary to Marx's predictions, capitalism has adapted and survived through welfare policies, labor rights, and economic reforms.
- **Limited Applicability Beyond Western Societies:** Marx's analysis was based on industrial Europe and does not fully explain class structures in non-Western societies with different social and cultural dynamics.
- **Revolutionary Change Has Not Always Followed Class Struggle:** While class conflict exists, many capitalist societies have evolved without violent revolutions, contradicting Marx's deterministic outlook.

Karl Marx's theory of social stratification remains one of the most significant critiques of capitalist societies. His emphasis on economic inequality, class struggle, and the exploitative nature of capitalism provides a powerful lens to understand social divisions. Despite criticisms, Marx's insights continue to shape debates on inequality, labor rights, and economic justice, making his theory a cornerstone of sociological thought.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. According to Marx which of the following is not one of the epoch of development of Western Society?

- (A) Primitive Communism (B) Feudal Society (C) Capitalist Society
(D) Asian Society

Q2. In which of the following processes does a worker become alienated from themselves, the production process, the product of their labor, their fellow workers, and humanity as a whole?

(A) Antagonism

(B) Alienation

(C) Pauperisation

(D) Revolution

3.4 Max Weber's Theory of Social Stratification

Max Weber, like Karl Marx, was a German sociologist who analyzed social stratification. While both scholars viewed class in economic terms, Weber's approach was more multidimensional. He argued that class divisions emerge in market economies where individuals compete for economic resources. However, unlike Marx, he did not see economic ownership as the sole determinant of stratification. Instead, he introduced a more complex model that included class, status, and power.

Weber's Perspective on Class

Weber defined class as a group of individuals who share a similar position in the market economy, which influences their economic opportunities and life chances. He emphasized that a person's "class situation" is directly tied to their "market situation," meaning that access to economic rewards is determined by an individual's ability to sell their labor, skills, or resources. This, in turn, affects their ability to access desirable social goods such as education, healthcare, and housing.

Although Weber agreed with Marx that the ownership of the means of production was a critical factor in social stratification, he further differentiated between various propertyless groups. Unlike Marx's binary division of bourgeoisie and proletariat, Weber highlighted that different skills and services carry distinct market values. For example, professionals, managers, and administrators often receive higher wages due to the demand for their expertise.

Weber identified four primary class groupings in capitalist societies:

- **The Propertied Upper Class**
- **The Propertyless White-Collar Workers**
- **The Petty Bourgeoisie**
- **The Manual Working Class**

3.4.1 Weber's Differences with Marx

Weber acknowledged that social stratification is exploitative, but he disagreed with Marx on several key aspects:

1. **Basis of Stratification:** While Marx viewed class as the sole determinant of social hierarchy, Weber argued that stratification is based on three dimensions:
 - **Class (Economic Resources):** People are stratified based on wealth and economic opportunity.
 - **Status (Prestige and Social Honor):** Some groups gain higher prestige irrespective of their economic status. For example, Brahmins in India enjoy high status regardless of their financial position.
 - **Power (Political Influence):** Political authority and organizational control are independent dimensions of stratification. Some people may lack wealth but still wield significant power (e.g., political leaders, bureaucrats).
2. **Structure of Social Stratification:** Weber rejected Marx's notion of class polarization. He believed that rather than reducing to just two conflicting classes, modern capitalist societies show

diversification, especially with the expansion of the middle class. White-collar workers, professionals, and skilled workers maintain distinct market positions, preventing the sharp class conflicts that Marx predicted.

3. **Consequences of Stratification:** Weber acknowledged that stratification leads to conflict, but he argued that this conflict may not always be revolutionary. Instead, it often manifests through workplace resistance, strikes, or political bargaining rather than large-scale revolutions. Unlike Marx, he asserted that a classless society is unlikely to ever exist, as disparities in power and prestige would persist even in socialist or communist systems.
4. **Beyond Economic Determinism:** While Marx argued that economic power determines political power, Weber contended that political power could exist independently. For example, religious leaders, bureaucrats, or political figures can wield power without necessarily owning significant economic resources.

3.4.2 Weber's Concept of Status

In addition to class, Weber emphasized the role of **status groups** in social stratification. Unlike class, which is determined by economic standing, status is based on social honor and prestige. A status group consists of individuals who share a similar **status situation**, meaning they receive comparable levels of social recognition.

- **Status and Group Identity:** Members of a status group are typically more conscious of their collective identity than those in a class group. For instance, aristocrats may recognize their shared heritage, while professionals like doctors and lawyers form exclusive social circles based on educational credentials.
- **Status in Traditional Societies:** Weber pointed to the caste system in India as the most rigid form of status stratification, where individuals inherit their social prestige and are restricted in social mobility.
- **Positive and Negative Social Honor:** Some groups enjoy **positive social honor** (e.g., professionals, aristocrats), while others face **negative social honor** (e.g., historically marginalized communities like the Dalits in India or Jews in medieval Europe).
- **Linkage Between Class and Status:** In many cases, class and status are interrelated, but they do not always align perfectly. The **nouveaux riches** (newly wealthy individuals) may be financially successful but still excluded from elite social circles due to their background or manners. Similarly, high-status groups may lack wealth but retain social prestige (e.g., nobility in Europe).

3.4.3 Weber's Concept of Party

Weber introduced **parties** as a third dimension of social stratification, distinct from class and status. He defined parties as organized groups that seek to acquire and exercise power.

- **Class and Status Influence on Parties:** While many parties represent class or status interests, this is not always the case. Some political parties cut across class and status lines to advance broader social goals.
- **Example of Cross-Cutting Interests:** Civil rights organizations in the U.S., such as the NAACP, represent both a racial status group and economic class interests. Similarly, political movements

may unite individuals from different economic backgrounds around common ideological or nationalistic concerns.

- **Weakening Class Solidarity:** The presence of diverse status groups within a class weakens class unity and makes the development of collective class consciousness less likely. Unlike Marx, who saw political parties as an extension of class struggle, Weber argued that political power could emerge independently of economic or status-based factors.

Weber's approach to social stratification remains highly influential because it accounts for the complexity of modern societies. His theory offers a more nuanced understanding of inequality than Marx's economic determinism by incorporating **economic resources, prestige, and political influence** as separate but interrelated sources of power.

- **Diversity in Social Hierarchy:** Weber's theory helps explain why individuals with similar economic positions do not always act as a unified class. The differences in social honor and political affiliations create fragmented interests.
- **Applicability Beyond Capitalism:** Unlike Marx, who linked class structures specifically to capitalism, Weber's framework applies to various social systems, including feudal, caste-based, and bureaucratic societies.
- **Relevance in Contemporary Society:** In modern democracies, political influence is not always dictated by economic class. A politician may wield power despite having modest wealth, and corporate leaders may lack political influence despite being wealthy.

Weber's theory of social stratification provides a multidimensional perspective on inequality, challenging Marx's economic reductionism. By recognizing the role of **class (economic position), status (social prestige), and power (political influence)**, Weber offers a broader framework for understanding social hierarchies. His insights remain relevant for analyzing class mobility, identity politics, and the persistence of social inequalities in contemporary societies.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Max Weber like Marx was a sociologist.

Q2. Economic inequality may be abolished by abolishing institution of

3.5 SUMMARY

Conflict theorists critique social stratification as a system that primarily benefits a select group rather than serving society as a whole. They argue that stratification perpetuates inequality, particularly between dominant economic elites and the working class. Karl Marx, a key figure in conflict theory, attributed social stratification to individuals' relationships with the means of production. According to Marx, class divisions were the fundamental social groups in any society, with economic structures determining social dynamics. His perspective emphasized the antagonism between the bourgeoisie (owners of production) and the proletariat (workers), seeing this struggle as the driving force of social change.

However, Max Weber presented a more nuanced analysis of stratification, arguing that social hierarchy is shaped not just by class but also by status and political power. Unlike Marx, Weber suggested that stratification is a multidimensional phenomenon where social class (economic position), status groups (social prestige), and political parties (influence and authority) interact in complex ways. He stressed the importance of examining these relationships within specific historical and cultural contexts, as stratification patterns evolve over time. Weber's approach acknowledges the fluidity of social structures and the diverse factors that contribute to social inequality, making it a more comprehensive framework for analyzing stratification in different societies.

3.6 Glossary

- **Bourgeoisie** – The group that owns and controls the means of production in a capitalist economy, holding economic and political power.
- **Capitalism** – An economic system based on private ownership of production and resources, where wealth is generated through market competition.
- **Class Conflict** – The ongoing struggle between social classes over wealth, power, and resources, often driving social and political transformations.
- **Conflict Theory** – A sociological perspective that interprets society as a continuous arena of competition, where power and domination, rather than consensus, determine social structures.
- **Proletariat** – The working class in a capitalist system, whose labor produces wealth for the bourgeoisie in exchange for wages.
- **Social Class** – A classification of individuals based on economic position, power, and social status, shaping their access to resources and opportunities.

3.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self- Check Exercise-1

A1. Asian society

A2. Alienation

Self- Check Exercise-2

A1. German

A2. Private Property

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3.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Critically examine Marx's views on social class and class conflict.
- (ii) How Marxian perspective on social stratification is different from that of Weberian **one** ?
- (iii) Elaborate on the Weber's theory of social stratification in detail.

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UNIT-4

STRATIFICATION IN PRE-MODERN SOCIETIES

Structure:

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Learning Objectives
- 4.3 Social Inequality in Pre-modern Societies
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 4.4 Social Stratification in Pre-modern Societies
 - 4.4.1 Phases in Human History
 - 4.4.2 Social Stratification in Pre-modern Societies in India
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
 - 4.5 The Rise of Social Stratification
 - 4.5.1 Forms of Social Stratification in Pre-modern Period
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 4.6 Summary
- 4.7 Glossary
- 4.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 4.9 References/Suggested Readings
- 4.10 Terminal Questions

4.1 Introduction

Throughout history, no society has ever achieved absolute equality. The notion of a perfectly egalitarian society, where individuals enjoy equal status in all aspects of life, remains an ideal rather than a reality. From the earliest human civilizations to modern complex societies, some form of social hierarchy has always existed. While the idea of equality has been a recurring aspiration, human societies have consistently exhibited disparities in power, prestige, and wealth. Despite efforts to create a just and equitable world, structural inequalities persist across different societies. The distribution of power is rarely uniform, as certain individuals or groups hold authority over others, influencing political, economic, and social structures. Similarly, wealth remains unequally divided, with disparities manifesting in the ownership of land, financial resources, and material assets. These inequalities are not merely incidental; they are often deeply entrenched in societal frameworks, shaped by historical, cultural, and economic factors.

Social stratification, the structured ranking of individuals and groups, varies across societies in its form and intensity. Some societies exhibit rigid class divisions, while others allow greater social mobility. However, complete parity remains unattainable. Even in societies that champion democratic values and social justice, disparities in access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power are evident.

The vision of an egalitarian society, where wealth and power are equally shared, challenges existing social structures. While efforts to reduce inequalities—through policies, welfare

programs, and advocacy—can bring about positive change, eliminating hierarchy entirely contradicts the inherent complexities of human society. The reality remains that inequality is deeply woven into the fabric of social life, influencing interactions, institutions, and individual experiences.

Thus, while striving for greater fairness and reducing disparities is a noble pursuit, the complete eradication of inequality appears more utopian than practical. Understanding the persistence of social stratification allows for a more realistic approach toward addressing systemic injustices and fostering a society that, while not entirely equal, ensures fairness and opportunity for all.

4.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter we will be able to know about:

- Social Stratification in pre-modern Societies
- Phases in Human history
- Forms of Social Stratification in Pre-modern Period

4.3 Social Inequality in Pre-modern Societies

Inequality is an inherent feature of all societies, transcending time and geography. While personal attributes such as physical strength, beauty, intelligence, and skills may contribute to disparities, structured patterns of inequality are primarily associated with individuals' social positions. Broadly, inequality can be classified into two categories: **natural inequality** and **social (man-made) inequality**.

1. Natural Inequality

Natural inequality arises from inherent biological differences among individuals, such as age, sex, height, and physical ability. These variations are not socially constructed but are an outcome of natural processes. While such disparities exist in all human populations, they do not necessarily translate into hierarchical divisions unless society assigns differential value to them.

2. Social (Man-Made) Inequality

Social inequality is a product of societal structures, norms, and institutions that create and perpetuate disparities among individuals and groups. Unlike natural inequality, which is biologically determined, social inequality is shaped by factors such as class, caste, gender, race, and access to resources. One of the most significant manifestations of social inequality is **social stratification**, which refers to the hierarchical arrangement of individuals and groups based on power, prestige, and wealth. Members of a particular social stratum share common interests and a sense of group identity, reinforcing the structured nature of inequality.

4.3.1 Social Stratification in Pre-modern Societies

In pre-modern societies, social stratification was deeply embedded in cultural and religious frameworks. A prominent example is the Hindu caste system, where society was divided into four Varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras), along with a fifth category—the untouchables—who were placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Such stratification influenced all aspects of life, from occupational roles to social interactions, and was often justified through religious and ideological beliefs.

Several classical thinkers have provided insights into social inequality and stratification:

1. Plato acknowledged that inequality is inevitable but proposed a class-structured society based on merit rather than inheritance. He envisioned three distinct classes:
 - Rulers (philosopher-kings)
 - Non-rulers (citizens who contribute to governance)
 - Auxiliaries (workers) who provide essential services to sustain society

His model emphasized equality of opportunity while accepting the inevitability of social hierarchy.

2. Aristotle analyzed inequality based on wealth and social status, categorizing people into:
 - The very rich
 - The very poor
 - The moderate class (which he viewed as essential for social stability)
3. St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine examined inequality through the lens of power, property, and prestige, reinforcing the role of religious and moral justifications in social hierarchy.
4. Machiavelli explored the relationship between rulers and the masses, emphasizing the necessity of governance structures to maintain social order. He argued that inequality is justified as long as individuals have equal opportunities to rise in the social hierarchy.
5. Thomas Hobbes viewed inequality as a consequence of human nature, with individuals constantly competing for power and resources. He proposed the Social Contract, where individuals surrender some freedoms to a sovereign authority in exchange for stability and security. However, if the ruler fails to maintain equity, the contract can be revoked.
6. Max Weber introduced a multidimensional perspective on social stratification, distinguishing between three forms of inequality:
 - Economic inequality, linked to different market positions (labor, money, and commodities)
 - Social honor (prestige), determining individuals' status in society
 - Political power, influencing governance and decision-making

Weber's framework highlights the complexity of social stratification, showing that economic disparities alone do not define social hierarchy; factors such as prestige and power also play a crucial role.

Social stratification has historically been based on rigid group hierarchies, such as caste and feudal systems. However, in contemporary societies, stratification is increasingly based on individual achievement rather than ascribed status. While traditional forms of inequality persist, modern social structures allow for greater mobility, with education and economic opportunities enabling individuals to move up or down the social hierarchy.

Although social inequality and stratification are often used interchangeably, the two concepts are distinct. Social inequality refers to disparities between individuals and groups, whereas social stratification specifically refers to the structured ranking of groups within society. While it is possible for inequality to exist without rigid social strata, stratification institutionalizes and reinforces disparities, making them a defining characteristic of social organization.

Despite efforts to reduce inequality, complete equality remains an unattainable ideal. However, understanding the dynamics of social stratification allows for more informed approaches to addressing systemic disparities and promoting greater social justice.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1..... inequality is concerned with reference to age, sex, height, weight etc.

Q2. Weber suggested types of market situations.

4.4 Phases in Human History

Human history can be divided into three phases:

- 1.pre-modern
- 2.modern
3. post modern

There is no definite beginning or end to each of these phases, rather they merge into one another, as each society reached these eras at different times. Western Europe is thought to have entered into the modern era around the 1600AD whilst the rest of the world remained pre modern at this time. Although now most industrialised countries are post-modern, a large proportion of the Third World remains modern or in some cases pre-modern. Main focus here would be on pre-modern stratification only.

The pre-modern era spans from before history and can be separated into two phases

1. Pre-Agrarian
- 2.Post-Agrarian

1. Pre-Agrarian: Society lives off the land, hunting and gathering. An example of a hunter-gatherer society that exists today is the Arctic foragers, who occupy the circumpolar region of the earth. Due to the lack of vegetation in this area of the world, most Arctic foragers are forced to live on a diet of meat. As meat is the main food source, many Arctic people are extremely mobile and specialise in different types of hunting and fishing, which vary with the seasons.
2. 2. Post-Agrarian: This was the time when people entered in settled life and start wealth and property accumulation and with the introduction of private property, society starts dividing in different stratas and the concept of agricultural labourer and agricultural master came into being, which in Latter stage converted into lords and serfs. Now along with food items available in before sentsed ST agriculture many other vegetarian items were added to food and it was advanced stage as compare to earlier.

4.4.1 Social Stratification in Pre-modern Societies in India

As it is depicted from above figure that pre-modern era was started with the inception of human civilization and lasted in 16th century with the introduction of renaissance which is also known as age of exploration. Though it includes many centuries started from inception of human civilization starting from food gathering and hunting, with the introduction of Ho Culture and agriculture based stratification, varna system and caste based system. Though earlier varna system was created to meet out four basic needs of society of that time, the needs were, Knowledge, Protection, Rearing and Service and to cater these needs four big classes were created and whole society was divided into four big segments and in later stage when concept of birth attached to it, then it become more institutionalised and become caste.

Social stratification even in pre-modern time was defined as the hierarchical ordering of people in a society differentiated according to their wealth, power, prestige and privilege. This hierarchical ordering comes about because as things people desire, aspire to and value are scarce, they have to compete for, and in the process they are not shared, acquired or distributed equally. In any society, it is possible to arrange people in a hierarchical order according to the levels of access to these desirable things. The idea of stratum immediately suggests that this hierarchical arrangement consists of different layers of society with some above or below others. While a completely egalitarian society is difficult to envisage, the degree of stratification generally depends on the level of technological development. As the technological base increases and its level rises, the situation changes with more goods in the system to be competed for.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The pre-modern era spans from before history and can be separated into phases.

Q2. . Western Europe is thought to have entered into the modern era around the AD.

4.5 The Rise of Social Stratification

The development of agriculture marked a significant turning point in human history, fundamentally altering the relationship between societies and their environments. As humans transitioned from a nomadic lifestyle to settled agricultural communities, they began reshaping their surroundings to support sustained food production. This shift not only ensured a more stable food supply but also laid the foundation for social inequality.

The emergence of **horticultural and pastoral societies** played a crucial role in this transformation. Horticultural societies relied on plant cultivation, while pastoral societies domesticated and bred animals. With a dependable food supply, populations grew, and not all members needed to engage in food production. This surplus of resources allowed individuals to pursue specialized roles beyond basic subsistence, leading to the **division of labor** and the formation of social hierarchies.

As agricultural productivity increased, people began engaging in trade, exchanging goods and services they could not produce themselves. This economic interdependence contributed to **the accumulation of wealth**, with some individuals or groups acquiring more resources than others. Those who controlled surplus food and trade networks gained greater influence, leading to disparities in power and social status. Over time, these economic differences became institutionalized, reinforcing **social stratification**.

The shift from simple farming tools to more advanced agricultural technology further intensified inequality. Innovations such as plows, irrigation systems, and permanent settlements allowed certain groups to amass land and wealth, solidifying their dominance. As a result, early agricultural societies saw the emergence of **elite classes**, often comprising landowners, religious leaders, and rulers who controlled resources and decision-making processes.

Thus, the rise of agriculture not only transformed human societies but also established the foundations of structured inequality. While it enabled economic and technological progress, it also created divisions that persist in various forms today. Understanding this historical evolution

provides insight into the origins of social hierarchy and the mechanisms that continue to shape societal structures.

According to The surplus production - left over resources - that agriculture made the social transformations that made up another dimension of the Neolithic revolution to Lenski (1984), "inequality is the result of increasing surplus, the average goods have an economic advantage relative to those with less goods because they have greater bargaining power, creating social inequality" He argues that the primary determinant of a society's level of productivity and in turn its resources is the level of its technology. Evident in the Neolithic transition was a gradual increase in productivity and consequently society's resources, centered on the technological advancements. This posits a correlational relationship between an increase in technological advancement and increase in productivity, implying an increase in goods and resource with surpluses, which consequently asserts a development of a mode of distribution.

How resources are distributed is then determined by two ways, by need-that is according to the basic needs of individuals and by privilege-dependent on the portion of surplus one receives According to Lenski, the distribution of privileges is further determined by power (surplus expropriation), Characteristic of the Neolithic transition are the key concepts argued by Lenski, hence one can explicitly assert the origins of social stratification in the Neolithic revolution.

Since the Neolithic Revolution began the era of permanent societies, the reliance on the limited amount of land gave way to political organisation and this political organisation caused social organization which was divided by amount of property and power. This created class distinctions, the people with more land and therefore more food were on the higher end of the social hierarchy, hence surplus expropriation may just be indirectly associated with stratification of people in society, whereas the acquisition of lands and ownership of agricultural production, have stratified society. Therefore, it was the beginning of distinct strata in Neolithic revolutionary societies. Hunting and gathering society is a society where the techniques of food production is still primitive and can be seen as the origin of the class system.

Social stratification has existed throughout history, taking different forms across societies. Various thinkers have offered explanations for why stratification emerges and persists. While some view it as a functional necessity, others argue that it is a means of maintaining elite control over resources and power.

The following perspectives highlight different aspects of pre-modern stratification:

1. **Racial and Cultural Factors in Stratification:** Differences in race and culture have historically contributed to stratification. In India, successive waves of racial and cultural invasions influenced the emergence of the caste system, leading to a rigid hierarchical structure. Similarly, in the United States, race has played a central role in the stratification system, shaping economic and social opportunities for different groups.
2. **Spengler's Theory of Scarcity and Stratification:** Oswald Spengler suggested that social stratification arises due to scarcity. When societies assign different functions and powers to individuals, they also create disparities in privileges and rewards. Certain positions, such as corporate leadership or government roles, become highly desirable due to their limited availability. Consequently, the competition for these scarce positions results in a hierarchical structure where individuals are ranked based on the rewards attached to their roles.

3. **Kingsley Davis and the Functional Necessity of Stratification:** Davis argued that stratification is essential for the proper functioning of society. To ensure that key positions are filled by competent individuals, societies must offer rewards as incentives. These rewards, distributed unequally, create a structured hierarchy where different positions carry different levels of prestige and compensation.
4. **Forms of Rewards and Their Role in Social Inequality:** Davis identified three types of rewards that contribute to stratification:
 - **Economic incentives** (wealth and material benefits)
 - **Aesthetic incentives** (comfort and luxury)
 - **Symbolic incentives** (status, self-respect, and recognition)

The unequal distribution of these rewards leads to social inequality, reinforcing the stratification system.

5. **Institutionalized Inequality and Its Justification:** Davis further argued that social inequality is an **unconsciously evolved mechanism** that ensures the most critical roles are filled by the most qualified individuals. In his view, a certain level of institutionalized inequality is necessary for society's stability and efficiency.
6. **Criticism of the Functionalist View:** Not all sociologists accept the functionalist explanation of stratification. Critics argue that stratification is not simply about ensuring efficiency but rather about maintaining power. Those at the top of the hierarchy actively work to preserve their privileged positions. Instead of being a necessary system for society, stratification is seen as a tool used by elites to control resources and limit access to power.
7. **Elite Control and Social Exclusion:** Historically, ruling classes—such as chiefs, kings, aristocrats, and the upper class—have sought to secure their dominance by restricting entry into their ranks. This deliberate control over power and privileges ensures that they alone dictate societal structures. What may appear as a **functional necessity** is, in reality, a system of exclusion designed to protect elite interests.
8. **Class Divisions in Historical Context:** Social stratification has taken different forms over time. Various class structures have existed, such as:
 - **Slave societies** (slaves vs. slave owners)
 - **Feudal societies** (vassals vs. feudal lords)
 - **Capitalist societies** (workers vs. capitalists)

In India, class distinctions have been uniquely expressed through the caste system, where social status is ascribed rather than achieved. Pre-modern stratification was shaped by multiple factors, including race, scarcity of resources, functional needs, and power dynamics. While some theorists view stratification as necessary for social organization, others argue that it primarily serves the interests of the ruling elite. The historical development of class structures demonstrates that inequality has been a persistent feature of societies, often institutionalized to maintain existing hierarchies.

4.5.2 Forms of Social Stratification in Pre-modern period

Pre-modern is the period in society which came prior to Modernity. Modern society began in Europe after the introduction of industrial society and large scale production. This piece will

examine pre-modern society and discuss why the study of this era is important for sociology. In short, all these pre-modern division of societies including Indian society can be divided as follows:

1. Food gathering and Hunting Stage
2. Ho culture and Initiation of Agriculture
3. Varna System
4. Caste System

1. **Food gathering and Hunting Stage:** Societies were primarily inclusively rely on hunting of animals, fishing or gather wild fruits, nuts or vegetables to survive. Until human began to domesticate plants and animals, societies remained hunting. They had a simple system of stratification; the headman of the hunting herd was the chief and privileged and having the responsibility to take care of his whole herd and he ensure equal distribution among all whatever was hunt. The second strata was of experts of hunting who used different weapons, instruments during hunting and the last strata was all other members of that herd. So, it can be called beginning of social stratification though it was not clearly visible. Even today some tiny fractions of world's population support themselves in such manner and they survive even today in isolated areas; such as deserts, the frozen tundra or in rainforests. Given the close relationship between hunter-gatherers and the irnatural environment, hunting and gathering tribes such as the Bushmenand the Pygmiesmay provide valuable information for anthropologists seeking to understand the development of human social structures.

2. **Ho culture and Initiation of Agriculture:** It has been some 12,000 years since humans gave up their hunter-gatherer ways. They grasped the idea of saving and planting seeds from season to season, which meant that instead of constantly foraging for food, they could stay in one place. They were able to concentrate on building their communities and, at the same time, develop agricultural systems adapted to local climates that allowed them to survive and even flourish in the lands where they settled. In this respect, pre-modern societies can be characterised by a combination of economic, political and cultural circumstances. In pre-modern society, work was not highly specialised and the number of roles necessary to produce things were relatively small, therefore the division of labour was simple when compared to modern societies.

Most of the labour forces engaged in agricultural activity and produced food through subsistence farming. The majority of pre-industrial groups had standards of living not much above survival, meaning that the majority of the population were focused on producing only enough goods for means of survival. By the 18th century there was only around 30 percent of the population who engaged in agricultural activity, this enables us to gain some idea of the nature of modern society and the economic changes that took place as modern society developed. This era was the beginning of visible stratification and whole society divided into land owners, agriculture workers, produce purchasers, whole sellers, retailers etc. Though upto that the prime concern of people was only how to meet-out basic needs and can be considered as proto- type of class and there was no consideration for caste.

3. **Varna System:** The term *Varna* originates from Sanskrit and translates to *type, order, color, or class*. It is mentioned in ancient Brahminical texts such as the *Manusmriti* and other Hindu scriptures, where society was classified into four broad categories. However, it is important to note that the *Varna* system, in its original form, was distinct from the caste system (*Jati*), which emerged later.

According to Hindu mythological texts, the *Varna* of an individual was determined by the alignment of celestial bodies at the time of birth. This belief influenced decisions regarding one's profession, nature, and social role. The system was designed to fulfill the fundamental functional requirements of society.

The four *Varnas* created by Brahma, as per Hindu tradition, were:

1. Brahmins – Scholars, priests, and teachers responsible for knowledge and spiritual guidance.
2. Kshatriyas – Warriors and rulers tasked with governance and protection.
3. Vaishyas – Merchants and agriculturalists engaged in trade and economic activities.
4. Shudras – Laborers and service providers who assisted the other three groups.

Groups that belonged to these four categories were collectively known as *Savarna*. However, it is important to distinguish *Varna* from the *Jati* system, which was far more complex and nuanced in nature. While *Varna* was an overarching classification, *Jati* represented specific occupational and social groups within these broad divisions.

The origins of the *Varna* system can be traced back to the *Purusha Sukta* hymn of the *Rig Veda*, where it is metaphorically described as different parts of a cosmic being (*Purusha*). However, many scholars believe that this section of the *Rig Veda* was a later addition, possibly serving as a justification for the hierarchical social structure. Over time, the concept of *Varna* was expanded in texts like the *Manusmriti*, the *Mahabharata*, and various *Puranas*.

Despite its scriptural significance, Hindu texts do not unanimously support the *Varna* system. Several scriptures challenge or critique it, emphasizing moral and ethical conduct over birth-based distinctions.

Caste System

While both *Varna* and *Jati* have pre-modern origins, the caste system in its rigid form evolved significantly during the post-Mughal period and British colonial rule. The British administration institutionalized caste as a fundamental mechanism for governance, shaping it into the structure recognized today.

Prior to British intervention, Indian society had a more fluid caste system, where social mobility and occupational changes were relatively possible. However, during colonial rule, caste became a formalized category used for census classification and administrative purposes.

Until the 1881 Census of India, the term *Jati* was predominantly used to refer to social groups. It was only during British rule that the term *caste* was systematically employed in ethnographic studies. In the 1891 census, various sub-groups were classified into six occupational and racial categories, and subsequent censuses continued to expand these classifications.

British colonial administrators, according to historian Susan Bayly, applied principles similar to zoological and botanical classifications to categorize Indian society. The census rankings were based on perceived purity, occupational origins, and moral standing,

reinforcing hierarchical divisions. This rigid classification contributed to the deepening of caste-based inequalities and solidified a system that had previously been more flexible.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Who lays emphasis on the functional necessity of stratification.

- (A) Kingsley Davis (B) Max Weber (C) Karl Marx (D) Comte

Q2. The word 'Varna' has its origin in which language?

- (A) English (B) Roman (C) Sanskrit (D) Spanish

4.6 SUMMARY

On the basis of above description, it can be stated that when Varna based class oriented division of society mingled with birth and transformed from one generation to another and supported by administrative ruling class of that time, particularly during British regime it become caste. Earlier people were confined upto the fulfilment of basic needs but when people gets prosperity they have been institutionalised in caste based institution. Starting from pre-modern time to date, caste has been a reality of Indian society and working as an axial around which whole Indian society revolves. All aspects of Indian society is being affected today by caste and particularly politics makes it worse. To a sizeable extend, on the basis of anthropological and sociological theories of social stratification in pre-modern societies it can be concluded that pre-modern stratified societies were divided into labour, warriors, and peasants with a thought that societies should produce enough food to support lives of people. A stratified society has reached its long-run equilibrium. One day, the producers will revolt against the elite and kill all the warriors. For simplicity, assume that the revolution does not impose any direct costs on producers, and no producer is killed during the revolution.

4.7 GLOSSARY

- **Inequality-** Difference between groups in society because one has more money, advantages etc. than the other.
- **Exploitation-** The act of using someone unfairly for your own advantage.
- **Social Contract-** an implicit agreement among the members of a society to cooperate for social benefits.

4.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Natural

A2. Three

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Two

A2. 1600 AD

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Kingsley Davis

A2. Sanskrit

4.9 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READINGS

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4.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Discuss in detail the stratification in Pre-modern societies.
- (ii) What are the different phases in human history?

BLOCK-II

UNIT- 5

SLAVERY AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

STRUCTURE

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Learning Objectives
- 5.3 Meaning and Definitions of Slavery
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 5.4 Types of Slavery
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 5.5 History of Slavery
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 5.6 Slavery as a form of Social Stratification
 - Self-Check Exercise-4
- 5.7 Summary
- 5.8 Glossary
- 5.9 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 5.10 References/Suggested Readings
- 5.11 Terminal Questions

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The division of society into classes or strata, forming a hierarchy of prestige and power, is a nearly universal characteristic of social structures. Throughout history, this phenomenon has intrigued philosophers and social theorists. However, it was only with the rise of modern social sciences that it became a subject of systematic analysis and critique.

Sociologists typically identify four major forms of social stratification: slavery, estates, caste, and social class. While all societies exhibit some level of stratification, the criteria for categorizing individuals differ widely across cultures and historical contexts. Social stratification has evolved in multiple forms over time, including slavery, the estate system, indentured servitude, the caste system, and the class system.

Slavery is one of the most extreme forms of stratification, where certain individuals hold absolute power over others, treating them as property. Enslaved individuals are denied basic rights and are subjected to coercion, exploitation, and various forms of mistreatment. In this system, society is divided into two distinct groups: the dominant class, which holds authority and control, and the subordinate class, which is deprived of autonomy and forced into servitude due to a lack of power and social standing.

5.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Comprehend the concept and various definitions of slavery.
- Explore the origins and historical development of slavery.
- Analyze slavery as a form of social stratification.

5.3 MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF SLAVERY

Slavery is a system in which individuals are treated as property and are controlled by others regarding their living conditions and labor. Those subjected to slavery are often forced to work under harsh conditions, either without fair wages or without any compensation at all. This practice has existed throughout history across various civilizations, including the Greeks, Romans, Incas, and Aztecs.

Definitions of Slavery

Scholars and thinkers have provided various interpretations of slavery:

1. L.T. Hobhouse described slavery as a condition where individuals lose their personal identity and legal rights, becoming mere objects under the complete authority of their masters. They are denied participation in political processes and are compelled to work excessively under restrictive conditions.
2. H.J. Nieboer (correcting the name) argued that slavery originates primarily due to economic disparities between different social classes.
3. Collins Dictionary defines slavery as "a system by which people are owned by others as slaves."

Conditions of Slaves

Slavery functioned as an extreme form of social stratification, subjecting individuals to severe exploitation. The conditions of slaves were marked by several key aspects:

- **Absolute Control by Masters:** A slave was entirely dependent on their owner, who had unchecked authority over them, treating them as personal property.
- **Denial of Political Rights:** Unlike free individuals, slaves had no political representation or legal autonomy.
- **Compulsory Labor:** Forced labor was an inherent aspect of slavery, making it a deeply oppressive institution.

Evolution of Slavery and Modern Parallels

Karl Marx's concept of the ancient mode of production is rooted in the existence of two distinct classes: masters and slaves. Over time, the nature of this relationship evolved, particularly during the medieval and modern periods. While legal slavery has been abolished, exploitative labor practices persist in various forms, such as bonded labor. Despite being outlawed by welfare states, bonded labor continues to reflect the underlying inequalities and coercive relationships seen in historical slavery.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Slavery as a system of social stratification was very

Q2. The master's power over his slave is

5.4 TYPES OF SLAVERY

Slavery manifests in different forms worldwide, but all share fundamental characteristics: individuals are compelled to work against their will and are unable to leave their situation. Those subjected to slavery often endure physical, psychological, or emotional abuse, as well as deception and coercion. Any prior consent to work becomes irrelevant once the person is held against their will and exploited.

Slavery can be categorized into the following types:

1. **Chattel Slavery:** This is the most traditional and severe form of slavery, where individuals are regarded as the personal property of their owners. They can be bought, sold, and inherited indefinitely. Although this practice has been abolished worldwide and is no longer legally recognized by any government, it was historically prevalent in societies such as the United States and Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries.
2. **Bonded Labor:** In this system, individuals become laborers to repay a debt, often under exploitative conditions. Initially, the agreement may seem voluntary, but many workers find themselves trapped in an unending cycle due to unfair contract terms that prevent them from ever settling their debt. This form of labor exploitation is still practiced in some regions despite legal prohibitions.
3. **Forced Labor:** This refers to any form of work that individuals are coerced into performing against their will. Those subjected to forced labor are treated as commercial property, similar to how enslaved African Americans were regarded in pre-Civil War America. This form of slavery persists today, with people being forced into labor due to intimidation, threats, or abuse of power.
4. **Child Slavery:** This involves the forced exploitation of children under the age of 18 through coercion, fraud, or violence. Children may be subjected to hazardous labor, debt bondage, prostitution, recruitment into armed groups, or domestic servitude. Despite global efforts to eliminate child labor, it remains prevalent in various industries.
5. **Domestic Servitude:** This form of slavery occurs in private households, where workers are controlled through force, fraud, or coercion. Victims are often isolated, unable to leave due to language barriers, confiscated identification documents, or restricted mobility. Many domestic workers are unaware of their rights, making them highly vulnerable to exploitation.

The Legacy and Abolition of Slavery

Slavery represents one of the most extreme forms of social inequality, where individuals are stripped of their basic rights and freedoms. The formal abolition of slavery occurred in 1838, following years of activism and legal reforms. Many sociologists played a crucial role in reshaping public perception, advocating for an egalitarian society. While early perspectives often framed slaves as helpless victims, C. Wright Mills argued that they were key figures in history, whose struggles contributed to significant social change.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Which is the most traditional form of slavery where people bound to become master's personal property?

- (A) Chattel (B) Bonded (C) Forced (D) Child

Q2. Which term describes slaves that are forced to work in 'extremely hidden workplaces: private homes?

- (A) Child labour (B) Domestic Servitude (C) Forced labour (D) Bonded labour

5.5 HISTORY OF SLAVERY

The exact origins of slavery are difficult to determine, as it predates written historical records. Evidence suggests that slavery did not exist in early hunter-gatherer societies. The earliest documented references to slavery can be found in the *Code of Hammurabi* from Mesopotamia, indicating that slavery had already been an established practice for thousands of years by the time it was recorded.

Slavery in the Ancient World

As societies became more structured and urban centers developed, the practice of slavery expanded. Many historians believe slavery first emerged in Sumer and later spread to Greece and other parts of Mesopotamia. In contrast, slavery in the Ancient East—particularly in China and India—appeared much later, around the Qin Dynasty in 221 BCE. Some scholars debate whether slavery existed in early India, as ancient Sanskrit lacks a direct term for "slave."

Slavery During the Middle Ages

The nature of slavery underwent significant changes during the Middle Ages due to frequent wars, raids, and conquests. The capture and enslavement of people from conquered regions became widespread, leading to large-scale forced migrations. Many enslaved individuals were transported across vast distances and forced to work for their captors in unfamiliar lands.

Slavery in the Americas

The transatlantic slave trade is one of the most well-documented periods of slavery. The first recorded instance of African slaves being brought to the Americas occurred in 1619, when 20 African men arrived in Jamestown. However, historians debate whether this marked the official beginning of legalized slavery in the colonies, as indentured servitude was already practiced in the region. By the late 17th century, the Royal African Slave Company had intensified the trade, with enslaved Africans being transported in increasing numbers.

While much of the focus on American slavery centers on the United States, the majority of enslaved Africans were actually sent to the Caribbean to work on sugar and coffee plantations. European colonies depended heavily on African labor for their agricultural economies. Additionally, a significant number of enslaved people were taken to Brazil and Spanish-controlled territories for both agricultural and domestic work.

Between the 17th and 18th centuries, millions of Africans were forcibly removed from their homeland and enslaved in the American colonies. They played a critical role in the production of cash crops such as tobacco and cotton. By the mid-19th century, growing tensions over slavery, coupled with America's westward expansion and the rise of the abolitionist movement, led to deep divisions that ultimately culminated in the Civil War.

Life Under Slavery in the Southern United States

By the antebellum period, enslaved individuals made up about one-third of the Southern population. Most were forced to work on plantations or small farms, with the majority of slave owners possessing fewer than 50 slaves. Slaveholders implemented strict controls to maintain power, often prohibiting enslaved people from learning to read or write. Their daily lives were governed by restrictive codes that limited their movements and personal freedoms.

Enslaved women were frequently subjected to sexual exploitation by their owners, while those who demonstrated obedience were sometimes granted privileges. In contrast, those who resisted were met with harsh punishments. A strict social hierarchy among enslaved individuals—ranging from household servants and skilled artisans to field laborers—was enforced to prevent collective resistance.

While slave marriages had no legal recognition, many enslaved people formed families. Although some slave owners encouraged these family structures, they did not hesitate to separate families through sales and forced relocations. By the time of the Civil War, more than 4 million enslaved individuals lived in the United States, with 95% residing in the South.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The majority of African slaves were concentrated in the to work on plantations.

Q2. is still thought to be the birthplace of slavery, which grew out of Sumer into Greece and other parts of ancient Mesopotamia.

5.6 SLAVERY AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Slavery is a form of extreme social hierarchy in which individuals are owned by others and treated as property. Historically, people became enslaved due to debt, as punishment for crimes, or as prisoners of war. According to Gerda Lerner, women were among the first to be enslaved through warfare, valued for their reproductive capabilities, labor, and as sexual commodities. Slavery could be either temporary or permanent, and in some societies, it was not necessarily passed down to future generations.

The earliest and most fundamental form of social stratification was slavery. A slave was regarded by both societal norms and legal systems as the property of their owner. The master had absolute authority over the enslaved individual, who was deprived of social, economic, and political rights. As a result, slavery represented one of the most extreme forms of inequality. The foundation of slavery was

primarily economic, as forced labor played a crucial role in sustaining the wealth and power of slave-owning elites.

The Nature of Slavery

Historian Moses Finley defined slavery as a system where a person is legally and socially viewed as the possession of another individual. Unlike other forms of labor, what distinguished slavery was not the nature of the work but the fact that the enslaved person was legally owned. Enslaved individuals held the lowest status in society, while free individuals ranked higher because they were not under someone else's ownership.

The low status of enslaved people was closely tied to the economic and power dynamics inherent in the system. While being a slave was considered degrading, it was not necessarily a reflection of an individual's personal worth. Slavery was often a result of war, with captives being forced into servitude. Finley emphasized that in times of war or crisis, no person, regardless of their status or wealth, was entirely safe from enslavement.

Slavery and the Transatlantic Trade

Slaves typically owned no property and had little to no power. To meet labor demands, European colonists initially attempted to enslave Indigenous peoples, but these efforts largely failed. They then turned to Africa, where enslaved people were forcibly transported to the Americas by European powers, including the British, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and French. Over time, American slave owners began to institutionalize slavery as a lifelong condition and made it inheritable, allowing enslaved people's children to be bought, sold, or traded.

Slavery in the United States was distinct in several ways. Unlike many other regions, it had a relatively balanced male-to-female ratio. Enslaved individuals in the U.S. often lived longer than those in other slave societies, and reproduction was common, resulting in a growing enslaved population. In contrast to other countries where enslaved individuals could eventually gain freedom by repaying debts, slavery in the U.S. was largely permanent. Before the Civil War, very few enslaved individuals were granted freedom.

The Legal and Modern Aspects of Slavery

Slavery was codified into law in many societies, including the United States. Although many governments have since outlawed slavery, forms of enslavement still persist in certain parts of the world. Reports indicate that human trafficking, forced labor, and child exploitation remain significant issues in regions such as Sudan, Mauritania, and parts of Africa, Asia, and South America.

Some sociologists argue that slavery should be viewed as an industrial system rather than a stratification system. However, this perspective is debated. While stratification typically involves different ranks within a free society, slavery creates a rigid divide between enslaved and free populations. Slavery has historically coexisted with other forms of stratification, such as feudalism and caste systems. Marxist theorists classify enslaved individuals, serfs, and wage laborers as "direct producers" whose labor sustains economic structures.

Slavery in Greece, Rome, and the U.S.

Two of the most well-known examples of systemic slavery occurred in Ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in the Southern United States during the 18th and 19th centuries. Historian H.J. Nieboer outlined key characteristics of slavery:

1. Absolute Subjugation – Every slave was owned by a master, and this ownership was legally recognized. A slave's lack of autonomy was a defining feature of their status. Unlike the authority that one free person might hold over another, a master's power over a slave was nearly unlimited. Even when laws imposed restrictions, these were seen as modifications rather than essential changes to the system itself.
2. Political and Social Exclusion – Enslaved people had no political rights. They could not participate in governance or public decision-making.
3. Forced Labor – Slavery was characterized by compulsory labor. While free laborers had the choice to stop working, enslaved individuals were compelled to work under coercion and threat of punishment.

The Decline of Slavery

The foundation of slavery was primarily economic, with aristocratic classes sustaining themselves through the exploitation of enslaved labor. However, many historians argue that slavery ultimately declined due to its inefficiency. As economies evolved, forced labor proved less productive than other forms of labor organization.

In the ancient world, there was often a contradiction between viewing slaves as property and acknowledging their humanity. In both Greece and Rome, societies distinguished between foreign slaves and those enslaved within their own communities. Debt slavery, in particular, became a focus of reform. In Athens, the statesman Solon abolished debt slavery, while in Rome, philosophical movements such as Stoicism contributed to growing opposition to the practice.

Philosopher Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse observed that debtor slavery softened perceptions of slavery itself, as it blurred the lines between free and enslaved individuals. Over time, restrictions on a master's power—such as limiting physical punishment and recognizing certain rights for enslaved individuals—became more common. The Christian Church played a role in advocating for these reforms, particularly during the later years of the Roman Empire.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The first and earliest type of social stratification is

Q2. The enslavement of children for work and sex is also a problem in Africa, Asia, and

5.7 SUMMARY

Slavery represents a rigid and closed form of social stratification, where individuals at the lowest level have no control over their status or opportunities for advancement. A dominant group holds absolute power and ownership over an oppressed group that is denied access to resources and basic rights. Social mobility is nonexistent for enslaved individuals.

In this system, people are treated as property, bought and sold, and forced into labor. Enslaved individuals are deprived of political rights and exist in a subordinate position within society. The legal framework surrounding slavery has varied across different societies, but its fundamental nature remains

an extreme form of inequality. Slavery has historically been rooted in economic structures, particularly in agrarian societies, where enslaved individuals were considered valuable for their role in production.

5.8 GLOSSARY

- **Abolitionist Movement:** A social and political movement advocating for the immediate end of slavery and the abolition of racial discrimination and segregation.
- **Americas:** The landmass comprising North and South America, along with the surrounding islands.
- **Colony:** A territory that is either partially or fully controlled by a foreign power and settled by its people.
- **Slavery:** A hierarchical system in which individuals are owned by others and treated as property.
- **Social Stratification:** The classification of people into different social layers based on factors such as wealth, power, and prestige.

5.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Exploitative

A2. Unlimited

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Chattel

A2. Domestic Servitude

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Caribbean

A2. Sumeria

Self-Check Exercise-4

A1. Slavery

A2. South America

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5.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Provide a critical analysis of slavery as a system of social stratification.
2. Discuss the historical development of slavery as an institution across different civilizations.
3. Explain the exploitative characteristics of slavery within the framework of social stratification.

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UNIT- 6

CASTE AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Learning Objectives
- 6.3 Meaning and Definitions of Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 6.4 Origin of Caste System in India
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 6.5 Perspectives on Caste System
 - 6.5.1 G.S.Ghurye's Perspective on Caste System
 - 6.5.2 Louis Dumont's Perspective on Caste System
 - 6.5.3 Mutton's Perspective on Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 6.6 Functions of Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-4
- 6.7 Demerits of Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-5
- 6.8 Merits of Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-6
- 6.9 Summary
- 6.10 Glossary
- 6.11 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 6.12 References/Suggested Readings
- 6.13 Terminal Questions

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, humans have aspired to create an egalitarian society—one where all individuals are equal, free from social hierarchies, and receive resources based on their needs. However, in every known society, some form of division exists, making absolute equality unattainable.

The term "stratification" is derived from geology, where it denotes the layering of rocks. In sociology, it refers to the hierarchical arrangement of individuals within a society, where people are classified into different social layers based on factors such as wealth, power, and status. Among the world's societies, India is often considered one of the most stratified. The caste system is a distinct and deeply rooted form of social stratification in Indian society, dating back centuries. Almost every sociologist and

anthropologist studying India has examined its caste structure due to its complexity and enduring influence. This system has drawn global attention from scholars seeking to understand its unique characteristics.

The caste system is a hierarchical social structure that is traditionally characterized by endogamy (marriage within one's caste), hereditary transmission of social status and occupation, ritual ranking, and norms of purity and pollution that regulate social interactions. Its origins trace back to ancient Indian society, and despite social changes, aspects of this system persist in contemporary India.

While the caste system has historically played a dominant role in India's social fabric, urbanization, economic changes, and affirmative action policies have led to a decline in its economic significance. However, caste-based discrimination remains a pressing social issue. Studies indicate that caste-based inequalities are not limited to India but extend to caste-like divisions in other regions and communities. According to organizations like UNICEF and Human Rights Watch, caste-based discrimination affects around 250 million people worldwide.

6.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Comprehend the concept and key features of the caste system as a form of social stratification.
- Explain the origins and functions of the caste system.
- Analyze various sociological perspectives on the caste system.
- Evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of the caste system.

6.3 MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF CASTE SYSTEM

The term "caste" is derived from the Spanish word "casta," which translates to "breed," "race," or a collection of inherited traits. It was the Portuguese who first used this term to describe the social divisions in India, traditionally known as Varna Vyavastha or Jati Vyavastha. Over time, the English language adapted this term into "caste."

The primary purpose of this system was to structure societal life by categorizing individuals into groups and assigning them specific roles and statuses within the social hierarchy.

Definitions of Caste

Some of the definitions of caste are :

- (i) According to Arnold Green, "Caste is a system of stratification in which mobility up and down the Status ladder, at least ideally may not occur".
- (ii) According to Herbert Risley, "Class is a collection of families or group of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same heredity callings and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous communities".
- (iii) According to Charles Cooley, "When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste".

- (iv) According to E. Blunt, "Caste is an endogamous group bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary, imposing on its member certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse, either following a common traditional occupation or claiming a common origin and generally regarded as forming a single homogenous community".
- (v) According to MacIver and Page, "when status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then class takes the extreme form of caste".

Self-Check Exercise-1

Multiple Choice Questions:

Q1. Who said that "When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste".

- (A) MacIver and Page (B) E. Blunt (C) Charles Chooley (D) Arnold Green

Q2. Who defines Caste as "when status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then class takes the extreme form of caste".

- (A) Max Weber (B) Mazumdar (C) MacIver and Page (D) Herbert Risley

6.4 ORIGIN OF CASTE SYSTEM IN INDIA

Historically, an individual's caste in India determined their occupation, which remained fixed throughout their lifetime. Social mobility was restricted, and inter-caste interactions, including marriage, were largely forbidden, leading to a rigidly stratified society.

The caste system is often linked to Hinduism, with its roots in the Rig Veda, an ancient Hindu scripture that classifies society into four hierarchical categories known as Varnas—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Over time, an additional category emerged—the untouchables (Dalits), who were assigned the most stigmatized tasks, such as cleaning waste and handling dead animals. Dalits faced severe discrimination, including exclusion from temples and restricted access to public resources like water sources. Despite numerous attempts to eradicate untouchability, caste-based discrimination continues to persist in many forms.

The precise origins of the caste system remain uncertain, with multiple theories attempting to explain its development. Each theory offers a unique perspective, highlighting different historical, religious, and sociopolitical influences.

Theories on the Origin of Caste System

1. Traditional Theory

This theory, rooted in Hindu mythology, suggests that the system of caste was divinely ordained by Brahma, the originator of the universe. According to this belief, different castes originated from different parts of Brahma's body—Brahmins from his mouth, Kshatriyas from his arms, Vaishyas from his thighs, and Shudras from his feet. This symbolic explanation associates castes with specific societal roles, portraying the hierarchical structure as natural and unchangeable. Ancient texts, including the

Manusmriti, further reinforced this classification. However, critics argue that this theory lacks empirical evidence and is largely a theological justification for an unequal social order.

2. Political Theory

French scholar Nibey Dubais and Indian sociologist G.S. Ghurye suggested that the system of caste was a strategic construction of the Brahmins to maintain dominance over society. According to this perspective, the caste hierarchy was not an organic social structure but rather a mechanism to establish and sustain Brahminical supremacy. By positioning themselves at the top of the social order, Brahmins exercised control over religious, educational, and administrative institutions. This theory emphasizes caste as a political tool of social control rather than a naturally occurring phenomenon.

3. Religious Theory

This theory posits that caste distinctions emerged due to religious rituals and customs. In early Indian society, individuals associated with religious duties—such as priests and rulers—held superior positions, while those engaged in manual labor or impure tasks were relegated to lower castes. Furthermore, dietary restrictions played a crucial role in caste segregation. Initially, food-sharing was common, but as religious beliefs diversified and people began worshipping different deities, food taboos emerged, reinforcing caste divisions. This perspective highlights how religious orthodoxy contributed to the institutionalization of caste.

4. Occupational Theory

Proposed by Nesfield, this theory asserts that caste distinctions arose primarily due to occupational specialization. Individuals engaged in similar professions formed distinct groups, which eventually solidified into castes. Over time, occupations associated with intellectual and ritualistic roles were considered superior, leading to the formation of the Brahmin caste. Similarly, warriors and rulers became Kshatriyas, while traders and artisans formed the Vaishya class. Those performing labor-intensive or impure tasks were categorized as Shudras and Dalits. This theory provides a more functional explanation of caste, linking it to profitable and labor dynamics rather than heavenly origins.

5. Evolutionary Theory

According to Hutton, the caste system evolved gradually as an extension of existing social institutions. He argues that caste-based divisions existed even before the arrival of Aryans, but the Aryans reinforced and systematized them. Fear of ritual contamination played a significant role in shaping caste-based restrictions, particularly concerning physical contact and food sharing. This theory suggests that caste stratification emerged due to a combination of social, economic, and religious factors rather than a single historical event.

The caste system in India is a product of multiple overlapping factors rather than the result of a single cause. While religious texts provided mythological justifications, political and economic forces played a crucial role in institutionalizing caste hierarchy. Over time, social practices, occupational specialization, and fear of pollution further reinforced caste distinctions. Despite various reforms and legal measures, caste continues to influence many aspects of Indian society. A deeper understanding of these historical roots is essential to addressing caste-based discrimination and fostering social equality.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. is the most mutual form of discrimination that is established on the caste system in India.

Q2. originally .gave the name occupational theory, according to which castes in India developed as per the occupation of a person.

Q3. Different castes were born out of various body parts of

6.5 PERSPECTIVES ON CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system in India has been extensively analyzed by various scholars who have examined its historical evolution, societal role, and ideological underpinnings. Two prominent sociologists, G.S. Ghurye and Louis Dumont, have provided distinct perspectives on caste, contributing to a deeper understanding of its complexities.

5.5.1 G.S. Ghurye's Perspective on Caste System

G.S. Ghurye, one of the earliest sociologists to systematically study caste, published *Caste and Race in India* in the 1930s. His work remains a key reference for understanding caste dynamics. He approached caste from historical, comparative, and integrative perspectives. His comparative study of kinship in Indo-European cultures led him to argue that caste and kinship networks in India had parallels in other societies. He also believed that caste and kinship in India played a crucial role in integrating diverse ethnic and racial groups into a cohesive social structure.

Kinship and Caste Networks

According to Ghurye, the Gotra and Charana were kinship categories that defined lineage and rank. These names were derived from ancient sages, symbolizing spiritual rather than biological descent. Even outside family structures, similar relationships, such as the Guru-Shishya (teacher-disciple) tradition, reinforced hierarchical order. He emphasized that caste divisions were maintained through rules of endogamy (marrying within one's caste) and commensality (restrictions on food-sharing), which created an integrated yet stratified social system. Hindu religious texts, particularly the Dharmashastras, provided the moral and ritualistic framework for sustaining this order.

Characteristics of the Caste System

1. Segmental Division of Society

- Society was divided into distinct, birth-based social groups (castes), each with its own traditions, occupations, and status. Mobility between castes was restricted.

2. Hierarchy

- Castes were arranged in a rigid social order, with Brahmins at the top, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. While this structure remains rigid in rural areas, urbanization has led to some relaxation in caste hierarchies.

3. Restrictions on Social Interaction and Food Sharing

- Caste imposed strict dietary and social restrictions. For example, Brahmins could not accept food from lower castes, except when prepared in ghee (clarified butter). Water-sharing was also regulated.

4. Unequal Civil and Religious Privileges

- Higher castes enjoyed social and religious advantages, while lower castes faced discriminatory restrictions.

5. Occupational Heredity

- Professions were caste-based and inherited, limiting occupational mobility.

6. Endogamy (Marriage within Caste)

- Castes and sub-castes followed strict endogamous rules, making inter-caste marriages rare.

5.5.2 Louis Dumont's Perspective on Caste System

French sociologist Louis Dumont examined caste as a system of separate but interdependent hereditary occupational groups. He argued that caste was governed by the principle of purity and impurity, which determined social rank and interactions. Each Jati (sub-caste) restricted contact with lower Jatis to maintain ritual purity, preventing intermarriage and social mixing.

Criticism of Dumont's Theory

Dumont's perspective has been challenged by scholars who argue that caste is not exclusively linked to Hinduism, as similar hierarchical structures exist in other communities, such as Indian Muslims and Christians. Additionally, comparable social stratification has been observed in 18th-century Germany, Korea, and Japan, where strict social divisions and untouchability practices existed.

Caste as an Ideological System

Dumont focused on the ideological framework of caste rather than its economic or political aspects. He argued that caste was not merely a form of social stratification but a unique system of hierarchical inequality sustained by religious values. His approach, known as the attributional approach, emphasized that caste was supported by Hindu religious beliefs.

Three Key Features of Caste

1. Separation
 - Castes followed strict rules on marriage and social contact, with each caste maintaining its own boundaries.
2. Interdependence (Division of Labor)
 - Each caste specialized in a specific occupation, and caste-based professions were hereditary.
3. Hierarchy
 - Castes were ranked in a superior-inferior order, with Brahmins at the top and untouchables at the bottom.

Concept of Purity and Impurity

Dumont identified purity and impurity as the core principle of caste hierarchy. Brahmins, performing religious duties, were considered pure, whereas untouchables, engaged in so-called impure occupations, were deemed ritually polluted. This ideology led to strict social segregation—untouchables were prohibited from drawing water from wells used by upper castes and denied entry into Hindu temples.

However, Dumont acknowledged that this system underwent gradual change, particularly after Gandhian movements and India's independence. Mahatma Gandhi played a crucial role in challenging caste discrimination, renaming untouchables as 'Harijans' (Children of God). Post-independence laws have also criminalized untouchability, though caste-based discrimination persists in various forms.

Temporary vs. Permanent Impurity

Dumont differentiated between temporary impurity (caused by events like birth or death, leading to brief social exclusion) and permanent impurity (associated with untouchables, who were deemed impure throughout their lives). He drew comparisons to similar practices in other societies, such as medieval European customs, where women after childbirth were temporarily excluded from religious ceremonies.

The caste system, as analyzed by Ghurye and Dumont, reflects both social integration and rigid hierarchical divisions. While Ghurye viewed caste as a historically evolved, kinship-based institution that helped integrate diverse communities, Dumont focused on its ideological and ritualistic foundations, emphasizing the purity-impurity dichotomy. Although caste discrimination has been legally abolished, its social implications remain significant in contemporary India. Understanding these theoretical perspectives helps in analyzing both historical continuity and the changing nature of caste in modern society.

6.5.3 Mutton's Perspective on Caste System

J.H. Hutton critically examined the **Brahmanical theory** of caste origin, arguing that it lacks **practical feasibility**. He dismissed the notion that Brahmins could have unilaterally implemented a rigid caste hierarchy unless they had **political power**, which historically rested with the **Kshatriyas**. Furthermore, he contended that an institution as deeply embedded as caste could not have been established merely through **administrative enforcement**. Instead, he suggested that caste was likely sustained by **appealing to religious beliefs**, which exerted a stronger influence on people's lives.

The Theory of Mana and Its Role in Caste Formation

Hutton proposed that caste originated from the tribal belief in 'Mana', a concept widely accepted by scholars like Roy, Rice, and Swart. 'Mana' refers to a mysterious supernatural force believed to possess both benevolent and malevolent powers. According to tribal traditions, certain objects, places, and even individuals were imbued with this mystical energy, which could be transferred through physical contact or social interaction. This belief system was inherently linked to taboos, which served as protective barriers against potentially harmful influences. These taboos regulated key social aspects such as food haring, intermarriage, and social interaction. Tribes often considered food from other groups dangerous, fearing that it might carry harmful spiritual elements from outsiders. Hutton argued that elements of caste-like divisions existed in India even before the arrival of the Aryans, challenging the notion that caste was solely a product of Aryan influence.

Caste Elements in Pre-Aryan Tribal Societies

Hutton's field research in **tribal regions east of the Naga Hills** revealed a pattern of **village-based occupational specialization**. In these communities:

- Each village functioned as an **autonomous political unit**.
- Specific villages specialized in particular trades—**some in pottery, others in weaving**.
- Economic exchange occurred through a **barter system**, fostering **interdependence** among villages.

Hutton theorized that this system existed across **pre-Aryan India**, where occupations were **geographically and socially restricted**. When members of **exogamous clans** migrated due to **political, social, or environmental disruptions**, they faced restrictions in their new settlements. The receiving villages

prohibited migrants from practicing local ancestral occupations, fearing **spiritual retribution from their ancestors**, who were believed to possess 'Mana'. If outsiders engaged in these tabooed professions, it was thought to **anger the spirits**, leading to misfortunes such as **crop failures or natural disasters**.

Mana in Other Religious Traditions

Hutton drew parallels between **Mana** and similar concepts in other religious traditions:

- In **Buddhism**, it manifests as '**Iddhi**' (spiritual power).
- In **Islam**, it is referred to as '**Kudrat**' (divine force).
- In **Hinduism**, it is comparable to '**Shakti**' (spiritual energy).

This cross-cultural similarity reinforces Hutton's argument that **supernatural beliefs played a crucial role in shaping social structures, including caste**.

Conclusion: Mana as a Foundation for Caste Restrictions

Hutton concluded that the **fear of Mana** was instrumental in shaping caste norms related to **occupation, food, drink, and marriage**. The belief that spiritual power could be transferred through **social interaction** led to restrictions, which later evolved into **institutionalized caste divisions**. His theory challenges the **Brahmanical narrative** by suggesting that caste was not **deliberately imposed** but **organically developed** through ancient **tribal customs and religious beliefs**.

By highlighting the **pre-Aryan tribal origins of caste**, Hutton provided an alternative perspective that moves beyond **religious justification** and explores **anthropological and cultural roots**. His work invites a deeper examination of **how indigenous belief systems shaped hierarchical social structures**, emphasizing the role of **ritual purity and supernatural fears** in sustaining caste-based segregation.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Fill in the blanks

Q1. In the early 1930's, G.S. Ghurye published a book which still is an important source book on Indian Castes.

Q2. has propounded the theory of 'Mana' in the formation of castes.

6.6 FUNCTIONS OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system serves distinct purposes at multiple levels. Its functions can be broadly categorized into three areas:

1. Functions at the Individual Level

- **Social Identity and Security:** Caste provides individuals with a **fixed social identity** based on birth, which influences their social interactions, occupation, and lifestyle.

- **Guidance for Behavior:** It establishes **norms and values** that dictate an individual's conduct, ensuring adherence to traditional customs.
- **Occupational Stability:** Since professions were historically linked to caste, individuals had a **predetermined livelihood**, reducing uncertainty in economic activities.
- **Social Support System:** Caste groups function as **extended families**, offering emotional, financial, and moral support in times of need.

2. Functions at the Societal Level

- **Division of Labor:** The caste system historically provided a **structured occupational hierarchy**, ensuring that different societal roles were fulfilled.
- **Social Order and Stability:** By regulating marriage, food habits, and social interactions, caste helped **maintain social discipline** and minimize conflicts.
- **Cultural Continuity:** The system played a role in **preserving traditions, rituals, and religious practices**, ensuring their transmission across generations.
- **Integration through Interdependence:** Despite its rigid structure, caste created **economic and social interdependence**, as different caste groups specialized in distinct occupations.

3. Functions for the Caste System Itself

- **Self-Perpetuation:** Endogamy and hereditary occupations ensured the **continuity of the caste structure** over generations.
- **Adaptability:** The system evolved over time, incorporating new caste groups and adjusting to social and economic changes.
- **Legitimization through Religion:** Religious texts and practices reinforced the **ideological foundation** of caste, justifying its existence and functions.

While the caste system historically played a role in maintaining social organization, it also led to **rigid social hierarchies and inequalities**, which have been challenged over time through social reform movements and legal interventions.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Caste provides an individual a sense of

Q2. According to the institutions of caste and religion are closely related.

6.7 DEMERITS OF CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system has played a significant role in shaping Hindu society. However, over time, several aspects of this system have become obstacles to social progress. Its rigid structure has prevented society from evolving alongside advancements in other areas. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan rightly observed that the caste system has ultimately hindered societal growth. Many scholars argue that it is necessary to dismantle the caste system to foster a more equitable society. Below are some of the major drawbacks associated with the caste system in its current form:

1. Social Fragmentation

Initially a unifying structure, the caste system has now become a source of division within Hindu society. It has segregated people into numerous sub-castes, leading to rivalry and resentment instead of mutual respect and harmony. The stratification of society into high and low castes has given rise to untouchability, reducing a significant portion of the population to a marginalized state. Even within the Brahmin community, various sects claim superiority over one another, reinforcing social disunity.

2. Political Disunity

The caste system has fragmented society into countless subdivisions, making political unity extremely difficult. Historically, this disunity made India vulnerable to foreign invasions and colonial rule. Even after gaining independence, caste-based divisions continue to influence political decisions, often obstructing social welfare initiatives and national progress.

3. Practice of Untouchability

One of the most inhumane consequences of the caste system is the practice of untouchability. People from lower castes, particularly Shudras and Dalits, have historically been treated as sub-human. Many higher-caste individuals believe that physical contact with a Dalit requires purification. This system has denied lower castes access to public spaces such as temples, wells, and schools, excluding millions from mainstream social life.

4. Oppression by Upper Castes

The caste system has functioned as a tool of domination for the upper castes, enabling them to suppress the lower castes. Many marginalized communities, commonly referred to as Dalits or Harijans, have been denied property rights, access to resources, and opportunities for self-improvement. This discrimination has significantly weakened the overall strength of Indian society.

5. Forced Religious Conversions

The oppressive nature of the caste system has historically pushed many lower-caste individuals to convert to religions such as Islam and Christianity, which offered them better social status and rights. The rigid nature of caste-based Hindu society limited cultural and religious fluidity, hindering the collective cultural development of India.

6. Gender Discrimination

The caste system has been a primary factor in the oppression of women. To maintain caste hierarchy, women were stripped of basic rights, including access to education and autonomy in marriage. Child marriages were enforced to preserve caste purity, and widows were often subjected to inhumane practices such as Sati. Women were denied opportunities for personal growth, significantly limiting their role in society.

7. Restriction on Occupational Mobility

Caste-based restrictions forced individuals to follow traditional caste occupations, preventing them from pursuing careers based on talent and interest. This rigidity has hindered economic progress by limiting innovation and efficiency in various professions.

8. Weakening of Social Solidarity

The caste system has created divisions by segregating different groups and restricting social interactions between them. This separation has eroded a sense of brotherhood and unity, leading to a fragmented society that struggles to work cohesively toward collective progress.

9. Hindrance to National Unity

By fostering caste-based loyalties over national identity, the caste system has obstructed the development of a united nation. Loyalty to one's caste often surpasses loyalty to broader national causes, impeding the successful functioning of democratic institutions. Caste-based politics continues to be a major barrier to national integration.

10. Barrier to Social Progress

The caste system has promoted extreme conservatism, making society resistant to change and modernization. People bound by caste traditions tend to resist reforms that could lead to social progress, thus impeding overall societal advancement.

11. Violation of Democratic Principles

The caste system contradicts democratic values by denying equal rights and opportunities to all individuals, particularly those from lower castes. It erects social barriers that prevent marginalized groups from achieving their full potential, leading to widespread inequality.

Self-Check Exercise-5

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Persons of high caste think it necessary to wash themselves if they accidentally touch a

Q2. Caste system is the principal cause of the state of Hindu women.

6.8 MERITS OF CASTE SYSTEM

While the caste system has been widely criticized for being a rigid and oppressive social structure, some proponents argue that it has historically provided stability to Hindu society. Below are some of the positive aspects cited by supporters of the caste system:

1. Organized Social Structure

Every society requires some form of classification to function efficiently. In ancient India, society was divided into four varnas: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. This classification was initially fluid and allowed individuals to attain higher social status based on merit. The division was believed to be based on scientific principles such as heredity and division of labor, helping maintain social harmony.

2. Caste System as a Social Constitution

The caste system functioned as a framework for Hindu society. Some European scholars argue that this structure helped maintain order and stability despite various political upheavals. Sir

Henry Cotton stated that the caste system has historically contributed to maintaining societal cohesion and continuity.

3. Evolution of a Higher Race

The caste system imposed specific rules regarding marriage to maintain purity within different groups. According to Havell, these restrictions were designed to ensure the gradual development of a superior social order.

4. Stability and Social Contentment

Proponents argue that the caste system has been a source of social stability. According to Sidney Law, caste divisions helped maintain order and protect society from external disruptions, including political conflicts and natural disasters. Furthermore, it provided individuals with predefined career paths, ensuring economic security and continuity within professions.

While the caste system may have once served a purpose in structuring society, its rigid and discriminatory nature has led to severe social issues in modern India. Reforming or dismantling the system is essential to fostering equality and progress in the nation.

Self-Check Exercise-6

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The caste system has worked as a constitution of society.

Q2. Classification of society is in every country

6.9 SUMMARY

The caste system is a form of social stratification where an individual's status is determined by birth and remains fixed throughout life. Unlike open social structures that allow for upward mobility, the caste system offers little to no opportunity for individuals to change their social standing. Occupations are typically assigned based on hereditary status rather than personal abilities, interests, or potential.

The Indian caste system is a unique example of ascriptive social hierarchy, where social inequality is passed down through generations. A caste can be described as an endogamous group whose members traditionally engage in specific occupations and adhere to shared social norms, behaviors, and ritual practices. The foundation of this system lies in the belief that each person's role and occupation in society are predetermined by birth.

Although the caste system has been officially abolished in India, its influence continues to persist, particularly in rural areas where traditional practices remain more deeply rooted. In contrast, urban regions display a lesser degree of caste-based distinctions, as modernization and socio-economic changes have led to shifts in societal norms.

6.10 GLOSSARY

- **Caste System:** A form of social stratification based on inherited status, where social mobility is highly restricted.
- **Endogamy:** A practice that mandates marriage within the same social group or community.
- **Hierarchy:** A structured ranking system that establishes authority and control within a society.
- **Jati:** A localized hierarchical classification of castes that determines occupation, social customs, and marital rules within a specific region.
- **Mana:** A supernatural force or power that may be attributed to individuals, spirits, or objects, and can be perceived as either beneficial or harmful.
- **Untouchables:** A social group historically placed outside the caste hierarchy, often facing discrimination. The term "Scheduled Castes" is used in official contexts, while "Dalits" is the preferred term among activists and the community.
- **Varna:** A broad classification system dividing Indian society into four hierarchical categories—Brahmin (priests and scholars), Kshatriya (warriors and rulers), Vaishya (merchants and traders), and Shudra (laborers and service providers).

6.11 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Charles Chooley

A2. MacIver and Page

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Untouchability

A2. Nesfield

A3. Brahma

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Caste and Race in India

A2. J.H. Hutton

Self-Check Exercise-4

A1. Belongingness

A2. Redcliff Brown

Self-Check Exercise-5

A1. Harijan

A2. Downtrodden

Self-Check Exercise-6

A1. Hindu

A2. indispensable

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6.13 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Explain the various theories to the study of caste system in India.
- (ii) Critically analyse G.S. Ghurye's perspective on caste system in India.
- (iii) Discuss the caste system as a form of social stratification. Illustrate with the help of examples.

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UNIT-7

STRATIFICATION IN MODERN SOCIETIES

STRUCTURE:

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Learning Objectives
- 7.3 Social Stratification in Modern Societies
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 7.4 Class: A form of Stratification in modern time
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 7.5 Caste system
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 7.6 Slavery
 - Self-Check Exercise-4
- 7.7 Summary
- 7.8 Glossary
- 7.9 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 7.10 References/Suggested Readings
- 7.11 Terminal Questions

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In modern, complex societies, valued resources such as income, power, and privileges are distributed unequally, with the most advantaged individuals and families receiving a disproportionately large share. The term "stratification system" refers to the network of social institutions responsible for generating these inequalities. The main components of such systems include: 1. Institutional processes that determine which goods and resources are considered valuable and desirable. 2. Rules of allocation that distribute these resources across different occupational and social roles (e.g., doctor, farmer, homemaker). 3. Mobility mechanisms that connect individuals to these roles, leading to varying levels of control over valued resources.

As a result, inequality arises through two matching processes:

- (a) Social positions are linked to "reward packages" of varying worth.
- (b) Individuals are then assigned to these positions and compensated accordingly.

Social stratification is the hierarchical arrangement of individuals and groups within a society based on their social status. It is a fundamental and enduring system of ranking that exists in all societies. Sociologist Raymond W. Murray describes it as the horizontal division of society into higher and lower social segments. Even in the most traditional and simple societies, some form of stratification has always existed.

Pitirim A. Sorokin, a well-known sociologist, argued that a fully unstratified society with absolute equality has never existed in human history. He defines social stratification as the hierarchical differentiation of people into various social layers. This is evident in the distinction between upper and lower social classes. The basis of stratification lies in the

unequal distribution of rights, responsibilities, privileges, power, and social influence among individuals and groups.

7.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the conclusion of this chapter, you will develop an understanding of:

- Different forms of social stratification in contemporary societies.
- Class as a distinct type of social stratification.
- Caste as a structured system of social stratification.
- Slavery as a historical and social system of stratification.

7.3 STRATIFICATION IN MODERN SOCIETIES

No society exists without stratification. It involves the unequal distribution of rights and privileges among its members. According to Gisbert, social stratification refers to the division of society into permanent groups or categories that are linked by relationships of superiority and subordination. Similarly, John F. Cuber and William F. Kenkel describe it as the structured ranking of individuals or groups, resulting in distinctions of superiority and inferiority within a society.

Kurt B. Mayer defines social stratification as a system of differentiation that creates a hierarchy of social positions, where individuals are regarded as superior, equal, or inferior based on socially significant factors. Lundberg states that a stratified society is characterized by inequality, with people being ranked as "higher" or "lower." Williams further explains stratification as the systematic ranking of individuals on a scale of superiority and equality, based on commonly accepted standards.

Stratification and Social Inequality

Social stratification inherently involves inequality. It is a process of ranking statuses, which exists in all societies. While the idea of a world without social distinctions is a recurring dream, the reality is that different positions come with varying rights, responsibilities, and privileges. Some individuals and groups hold higher status than others due to their access to better opportunities and resources. For instance, in India, professionals like doctors and engineers tend to be ranked higher in terms of social prestige compared to teachers. Over time, such rankings become embedded within the social system.

However, the level of prestige associated with different positions is not uniform across societies. The reasons for status differentiation can vary widely and may not always be rational. Some distinctions arise from religious beliefs, cultural traditions, or historical circumstances that have been passed down over generations.

Forms of Social Stratification

Throughout history, societies have been divided into distinct social groups based on various criteria. In modern times, social stratification is generally classified into four main forms:

1. **Slavery-Based Stratification** – A system where people are owned as property and denied basic freedoms.
2. **Class-Based Stratification** – A system where social mobility is possible based on economic status and achievements.

3. **Caste-Based Stratification** – A rigid system, particularly seen in India, where social status is hereditary and fixed.
4. **Estate-Based Stratification** – A historical system where land ownership and hereditary privilege determined social hierarchy.

Each of these forms of stratification reflects how societies rank individuals and groups, shaping opportunities, privileges, and access to resources.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1 Process of Stratification is a statuses which is found in every civilizations.

Q2. writes, "A stratified society is characterized by inequality, where individuals are ranked based on perceived differences, with some considered "higher" and others "lower."

7.4 Class: A Form of Stratification in Modern Time

Status serves as the primary determinant of social class. According to Ogburn and Nimkoff, a social class consists of "one or two or more broad groups of individuals who are ranked by the members of the community in socially superior and inferior positions." Max Weber viewed classes as groups of individuals who share similar opportunities for acquiring goods and exhibit comparable living standards.

A social class is essentially a segment of society where individuals relate to one another on a basis of equality and are distinguished from others by recognized norms of superiority and inferiority. Each social class is associated with specific behaviors, standards, and occupations.

A class is defined as "a culturally recognized group that holds a particular position or status within society." Ginsberg describes a class as a collection of individuals who, due to common descent, occupation, wealth, and education, develop a shared way of life, including similar beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. The social position of a class is shaped by the level of prestige attached to it. Wherever social interactions are influenced by hierarchical considerations of status, a social class system exists. In other words, class is fundamentally a status group.

MacIver and Page assert that understanding social class as a distinct status group offers a precise conceptual framework applicable to any system of social stratification. They argue that economic, political, and religious power—along with unique cultural expressions and ways of life—serve to differentiate one class from another, giving cohesion to each class and shaping the structure of society.

Essential Characteristics of Social Class

1. **Sense of Equality within the Class:** Members of a particular class share a feeling of similarity in lifestyle and behavior, expecting their actions to align with those of others in the same group. They often choose occupations within a limited range and recognize common attitudes and behaviors among their peers.
2. **Perceived Inferiority to Higher Classes:** Individuals often feel a sense of lower status in comparison to those in the upper strata of society.

3. **Perceived Superiority over Lower Classes:** Similarly, they may regard those in lower classes as socially and economically inferior.

The primary characteristic of a social class is its relative standing in relation to other classes, which determines the level of respect, prestige, and influence its members hold. This hierarchical structure is similar to the military, where commissioned and non-commissioned officers occupy different ranks.

Historical Examples of Social Class

In ancient Rome, society was divided into distinct groups, including slaves, plebeians, and several superior classes. In medieval times, social stratification was evident in the following classes:

1. **Cottars** – Peasants or farm laborers who occupied cottages and small plots of land, often in exchange for services.
2. **Villeins** – Semi-free individuals under the feudal system who were bound to the land but had certain rights compared to slaves.
3. **Free Tenants** – Peasants who owned land and held a unique position in the social hierarchy.
4. **Lesser Gentry** – Individuals of noble birth with social standing but not at the highest ranks of nobility.
5. **Nobility** – A privileged class ranked just below royalty, enjoying significant wealth and influence.
6. **Royalty** – Members of the ruling family, including kings and queens.
7. **Ecclesiastical Officers** – High-ranking religious figures who played a key role in governance and social order.

Conclusion

The distinction between social classes has been evident throughout history, from the lowest ranks, such as slaves who were treated as property, to higher-status groups like nobles and royalty who held political power. Medieval society, for instance, had clear class divisions, with serfs bound to the land, free tenants who owned land, and the ruling elite who controlled governance and resources.

Each social class forms an internal network, where members recognize one another as equals and differentiate themselves from other classes. They tend to associate within their group, maintaining distinct lifestyles. In this sense, each class operates as a society within a larger society.

Social Class in Modern Society

Social class today is typically determined by wealth, influence, and social standing. Sociologists use three primary methods to analyze social class:

1. **Objective Method** – Examines measurable factors such as income, education, and occupation.
2. **Subjective Method** – Involves self-assessment, where individuals identify their own social class.
3. **Reputational Method** – Relies on how people perceive and classify others in society.

Based on these methods, modern social classes can be categorized as follows:

1. Lower Class

Characterized by poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic necessities such as healthcare, housing, and education. Many individuals in this group have not completed

high school and struggle with financial insecurity. The media often portrays them negatively, reinforcing stereotypes of dependency and criminal behavior.

2. Working Class

Composed of individuals with minimal education who perform manual labor with little prestige. Unskilled workers, such as dishwashers, cashiers, maids, and waitstaff, often earn low wages with limited career prospects. Skilled laborers, including carpenters, plumbers, and electricians, fall into the "blue-collar" category. While they may earn more than some middle-class professionals, their jobs are often physically demanding and hazardous.

3. Middle Class

Often described as the "sandwich" class, the middle class falls between the working class and the wealthy elite. It is further divided into two subgroups:

- **Lower Middle Class:** Includes individuals with moderate education and income, such as small business owners, teachers, and managers.
- **Upper Middle Class:** Consists of highly educated professionals, such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, and corporate executives, who enjoy financial stability and social prestige.

4. Upper Class

Representing only a small percentage of the population, the upper class controls a significant portion of national wealth. This class is further divided into:

- **Lower Upper Class:** Comprised of individuals who have recently acquired wealth through business, investments, or entrepreneurship.
- **Upper Upper Class:** Includes families with inherited wealth that has been passed down through generations. These aristocratic groups hold considerable influence in society.

Both segments of the upper class possess immense financial resources, which afford them a lifestyle of luxury, leisure, and power. They reside in elite neighborhoods, participate in exclusive social circles, and send their children to prestigious institutions. Due to their economic and political influence, they have a vital role in shaping national and global affairs.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Multiple- Choice Questions

Q1. The upper class constitutes how much percentage of the total population?

- (A) 9 (B) 7 (C) 6 (D) 3

Q2. The middle class is known by which other name?

- (A) Burger class (B) Sandwich class (C) Lower class

7.5 Caste System: Form of Stratification

The caste system is the oldest forms of social stratification and even though it may be prohibited by the law, the political divisions continue to exist in the minds of the people leaving many oppressed. Before the caste system, India had four groups or divisions already established:

- (a) The Negrito

- (b) Mongoloid
- (c) Austroloid
- (d) Dravidian

It was during the Aryan invasion around 1500 BCE when the caste system was created. The word caste derives from the Portuguese word *casta*, meaning breed, race, or kind. In this system, the citizens are divided into categories or castes. *Varna*, the Sanskrit word for colour, refers to large divisions that include various castes; the other terms include castes and subdivisions of castes sometimes called sub-castes.

Among the Indian terms that are sometimes translated as caste are *jati*, *jat*, *biradri*, and *samaj*. There are thousands of castes and sub-castes in India. It follows a basic precept:

- (a) All men are created unequal
- (b) Each category or *jat* has a special role to play in the society
- (c) This structure is a means of creating and organising an effective society.

The caste system in India is primarily associated with Hinduism but also exists among other Indian religious groups. Castes are ranked and named. Membership of caste is achieved by birth. Castes are also endogamous groups. Marriages and relationships between members of different castes, while not actually prohibited, face strong social disapproval and the threat of ostracism or even violence.

A Caste System is a social system based on ascribed statuses, which are traits or characteristics that people possess as a result of their birth. Ascribed statuses can include race, gender, nationality, body type, and age. A caste system ranks people rigidly. No matter what a person does, he or she cannot change castes.

People often try to compensate for ascribed statuses by changing their nationality, lying about their age, or undergoing plastic surgery to alter their body type. In some societies, this strategy works, in others, it does not.

The Indian government officially outlawed the caste system in 1949, but vestiges of it remain today. The system originated with the Hindu religion, which subscribes to the concept of Reincarnation, the belief that while the physical body dies, the soul of a person is immortal and goes on to be reborn into another body. People who are good in their current life will come back to improved circumstances in the next life, but if they are evil, they will be punished in the next one. Therefore, those who are poor or ill are suffering punishment for having done something wrong in a past life. One should not interfere in the life of another person because that individual's circumstances are the result of what he or she has done in a previous incarnation. Caste based stratification is deep rooted in Indian society and presently thousands of castes are there in India and all are hierarchically arranged in many sub-groups on many bases. As per latest data, there are more than 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes in India. As per the latest report tabled by NITI Aayog in Parliament, there are 4.6 million caste based entries in India and work is still going on to categorise them.

India being a big country and having caste driven society, which is divided into thousands of caste and sub-caste groups which are determined on the basis of birth and cannot be changed through life, known as caste system which is regulating whole Indian society.

Earlier, it was based on occupational categories known as Varna. At present both Varna and caste prevails together in modern times, not only in India, but also in neighbouring countries like Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma), Malaysia etc. Caste system has created many segments (lyres) which are visible and regulating system for the last many centuries.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Fill in the blanks

Q1. It was during the invasion around 1500 BCE when the caste system was created.

Q2. Before the caste system, India had groups or divisions

7.6 Slavery: Form of Social Stratification

Slavery has been a longstanding institution throughout history. It existed in its most extreme forms in ancient Greece and Rome and later in the southern United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even in a modified form, slavery was prevalent in various parts of the world. Some key characteristics of slavery in its most severe form include:

1. A slave is considered the property of their master, treated as an object similar to household goods such as furniture and utensils.
2. Slaves have no political rights.
3. Socially, they are marginalized and looked down upon.
4. Forced labor is an essential aspect of slavery, where the master has complete control over the working hours and the intensity of tasks assigned. Economic motives primarily sustain this system.

Throughout history, there has been a conflict between viewing a slave as mere property and recognizing their humanity, emotions, and potential for personal growth. Philosophers such as the Sophists in ancient Greece criticized slavery as inhumane and unnatural. Over time, protests against slavery emerged across different societies, and its inefficiency as a labor system contributed to its gradual decline and eventual abolition.

Modern Slavery

Despite its formal abolition, slavery continues in various forms across the world. Modern slavery affects people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds, but it disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities. Economic hardships often push individuals into exploitative situations where they are deceived into accepting jobs that are vastly different from what was promised.

Defining Slavery

The U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons defines modern slavery as encompassing "trafficking in persons" and "human trafficking," referring to the recruitment, transportation, and exploitation of individuals through force, fraud, or coercion. The U.S. federal Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 and the United Nations' Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons categorize modern slavery into forms such as "involuntary servitude," "debt bondage," and "forced labor."

Kevin Bales, an American scholar and co-founder of Free the Slaves, describes modern slavery as a condition in which a person is under the control of another, subjected to violence and force for the purpose of exploitation.

Professor Remington Crawford-III from the University of Toronto argues that slavery still exists and that consumers should critically assess the origins of their clothing and other goods. Governments and businesses must take greater responsibility in addressing the issue. According to research from the Walk Free Foundation, the 2016 Global Slavery Index estimated that approximately 70 million people were enslaved worldwide, with 58% of them residing in India, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan. Among them, around 10 million were children. Since slavery is illegal everywhere, it often remains hidden, making it difficult to obtain precise figures. Estimates rely on secondary sources such as United Nations reports, government publications, and non-governmental organization (NGO) investigations.

Forms of Modern Slavery

1. A young girl in a society that normalizes child marriage may be forced to marry an older man, stripping her of autonomy.
2. Individuals born into hereditary slavery, such as certain caste-based systems, may be considered the property of their masters from birth.
3. Slavery is more prevalent in regions with weak legal systems and widespread corruption. Marginalized groups, including undocumented migrants, are at heightened risk due to the threat of deportation.
4. Many assume slavery exists only in developing nations, but it persists even in developed countries. For instance, the British government estimates that tens of thousands of people live in conditions of modern slavery in the UK.

Modern Slavery in Numbers

- 40.3 million individuals live in modern slavery worldwide.
- 10 million of them are children.
- 30.4 million are in the Asia-Pacific region, primarily in bonded labor.
- 9.1 million are in Africa.
- 2.1 million are in the Americas.
- 1.5 million are in developed economies.
- 16 million victims are exploited in economic activities.
- 4.8 million people are forced into sexual exploitation.
- 99% of individuals trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls.

Slavery remains a pressing global issue, and concerted efforts from governments, organizations, and individuals are essential to eradicate it permanently.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Professor Remington Crawford-III of the University of said, "slavery is something that is with us always.

Q2. Slavery is also more likely to occur where the rule of law is and corruption is rife.

7.7 SUMMARY

Overall it can be stated that all these mentioned four forms of social stratification are still prevalent even today and most important characteristics of modern world. These are prevalent in different shapes and different forms almost everywhere and there is no single society which can claim equality. Equality is a myth and inequality is a reality and this inequality is a visible reality of modern civilisation.

7.8 GLOSSARY

- **Slavery-** The activity of legally owning other people who are forced to work for or obey you.
- **Class-** To put somebody/something in a particular group
- **Segment-** a section or part of something

7.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

- A1. Ranking
- A2. Lundberg

Self-Check Exercise-2

- A1. 3%
- A2. Sandwich Class

Self-Check Exercise-3

- A1. Aryan
- A2. Four

Self-Check Exercise-4

- A1. Toronto
- A2. Weaker

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7.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- Q1. What is class stratification?
Q2. Discuss the concept of caste and describe the characteristics of caste.
Q3. Is caste changing into class? Explain in detail.

UNIT-8

CLASS AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

STRUCTURE

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Learning Objectives
- 8.3 Meaning and Definition of Class
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 8.4 Type of Classes
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 8.5 Determinants of Class
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 8.6 Class as a Form of Stratification
 - Self-Check Exercise-4
- 8.7 Difference between Caste and Class
 - Self-Check Exercise-5
- 8.8 Summary
- 8.9 Glossary
- 8.10 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 8.11 References/Suggested Readings
- 8.12 Terminal Questions

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Class is a fundamental form of social stratification, particularly prevalent in modern, industrialized societies. While the caste system is uniquely associated with India, class divisions exist universally across societies. A social class consists of individuals who share a similar social standing and perceive themselves as equals within their group. At the same time, they recognize distinctions between their own status and that of others—considering themselves superior to some and subordinate to others.

Beyond economic power, members of a particular class often share common values, attitudes, and lifestyles. These shared characteristics shape their worldview and influence social interactions, reinforcing class distinctions. Each social class develops its own set of beliefs, norms, and behavioral patterns, differentiating it from others. Thus, class is not merely an economic category but also a cultural and social phenomenon that affects individuals' opportunities, aspirations, and interactions within society.

8.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Comprehend the meaning and definitions of social class.
- Describe the characteristics of class as a system of social stratification.
- Identify the various factors that determine class.
- Distinguish between caste and class within the Indian context.

8.3 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF CLASS

Social class, as a form of social stratification, has been examined by various scholars. Some of their definitions are as follows:

- (i) Horton and Hunt define social class as a category of individuals who occupy a similar position within the continuum of social status.
- (ii) Ogburn and Nimkoff describe social class as a collection of individuals who hold essentially the same social status within a given society.
- (iii) MacIver and Page explain social class as a segment of the community distinguished from others based on social status.
- (iv) Max Weber views class as a group of people occupying a comparable position in the market economy, leading to similar economic rewards. According to Weber, an individual's class position is primarily determined by their market situation, which influences their life chances.
- (v) Karl Marx defines class as a collective of individuals who share a common relationship with the means of production.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Who defines class as , "a social class is the aggregate of persons having essentially the same social status in a given, society".

- (A) Maclver and Page (B) Max Weber (C) Marx (D) Ogburn and Nimkoff

Q2. Who defines class as, "a class is a group of people who stand in a common relationship to the means of production".

- (A) Max Weber (B) Marx (C) Hortun and Hunt (D) Maclver and Page

8.4 TYPES OF CLASSES

Social class is a central concept in sociology, with Karl Marx and Max Weber being two of the most influential theorists in its study. Their perspectives offer distinct yet interrelated views on class divisions in society.

Marxist Perspective on Class

Karl Marx identifies two primary classes within the capitalist system:

1. **Capitalists (Bourgeoisie):** These are the owners of the means of production, such as factories, land, and industries. They control economic resources and have the power to shape society according to their interests.
2. **Workers (Proletariat):** This group consists of individuals who do not own any means of production and must sell their labor power to capitalists in exchange for wages.

Marx argues that this division leads to class struggle, as the capitalists seek to maximize profits while the workers strive for better wages and working conditions. This conflict, according to Marx, is the driving force of social change and, ultimately, could lead to a classless society.

Weberian Perspective on Class

Max Weber expands on Marx's economic interpretation of class by introducing the role of market position and life chances. He acknowledges that ownership of productive possessions is a major determinant of class but also highlights the significance of occupation, skills, and market demand. Weber categorizes class into the following groups:

- **Propertied Upper Class:** Individuals who possess significant wealth and assets, ensuring them high economic rewards.
- **Property-less White-Collar Workers:** Professionals and administrators who do not own productive resources but have marketable skills that earn them relatively high salaries.
- **Petty Bourgeoisie:** Small business owners and self-employed individuals who have some degree of financial independence but lack the power of large-scale capitalists.
- **Manual Working Class:** Wage laborers engaged in industrial and service sectors, typically receiving lower financial compensation.

Weber argues that social stratification is multidimensional, influenced not just by economic class but also by status (prestige) and power (political influence). Unlike Marx, who sees class struggle as the primary driver of societal change, Weber views class as more fluid, with individuals having varying levels of mobility based on education, skills, and economic conditions.

Contemporary Social Class Structure

In modern societies, social class is generally divided into three broad categories: upper, middle, and lower classes. These divisions are influenced by economic resources, occupation, education, and lifestyle.

1. Upper Class

The upper class consists of individuals who possess significant wealth, political influence, and social prestige. Their power often extends beyond economic ownership to control over political and cultural institutions. In societies with aristocratic traditions, such as the United Kingdom, birth and lineage play a crucial role in determining class status. In contrast, countries like the United States emphasize wealth accumulation, where the "super-rich" hold significant economic and social power. However, even in capitalist societies, old wealth (inherited wealth) is often regarded with greater prestige than newly acquired wealth. The upper class typically maintains its status through generational wealth, exclusive education, and social networks that reinforce their dominance.

2. Middle Class

The middle class is a diverse group that falls between the upper and lower classes in terms of economic status and lifestyle. This category includes professionals, small business owners, managers, and educated workers, often referred to as "white-collar" employees. The middle class plays a crucial role in modern economies, as technological advancements and globalization have increased the demand for skilled labor. Sociologists like Ralf Dahrendorf emphasize the growing expansion of the middle class in Western societies, arguing that technological and economic changes have formed original chances for societal mobility. However, globalization and the outsourcing of low-skilled jobs to developing nations have also resulted in economic insecurities for some middle-class workers.

3. Lower Class

The lower class consists of individuals who have minimal financial security and often struggle to meet basic needs. This group includes low-wage workers, the unemployed, and those dependent on government assistance. Within the lower class, there is a further distinction:

- The Working Poor: Employed individuals who earn low wages but lack financial stability. These persons are occasionally categorized as "blue-collar" workers, engaged in manual labor and service-sector jobs.
- The Underclass: Those who experience long-term unemployment, homelessness, or dependency on welfare programs. This group, similar to Marx's "lumpen-proletariat," lacks consistent employment opportunities and is often marginalized in society.

Social class is a dynamic and evolving concept that shapes individuals' opportunities, lifestyles, and social mobility. While Marx views class primarily in terms of economic ownership and conflict, Weber highlights the complexity of class divisions, incorporating market position and status. In contemporary societies, class distinctions continue to influence economic opportunities, access to education, and political power, making class stratification a critical area of sociological analysis.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. argues that in the capitalist mode of production there are two classes i.e., capitalists and workers.

Q2. The term also refers to persons with low income.

8.5 DETERMINANTS OF CLASS

Social class is shaped by multiple factors that influence an individual's status and position within society. While no single determinant can fully define class, certain key indicators play a crucial role in class stratification. These determinants include wealth, occupation, education, and prestige, among others.

1. Wealth and Income

The accumulation of wealth serves as a key factor differentiating the upper class from other social groups. Those with significant financial resources often attain higher social status and influence. However, class position is not solely determined by wealth. For example, a highly educated professor may be held in greater esteem than a wealthy criminal, despite the latter having a higher income. While financial resources grant access to better opportunities and a particular lifestyle, social class is influenced by broader societal perceptions, extending beyond mere economic power.

2. Occupation

Occupation serves as a crucial determinant of class, as different professions carry varying levels of prestige and influence. White-collar professions such as doctors, engineers, professors, and administrators are generally regarded as more prestigious than blue-collar jobs like manual labor or mechanical work. However, income does not always align with occupational prestige—some highly skilled manual workers may earn more than professionals in education or public service. Beyond financial earnings, occupation also influences lifestyle, values, and social networks, making it a strong indicator of class standing.

3. Education

Education is both a consequence and a cause of social class. Access to quality education is often determined by financial resources, family background, and social encouragement. Individuals from privileged backgrounds have greater opportunities to attend elite institutions, ensuring their continued presence in higher social classes. Moreover, the level and type of education one attains significantly impact career prospects and social mobility. In this way, education serves as a powerful tool for both maintaining and altering class status.

4. Prestige

Prestige refers to the social recognition and respect associated with a particular occupation or lifestyle. It is independent of individual wealth and instead reflects the societal value placed on certain roles. For example, a respected academic or a public servant may hold greater prestige than a wealthy businessperson involved in unethical practices. Sociologists have attempted to measure occupational prestige through rankings that reflect society's collective perception of different professions.

Other Factors Influencing Class Status

In addition to wealth, occupation, education, and prestige, various other elements contribute to an individual's social class. These include family background, kinship networks, and residential location. While financial stability and professional success are the most visible markers of class, social heritage and cultural capital also play a crucial role in determining an individual's position within the broader hierarchy.

Social class is a multidimensional construct influenced by economic, professional, and social factors. While financial wealth provides access to resources, occupation and education shape societal perceptions and opportunities. Prestige, independent of wealth, further determines an individual's standing in society. Thus, class is not solely a function of income but a combination of material assets, professional status, educational attainment, and social recognition.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Fill in the blanks

Q1. refers to the respect and admiration with which an occupation is regarded by society.

Q2. . To get a higher education, one needs money plus

8.6 CLASS AS A FORM OF STRATIFICATION

The class system is a fundamental characteristic of modern industrial and urban societies, organizing individuals into hierarchical groups based on economic, social, and professional distinctions. Unlike the rigid caste system, class is an open form of stratification where an individual's status is largely determined by personal achievements and social mobility is possible. The following are key characteristics of class-based stratification:

1. Class-Based Social Perception

Individuals within different classes develop specific perceptions about their own status in relation to others. These perceptions shape class consciousness and influence social interactions:

- **Sense of Equality:** Individuals perceive themselves as equal to others within their own class group.
- **Sense of Inferiority:** Those in lower classes may feel inferior when compared to individuals in higher-class positions.
- **Sense of Superiority:** Those in higher social classes often perceive themselves as superior to individuals from lower economic or social backgrounds.

These perceptions contribute to the development of class solidarity, reinforcing shared interests and a collective identity within a particular social class.

2. Achieved Status and Meritocracy

Class is largely determined by individual accomplishments rather than birth, unlike caste-based stratification. People can improve their social status through economic success, education, or professional achievements. This meritocratic nature of class systems allows individuals to move upward based on their abilities and efforts. However, structural inequalities, such as access to education and economic resources, often limit the extent of mobility.

3. Universality of Class Stratification

Class-based social divisions are a near-universal phenomenon in modern societies. While the specific structure of class hierarchies may vary across different cultural and economic contexts, distinctions based on wealth, occupation, and lifestyle exist in all industrial and post-industrial societies. The persistence of class divisions highlights its role as a fundamental organizing principle in social life.

4. Class and Prestige

Social class is closely linked to prestige, which refers to the level of respect and admiration a class holds within society. Higher-status classes, such as political elites and wealthy individuals, enjoy greater social prestige. This prestige is not solely based on wealth but also on factors such as education, profession, and influence. Society's evaluation of a class group's contributions and influence plays a crucial role in determining its relative prestige.

5. Openness and Social Mobility

One of the defining features of class stratification is its openness. Unlike caste systems, which impose rigid restrictions on movement between social groups, class allows for vertical mobility—individuals can move up or down the social ladder based on achievements, economic success, or social connections. Furthermore, there are no formal restrictions on inter-class marriage, though economic and cultural differences often influence marital choices.

6. Class Consciousness

Class consciousness refers to the awareness individuals develop regarding their class position and its implications. This awareness fosters a sense of shared interests and solidarity among members of the same class. Sociologists argue that class consciousness plays a crucial role in shaping social movements and political behavior. In Marxist theory, for instance, workers developing class consciousness is a key step toward collective action against capitalist exploitation.

The class system is a complex and dynamic form of social stratification that structures modern societies based on economic and social distinctions. While it provides opportunities for upward mobility and personal achievement, existing inequalities often limit access to resources and opportunities, reinforcing social divisions. Class consciousness and prestige further shape how individuals navigate social hierarchies, making class an essential factor in understanding societal organization and social change.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Class system provides scope for improving one's

Q2. is the sentiment that makes the realization of solidarity with other members of the same class.

8.7 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CASTE AND CLASS AS A FORM OF STRATIFICATION

Caste and class are two significant systems of social stratification that structure societies in different ways. While the caste system is predominantly found in India, class-based stratification exists in almost all societies. Despite their similarities in organizing people into hierarchical groups, caste and class differ fundamentally in terms of mobility, origin, social flexibility, and the role of religious ideology. The key differences are outlined below:

1. Open vs. Closed System of Stratification

One of the most significant differences between caste and class is the degree of social mobility allowed.

- **Class as an Open System:** The class system is flexible, allowing individuals to change their social position based on personal achievements, education, and economic success. As sociologist Hitter notes, "A class system is an open system of rating levels. If a hierarchy becomes closed against vertical mobility, it ceases to be a class system and becomes a caste system." This openness enables individuals born in lower economic classes to improve their status through hard work, entrepreneurship, and professional achievements.
- **Caste as a Closed System:** In contrast, the caste system is rigid and hereditary. Once an individual is born into a caste, they remain in it for their entire lifetime, with little to no possibility of changing their social status. Caste is determined by birth, making it an ascribed status rather than an achieved one. Unlike in class systems, personal efforts, wealth, or education do not typically lead to a shift in caste status.

2. Religious vs. Secular Basis

The foundation of caste and class stratification also differs significantly in terms of religious influence.

Caste as a Religious Institution: The caste system in India is deeply rooted in religious ideology. According to Maclver, "The rigid demarcation of caste could scarcely be maintained were it not for strong religious persuasions." Hindu religious texts, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, justify caste divisions as divinely ordained, emphasizing the fulfillment of caste duties (*dharma*) as a sacred obligation. The belief that adherence to caste duties determines one's rebirth in a higher or lower caste has historically reinforced caste hierarchy.

Class as a Secular System: Unlike caste, class distinctions are based on economic and social factors rather than religious doctrines. Class divisions emerge from material conditions, market forces, and historical developments rather than supernatural beliefs.

Consequently, class stratification is more fluid and responsive to changes in economic and political structures.

3. Marriage Rules

Marriage norms differ significantly between caste and class-based societies.

- **Caste-Based Endogamy:** The caste system enforces strict endogamy, meaning individuals must marry within their own caste. Marrying outside one's caste often results in social ostracization or even expulsion from the caste group. This restriction reinforces caste boundaries and limits social mobility.
- **Class-Based Exogamy:** In contrast, class does not impose rigid restrictions on marriage. A person from a wealthy family may marry someone from a lower-income background without losing their social status. While economic and educational compatibility may influence partner selection in class-based societies, there is no institutionalized prohibition against inter-class marriages.

4. Class Consciousness vs. Caste Identity

The awareness and perception of one's social position function differently in caste and class structures.

- **Class Consciousness:** In class systems, individuals develop class consciousness based on shared economic interests and social conditions. This awareness fosters solidarity among members of the same class, often leading to collective efforts for better wages, working conditions, and social reforms. Karl Marx emphasized the role of class consciousness in mobilizing the working class against capitalist exploitation.
- **Caste Identity:** In contrast, caste identity is ingrained from birth and does not require subjective awareness for individuals to recognize their caste position. The caste hierarchy is socially reinforced through customs, rituals, and everyday interactions, making it a deeply embedded social reality rather than an identity shaped by shared economic interests.

5. Prestige and Social Hierarchy

The way prestige is distributed in caste and class systems also differs.

- **Fixed Prestige in Caste System:** The caste system establishes a rigid hierarchy in which each caste's status is predefined and unchangeable. Higher castes traditionally enjoy privileges and social respect, while lower castes face discrimination and social exclusion.
- **Fluid Prestige in Class System:** Unlike caste, class status is not permanently fixed. Individuals can gain or lose prestige based on their achievements, profession, or economic success. The relative prestige of different occupations and social groups shifts over time, depending on societal values and economic trends.

6. Legal and Political Considerations

Caste and class have different implications for legal and political policies.

- **Caste-Based Affirmative Action:** In India, caste has been recognized as a criterion for social disadvantage, leading to affirmative action policies such as reservations in education and employment for historically marginalized groups (*Scheduled Castes*, *Scheduled Tribes*, and *Other Backward Classes*). The Supreme Court of India, in its ruling on job reservations under Article 16(4) of the Constitution, upheld caste as a determinant of social backwardness, reinforcing the institutional recognition of caste distinctions.

- **Class-Based Economic Policies:** In contrast, class-based inequalities are generally addressed through economic policies such as liberal fiscal policy, community well-being programs, and labor laws. While economic disparities exist, class stratification does not receive the same level of constitutional recognition as caste-based disadvantages.

While both caste and class systems create hierarchical social structures, they differ in terms of flexibility, origin, marriage norms, consciousness, and legal recognition. Caste is a rigid, hereditary, and religiously sanctioned form of stratification, whereas class is a more fluid, achievement-based, and economically driven system. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for analyzing social inequalities and developing policies aimed at reducing discrimination and promoting social mobility.

Self-Check Exercise-5

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Describes a class system as an open hierarchy of ranking levels.

Q2. In the caste system, mate selection is typically restricted and governed by social norms.

8.8 SUMMARY

Class is a key component of social stratification in contemporary societies, primarily shaped by economic factors and an individual's financial standing. Major indicators of social class include income, wealth, occupation, education, personal accomplishments, and individual abilities. These elements contribute to class distinctions based on variations in economic resources, professional status, and educational background. From a sociological perspective, class is linked to merit-based criteria and an open stratification system, enabling social mobility and advancement within the hierarchy.

8.9 GLOSSARY

- **Achieved Status:** A social position acquired through individual effort and competence.
- **Bourgeoisie:** The capitalist class that controls and owns the means of production.
- **Life Chances:** The likelihood of individuals obtaining opportunities and resources within society.
- **Proletariat:** The working class that earns wages by selling its labor in a capitalist system.
- **Social Class:** A group of people with similar levels of wealth, social status, and influence.

8.10 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Ogburn and Nimkoff

A2. Marx

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Marx

A2. Lower class

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Prestige

A2. Motivation

Self-Check Exercise-4

A1. Status

A2. Class Consciousness

Self-Check Exercise-5

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8.12 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- (i) Define the concept of class and elaborate on the Marxian and Weberian perspectives on class.
- (ii) Analyze class as a form of social stratification, highlighting its key features and critiques.
- (iii) Compare and contrast caste and class as systems of social stratification.

(i)

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UNIT-9

RACE AND ETHNICITY AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

STRUCTURE

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Learning Objectives
- 9.3 Meaning and Definition of Race
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 9.4 Meaning and Definition of Ethnicity
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 9.5 Race in a Global World
 - 9.5.1 Race in Social Science
 - 9.5.2 Race in India
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 9.6 Race and Ethnicity as a form of Social Stratification
 - Self-Check Exercise-4
- 9.7 Summary
- 9.8 Glossary
- 9.9 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 9.10 References/Suggested Readings
- 9.11 Terminal Questions

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of difference is something individuals internalize early in life. During primary socialization, people learn that distinctions among individuals are perceived as natural. Statements like "*boys are boys and girls are girls*" reinforce gender segregation and shape a sense of identity through an "*us versus them*" perspective. As individuals progress through life, these categories expand to include cultural influences, further shaping perceptions of difference. Over time, these constructs can lead to biases and stereotypes, which may be consciously or unconsciously reinforced. Understanding these recurring behavioral patterns and their broader societal implications is essential for analyzing sociological concepts such as race and ethnicity.

Societies are often structured into hierarchical layers, where some groups enjoy privileges while others experience marginalization. This structured division is known as **social stratification**. While caste is a dominant aspect of social stratification in India, other crucial factors such as class, gender, power, race, and ethnicity also play significant roles. Beyond the caste system, social stratification can take various forms, including estate systems, slavery, and ethnic divisions.

Racial and ethnic stratification refers to systems of inequality where an individual's group membership—determined by race, religion, or national origin—affects their social position and access to resources. Race is a **social construct** based on perceived genetic heritage, often linked to distinct physical characteristics. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is shaped by cultural rather than biological differences. Ethnic groups share a common ancestry and cultural background, which influences their identity and social interactions.

9.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Define race and explore its various interpretations.
- Understand the meaning and definitions of ethnicity.
- Examine racial classifications both globally and in India.
- Analyze race and ethnicity as key aspects of social stratification.

9.3 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF RACE

A racial minority is one of the most commonly recognized types of minority groups in society. Race refers to a group that society identifies based on certain biologically inherited physical characteristics. However, defining racial categories precisely remains complex. Most classification efforts consider a combination of physical traits, including skin color, facial features, hair texture, eye shape, height, and genetic markers. In essence, race can be understood as a group of individuals connected through common ancestry.

Historically, the term was used to describe shared characteristics resulting from a common lineage. J.S.B. Haldane, in his contribution to *What is Race*, a publication by UNESCO, defines race as "a group which shares in common a certain set of innate physical characteristics and a geographical origin within a certain area." This implies that a racial group inhabits a specific geographical region and possesses distinct inherited traits. Several scholars have provided definitions that help clarify the concept of race:

1. **A.W. Green** describes race as "a large, biological, human grouping with a number of distinctive, inherited characteristics which vary within a certain range."
2. **J. Biesanz and M. Biesanz** define race as "a large group of people distinguished by inherited physical differences."
3. **Horton and Hunt** state that race refers to "a group of people somewhat different from other groups in a combination of inherited physical characteristics, but race is also substantially determined by popular social definition."
4. **L.C. Dunn** explains that "a race, in short, is a group of related intermarrying individuals, that is, a population that differs from others in the relative commonness of certain hereditary traits."
5. **Sutherland and Woodward** describe race as "a broad association of persons of similar biological heritage, who are united in settlement by common cultural traditions and who, in times of conflict, seek to claim rights to a better social position on the basis of inherited qualities."

These definitions emphasize both the biological and social dimensions of race, highlighting its role in societal structures and cultural identity.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Who defines race as, "a race is a large group of people distinguished by inherited physical differences".

- (A) A.W. Green (B) Hortun and Hunt (C) J. Biesanz and M. Biesanz (D) L.C.Dunn

Q2. Who defines race as, , "a race is a large, biological, human grouping with a number of distinctive, inherited characteristics which vary within a certain range".

- (A) Hortun and Hunt (B) Sutherland and Woodward (C) J. Biesanz and M. Biesanz
(D) A.W. Green

9.4 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF ETHNICITY

The term *ethnic* originates from the Greek word *ethno*, meaning "nation." Historically, it was used to describe tribal societies that functioned as nations based on their simple forms of governance and economic structures. Over time, the term evolved to encompass distinctions among human groups based on shared cultural, racial, or ancestral traits. Ethnicity, therefore, refers to a collective sense of identity that binds individuals within a group based on common cultural elements, historical experiences, and social practices. It represents a dynamic concept that goes beyond mere racial distinctions, incorporating linguistic, religious, and traditional differences.

Key Definitions of Ethnicity

Scholars have provided various perspectives on ethnicity, each emphasizing different aspects of identity and group membership:

1. **J.M. Yinger** defines an ethnic group as one whose members share a common culture, which is transmitted across generations, incorporating biological continuity. According to Yinger, ethnicity is characterized by:
 - The perception of distinctiveness by outsiders based on factors such as religion, language, race, or country of origin.
 - A self-perception of cultural uniqueness among the group's members.
 - Participation in shared cultural practices aimed at preserving their distinct identity.
2. **Fredrik Barth** views ethnicity as "a subjective process of status identification." He argues that ethnicity is not just about cultural identity but also involves a claim to social recognition. Groups may seek to assert their status as either superior to others or, at the very least, equal to them. This suggests that ethnicity is not just an inherent trait but also a social construct shaped by interactions and perceptions.
3. **Anthony Giddens** defines ethnicity as "the cultural practices and outlook that distinguish a given community of people." He highlights that ethnic groups not only perceive themselves as culturally distinct but are also seen as distinct by others in society. This dual perspective underscores the role of both internal group identity and external recognition in shaping ethnic consciousness.
4. **Paul Bross** describes an ethnic category as "any group of people differing from others based on objective cultural criteria—such as language, dialect, clothing, diet, customs, religion, or race—

while also maintaining a distinct internal social and economic structure." His definition emphasizes that ethnicity is not just a marker of cultural diversity but also involves economic and social organization within a community.

5. **K.S. Singh** argues that ethnicity increasingly refers to populations distinguished by unique bio-cultural and bio-social traits. He highlights the concept of ethnic difference as the recognition of a contrast between "us" and "them," reinforcing the idea that ethnicity is shaped by both self-identification and external differentiation.

Ethnicity is not a static or purely biological concept; rather, it is a fluid and socially constructed identity. It plays a crucial role in shaping social interactions, political movements, and historical narratives. While some groups use ethnicity to foster cultural pride and solidarity, others may face discrimination and marginalization based on their ethnic identity. Ethnicity can serve as both a unifying force and a basis for exclusion, depending on the socio-political context.

Moreover, the process of ethnic identification is influenced by historical, political, and economic factors. Migration, globalization, and intergroup relations constantly reshape ethnic boundaries. For instance, ethnic identity may be reinforced in response to external threats or discrimination, while inter-ethnic interactions can lead to cultural assimilation and hybridity.

Understanding ethnicity requires moving beyond rigid definitions and recognizing its evolving nature. It is not merely about physical or cultural traits but also about how groups navigate their identities in different social contexts. Whether as a source of unity or division, ethnicity remains a fundamental aspect of human societies, influencing individual identities and collective experiences across time and space.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

- Q1. The word "**ethnic**" originates from a Greek term..... meaning 'nation'.
- Q2. Ethnicity is the sense of ethnic diversity which takes about the of a particular group.

9.5 RACE IN A GLOBAL WORLD

The concept of race has been historically associated with various social and political issues, such as racial profiling, discrimination, and inequality. These associations stem from the long-standing belief that humans can be classified into distinct biological groups. However, the original use of the term *race* was more general, referring to all of humanity as a single collective. It was only from the 18th century onwards that racial classification systems were introduced, reinforcing divisions among people based on physical characteristics.

One of the earliest racial classification systems was developed by **Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882)**, who categorized races based on physical attributes. His classification included:

- **Caucasian (White)** – perceived as superior in intelligence, morality, and capability.
- **Negroid (Black)** – considered emotional, immoral, and inferior.
- **Mongoloid (Yellow)** – also deemed emotional and immoral.

Gobineau even questioned whether Black and Yellow races shared a common ancestry with Whites. He argued that populations from Southern and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia,

and North Africa were racially mixed. Such race-based ideologies were later expanded upon, particularly during the Nazi regime in Germany, the Ku Klux Klan movement in the U.S., and South Africa's apartheid system. These theories justified social exclusion, discrimination, and even acts of violence against non-Caucasian populations. However, contemporary society largely rejects these outdated and discriminatory views.

9.5.1 Race in Social Science

Social scientists overwhelmingly agree that race has no biological foundation. It is primarily a social construct used to justify inequalities. However, there is ongoing debate on how race should be studied:

1. **Eliminating the Concept of Race** – Some argue that the term is ideologically loaded and should be abandoned entirely.
2. **Recognizing Race as a Social Reality** – Others contend that race still influences daily life, shaping social structures and experiences, making its study essential for understanding racial discrimination and inequality.

Historically, distinguishing between groups was part of human social organization, often based on kinship, tribe, or corporal appearances. Though, the progression of **racialization** transformed these differences into categories used for political and social hierarchies. For example:

- European colonial powers classified non-Europeans as non-white to justify exploitation.
- Africans were racialized as inferior, particularly during the transatlantic slave trade.
- The caste-like racial structures in South Africa and Europe marginalized ethnic minorities.

Racialization affects various features of existence, including learning, occupation, healthcare, and societal interactions. It dictates access to opportunities and resources, often reinforcing existing inequalities.

9.5.2 Race in India

In India, racial classification has been historically influenced by both colonial anthropology and indigenous social structures. One of the most well-known classifications was proposed by **Herbert Risley**, who identified seven physical types within the Indian population:

1. The Dravidian Type

- Short to medium stature
- Dark complexion, often approaching black
- Dark, thick, and sometimes curly hair
- Long head and broad nose
- Found primarily in **Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Chotanagpur, and Western Bengal**
- Risley considered them the original inhabitants of India, later influenced by Aryan, Scythian, and Mongoloid migrations.

2. The Indo-Aryan Type

- Tall stature, fair complexion
- Dark eyes, abundant facial and body hair

- Long head and narrow nose
- Found in **Punjab, Rajasthan, and Kashmir**
- Includes **Kashmiri Brahmins, Rajputs, Jats, and Khattris**
- Considered to be closest to the early Aryan settlers.

3. The Mongoloid Type

- Broad head, dark complexion with a yellowish tinge
- Scanty facial and body hair
- Short to medium stature
- Found in **Himalayan regions, North East India, Nepal, and Burma**
- Examples: **Lepchas, Limbus, Murmis, Gurungs, and Bodo tribes**

4. The Aryo-Dravidian Type (*Hindustani Type*)

- Long to medium head
- Complexion varies from light brown to black
- Medium-sized nose, broader than Indo-Aryan types
- Found in **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and parts of Rajasthan**
- A result of Aryan-Dravidian intermixing.

5. The Mongolo-Dravidian Type (*Bengali Type*)

- Broad and round head
- Dark complexion, medium to short stature
- Medium, slightly flat nose
- Found in **Bengal and Orissa**
- Examples: **Bengali Brahmins and Bengali Kayasthas**
- Includes influences from Mongoloid, Dravidian, and Indo-Aryan populations.

6. The Scytho-Dravidian Type

- Medium to broad head, low to medium stature
- Fair complexion, moderately fine nose
- Scanty facial and body hair
- Found in **Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh**
- Examples: **Maratha Brahmins, Kunbis, and Coorgs**
- Originated from intermixing of Scythians and Dravidians.

7. The Turko-Iranian Type

- Broad heads, long prominent nose
- Fair complexion, dark or grey eyes
- Plentiful facial and body hair

- Found in **Afghanistan, Baluchistan, and Northwest Frontier Province (now in Pakistan)**
- Includes **Balochis, Brahuis, and Afghans**

The concept of race, both globally and in India, has evolved from a rigid biological classification to a complex social construct. While earlier racial theories justified discrimination and social hierarchy, contemporary perspectives recognize race as a socio-political phenomenon. In India, the interplay between racial, ethnic, and caste identities continues to shape social dynamics. Rather than relying on outdated racial classifications, modern scholarship focuses on cultural and historical interactions that define human diversity.

self-Check Exercise-3

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Which racial type is categorized by broad heads and fine to medium nose, which is long and protuberant?

- (A) Scytho-Dravidian (B) Turko-Iranian (C) Mongolo-Dravidian (D) Indo-Aryan

Q2. Which type of race are broad-head, dark complexion with yellowish tinge and scanty hair on face and body.

- (A) Turko-Iranian (B) Indo-Aryan (C) Mongoloid (D) Dravidian

9.6 RACE AND ETHNICITY AS A FORM OF STRATIFICATION

Throughout history, racial and ethnic distinctions have shaped societal structures and influenced human interactions. Judgments based on skin color, geographic origin, or cultural background have led to divisions, resulting in majority and minority group dynamics, segregation, economic disparities, and, in extreme cases, acts of genocide. These divisions have created ongoing struggles over resources and opportunities, reinforcing social stratification.

Race is one of the fundamental axes of social stratification. Although often perceived as a biological characteristic, race is, in reality, a social construct. Sociologists emphasize that race is not rooted in genetics but is instead a product of societal beliefs and practices. Despite its constructed nature, race has profound social implications, influencing access to wealth, education, and political power. Racial minorities frequently experience economic disparities, earning lower incomes and possessing less wealth compared to their white counterparts. Educational attainment is another area where racial inequality is evident, as minority groups often have lower graduation rates than white individuals.

Although related, race and ethnicity are distinct concepts. Ethnicity refers to cultural commonalities such as language, traditions, religion, and shared history. Like race, ethnicity is socially constructed, yet it also significantly affects individuals' life chances. Ethnic minorities are often perceived as inferior, leading to systemic stratification based on ethnic identity. Ethnicity, similar to class, influences an individual's societal status and access to resources. It encompasses a wide range of social identifiers, including religion, kinship, language, and caste, all of which serve as bases for stratification.

In many societies, ethnicity plays a key role in the unequal distribution of resources. Certain ethnic groups have privileged access to economic and social advantages, while others face systemic

marginalization. Ethnic stratification creates hierarchical divisions in access to prestige, property, and political power, reinforcing social inequality. Ethnic identity is deeply tied to power structures and class dynamics, often serving as an extension of kinship sentiments. Some scholars argue that ethnicity is rooted in both primordial ties, such as kinship and caste, and instrumentalist perspectives that view ethnicity as a means for political and economic mobilization.

Ethnicity is also a crucial factor in political organization. In India, caste-based associations actively participate in the political landscape, forming distinct ethnic entities. Groups such as AJGAR (Ahirs, Jats, Gujjars, and Rajputs) and other caste clusters have emerged as influential political blocs. Additionally, religious and cultural identities, such as those of Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Gorkhas, are often articulated in ethnic terms. Regional identities, such as those associated with Oriya, Tamil, Telugu, Assamese, Marathi, and Gujarati communities, further demonstrate how ethnicity influences social and political life.

The process of ethnicization—the transformation of social relations into ethnic categories—has been intensified by economic, social, and political changes. Ethnic division of labor creates disparities where some groups dominate economic sectors while others are relegated to subordinate roles. For example, in Bihar, Marwaris and Punjabis have historically controlled major industries and trade, while local Bihari and tribal populations have been excluded from economic power. Such patterns of ethnic economic dominance contribute to social tensions and reinforce class-based stratification.

Scholars such as Jagannath Pathy highlight the requirement for strategies that funding tribal communities in India, recognizing them as ethnic minorities with unique socio-economic challenges. Similarly, S.L. Joshi argues that ethnicity provides continuity and identity for tribal populations, helping them preserve their distinct social status. The intersection of ethnicity and class further complicates stratification, as individuals within the same indigenous group may experience dissimilar economic realities. Ethnic identity is often used as a instrument for radical and monetary demands, and conflicts arise when different ethnic groups compete for resources and representation in society.

Ultimately, the interplay between race, ethnicity, and class continues to shape social hierarchies worldwide. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing inequalities and promoting social justice. By critically examining the role of race and ethnicity in social stratification, societies can work toward more equitable policies and inclusive social structures.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Fill in the blanks

Q1. An ethnic group may be considered as in a given system or social stratification.

Q2. believes that ethnicity imparts continuity and identity to the tribal people.

9.7 SUMMARY

Race is a category of people who share common ancestry, similar physical characteristics, and a sense of collective identity. It encompasses both physical traits, such as skin color, and other attributes like intelligence, which society often considers socially significant. However, many widespread beliefs about race are based on myths, as there are no definitive features that can distinctly classify human beings into separate races.

Ethnicity is constructed on shared cultural traditions, perspectives, and distinctions that distinguish one group from another. It represents a common cultural heritage, typically including ancestry, historical experiences, language, religion, and specific forms of dress. Unlike racial traits, ethnic differences are not natural but learned through cultural transmission.

In essence, aspects such as region, race, caste, sect, language, and tribe all fall under the broader concept of ethnicity, forming a crucial foundation for social stratification. People often categorize themselves and others based on these factors, making ethnicity a key determinant in societal divisions.

9.8 GLOSSARY

- **Discrimination:** Actions based on prejudice directed against a particular group.
- **Ethnicity:** A shared cultural identity that may include heritage, language, religion, and traditions.
- **Racialization:** The social process where groups are exposed to unequal treatment due to perceived physical differences.
- **Racism:** The belief that some racial groups are inherently superior or inferior to others.
- **Stereotypes:** Generalized and often oversimplified beliefs about specific groups of people.

9.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. J. Biesanz and M Biesanz

A2. A.W. Green

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Ethno

A2. Belongingness

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Turko-Iranian

A2. Mongogoloid

Self-Check Exercise-4

A1. Stratum

A2. S.L Doshi

9.10 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READINGS

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9.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the concepts of race and ethnicity within the framework of social stratification.
2. Define ethnicity and explain its connection with race.
3. Elaborate on the notion of ethnicity and in what way it acts as a foundation for social stratification. Support your response with a relevant example.

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UNIT-10

GENDER AND INEQUALITY

STRUCTURE

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Learning Objectives
- 10.3 Meaning of Gender Inequality
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 10.4 Perspectives on Gender Inequality
 - 10.4.1 Functionalist Perspective on Gender Inequality
 - 10.4.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender Inequality
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 10.5 Gender Inequality in India
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 10.6 Summary
- 10.7 Glossary
- 10.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 10.9 References/Suggested Readings
- 10.10 Terminal Questions

10.1 INTRODUCTION

One might assume that being a man or a woman is solely determined by biological sex or the physical body one is born with. However, the nature of maleness and femaleness is more complex and cannot be easily categorized. To understand this, it is essential to distinguish between sex and gender. Sociologists define *sex* as the anatomical and physiological differences that distinguish male and female bodies. In contrast, *gender* refers to the psychological, social, and cultural differences between males and females. It is associated with socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity and does not necessarily correspond directly to an individual's biological sex.

For instance, some individuals feel that their gender identity does not align with their assigned biological sex and may choose to transition or adopt behaviors and lifestyles typically associated with the opposite gender. This distinction between sex and gender is crucial, as many differences between males and females are shaped by social and cultural influences rather than biology.

Sociologists have put forth contrasting perspectives on the formation of gender identities and social roles. The debate among scholars revolves around the extent to which social factors shape gender differences. There are three broad approaches in sociological interpretations of gender differences and inequalities. The first approach argues that biological factors play a key role in behavioral differences between men and women. The second emphasizes the role of socialization and

the learning of gender roles. The third suggests that both gender and sex are entirely social constructs with no biological basis.

Gender inequality refers to the visible or subtle disparities between individuals based on gender. This issue is often termed *gender bias*, which signifies gender-based stratification or discrimination between boys and girls. In India, this problem is more pronounced in rural areas, where many people view a girl child as a burden. However, gender inequality is also evident in urban settings, including workplaces, educational institutions, and broader society. The world we live in is marked by significant disparities, with women often bearing a disproportionate share of hardships compared to men.

10.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the idea of gender inequality.
- Explain the functionalist perspective on gender inequality.
- Explore different strands of feminism in the context of gender inequality.
- Analyze the issues related to gender inequality in India.

10.3 MEANING OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender is a socio-cultural construct that defines roles, behaviors, and expectations assigned to males and females within a society. In contrast, **sex** refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that differentiate men and women. While sex is based on biological attributes, gender is shaped by social norms and cultural influences.

Gender inequality is interpreted in various ways, as definitions often reflect different perspectives. One approach defines it as the unequal distribution of opportunities based solely on gender perceptions, restricting access to resources, education, and employment. Another perspective highlights disparities in power, status, and recognition between men and women within social structures. The former emphasizes tangible inequalities in access to opportunities, while the latter focuses on deeper societal biases that reinforce gender hierarchies. Both dimensions contribute to the persistence of gender-based discrimination and social stratification.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1. is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviours assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society.

Q2. The term 'sex' is a and psychological phenomenon which defines men and women.

10.4 PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER INEQUALITY

In sociology, **gender** refers to the social and cultural distinctions between men and women, shaping their roles and expectations in society. The differentiation between **sex** and **gender** was introduced to challenge the long-standing belief that women's subordination is a natural consequence of biological differences. Historically, it was assumed that the roles, status, and characteristics assigned to men and women were biologically determined and, therefore, unchangeable. However, gender is a social construct, closely tied to the expectations and behaviors that society imposes on individuals based on their sex.

From birth, individuals are subjected to **gendered socialization**, where societal norms dictate their treatment and opportunities. Sons are often celebrated and provided with greater privileges, while daughters may face discrimination in terms of access to resources, education, and healthcare. Boys are typically encouraged to be strong and independent, while girls are often socialized to be passive and home-oriented. These distinctions, rather than being inherent, are reinforced by cultural practices, making gender inequality a socially constructed phenomenon.

Gender inequality is distinct from other forms of social and economic disparities, as it operates both within and beyond the household. It is not merely a reflection of economic disparities but is also deeply rooted in **pre-existing gender norms and perceptions** that shape societal expectations. This inequality has far-reaching consequences, not only limiting women's autonomy but also hindering overall economic and social development. Restricting women's participation in economic, political, and social spheres weakens societal progress. Many developing nations, including India, continue to exhibit gender disparities in areas such as education, employment, and healthcare.

Gender has a crucial role in defining life opportunities and social positions. Across cultures, men and women occupy different roles, yet no known society has granted women greater power than men. Male roles are generally accorded more value, status, and economic rewards. Women, on the other hand, are often assigned primary responsibilities for domestic work and child-rearing, while men are expected to be the primary providers. This **gendered division of labor** has led to disparities in power, prestige, and wealth between men and women.

Despite significant progress in women's rights globally, **gender differences continue to drive social inequalities**. Understanding and addressing gender inequality has become a central concern in sociology, leading to various theoretical explanations of **male dominance in economic, political, and familial spheres**. The following sections explore key sociological perspectives that explain the persistence and structural nature of gender inequality in society.

10.4.1 Functionalist Perspective on Gender Inequality

The **functionalist approach** views society as a system of interconnected parts that work together to maintain social order and stability. From this perspective, gender differences are seen as essential for social cohesion and integration. However, this viewpoint has been widely criticized for ignoring social conflicts and reinforcing a traditional, often conservative, understanding of gender roles.

Proponents of the "**natural differences**" theory argue that the division of labor between men and women is biologically determined. They suggest that individuals perform roles suited to their innate abilities. **George Murdock (1949)**, through his cross-cultural study of over 200 societies, observed that gender-based division of labor exists universally. While he acknowledged that this division was not biologically programmed, he deemed it the most practical and logical way to structure society. He

asserted that women should focus on domestic responsibilities, while men engage in economic activities outside the home.

Talcott Parsons, a key functionalist theorist, examined the role of the family in industrial societies, particularly in the socialization of children. He argued that a well-functioning family requires a **clear sexual division of labor**. According to Parsons, women are best suited for **expressive roles**, providing emotional support and nurturing children, while men should assume **instrumental roles**, such as being the primary breadwinner. He believed that women's caring nature not only benefits children but also helps stabilize men, given the pressures they face in the workforce. This complementary arrangement, Parsons claimed, strengthens family bonds and promotes social harmony.

A related perspective on child-rearing was offered by **John Bowlby (1953)**, who emphasized the significance of maternal care in a child's early development. He introduced the concept of **maternal deprivation**, arguing that separation from the mother during early childhood could result in inadequate socialization. According to Bowlby, this lack of maternal bonding could lead to serious psychological and behavioral problems, including antisocial tendencies. He maintained that a child's mental health and overall well-being are best ensured through continuous and close interaction with the mother.

While functionalist perspectives highlight the perceived benefits of gender-based roles, they have been widely challenged for legitimizing gender inequalities. Critics argue that these theories reinforce traditional gender norms and fail to account for the evolving nature of family structures, economic demands, and women's increasing participation in the workforce. By attributing gender roles to biological differences, functionalism overlooks the influence of socialization as well as changing societal expectations in shaping gender identities and responsibilities.

10.4.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender Inequality

The feminist movement has generated a vast body of theoretical frameworks aimed at explaining gender inequalities and proposing strategies to overcome them. Various feminist perspectives have analyzed gender inequality through different lenses, emphasizing factors such as sexism, patriarchy, and capitalism. While these perspectives overlap in some areas, they also offer distinct explanations for the persistence of gender disparities.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism attributes gender inequality to communal and traditional attitudes rather than systemic structures. Earliest advocates of this perspective was **John Stuart Mill**, who, in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), argued for legal and political equality between men and women, including the right to vote. Liberal feminists focus on specific social barriers, such as workplace discrimination, unequal educational opportunities, and biased media representations, rather than viewing gender subordination as part of a larger oppressive system.

Liberal feminists advocate for gradual reforms within existing institutions to achieve gender equality. Their approach has led to significant progress, particularly in advancing women's rights in employment, education, and political representation. However, critics argue that liberal feminism fails to address the structural roots of gender inequality and does not sufficiently challenge the systemic nature of women's oppression.

Socialist and Marxist Feminism

Socialist feminism builds on Marxist conflict theory, which emphasizes economic structures as the foundation of social inequality. While Karl Marx himself did not extensively discuss gender inequality, his collaborator **Friedrich Engels** provided a Marxist interpretation of gender oppression. Engels argued that under capitalism, gender inequality is reinforced by material and economic conditions. He linked women's subjugation to private property ownership, contending that capitalism intensifies patriarchy by concentrating capital and supremacy in the hands of men.

Engels also highlighted the exploitation of women's unpaid domestic labor, asserting that capitalism benefits from women's work in the household without compensating them. He maintained that women's subordination was not only a result of biological differences but also of economic dependence on men. Socialist feminists argue that liberal feminism's reformist goals are insufficient and call for a fundamental restructuring of the family and labor system. They propose collective solutions for child-rearing and household responsibilities, asserting that true gender equality requires a socialist revolution that eliminates private ownership and redistributes resources equitably.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism places patriarchy at the core of gender inequality, viewing it as a universal system of male dominance that has persisted across cultures and historical periods. This perspective asserts that men benefit from and actively sustain women's oppression, particularly within the family structure. Radical feminists argue that men exploit women by relying on unpaid domestic labor while simultaneously restricting their access to power and influence in society.

One prominent radical feminist, **Shulamith Firestone (1971)**, contended that the biological ability to bear children places women in a dependent position, reinforcing their fiscal and communal subordination. She introduced the concept of "sex class," asserting that gender oppression is deeply rooted in reproductive roles and can only be dismantled by abolishing traditional family structures.

Radical feminists also highlight violence against women and the objectification of female bodies as central mechanisms of oppression. They popularized the phrase "the personal is political", emphasizing that private experiences—such as domestic labor, reproductive rights, and sexual violence—are deeply connected to larger social and political structures.

Sylvia Walby contributed to radical feminist theory by reconceptualizing patriarchy, arguing that it remains a valuable analytical tool when understood in a broader socio-economic and political context. She identified multiple interconnected structures—such as the family, the labor market, and the state—that perpetuate gender inequality.

Feminist theories provide diverse explanations for gender inequality, ranging from individual rights and legal reforms (liberal feminism) to economic and structural transformations (socialist and Marxist feminism) and the dismantling of patriarchal power structures (radical feminism). While each approach has its strengths and limitations, they collectively highlight the deep-seated nature of gender inequality and underscore the need for systemic change to achieve genuine equality.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. has advanced an important reconceptualization of patriarchy.

Q2. To Engels,exploited man by paying low wages and women by paying no wages

10.5 GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA

Gender inequality in Indian society is deeply embedded within its patriarchal framework, which has historically placed women in subordinate positions. Sociologist Sylvia Walby describes patriarchy as a system where men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. This dominance is not a recent phenomenon but a continuation of deeply rooted cultural, religious, and social structures that have governed gender relations for centuries.

Religious doctrines have played a significant role in reinforcing gender hierarchies. Ancient Hindu legal texts, particularly those attributed to Manu, prescribed rigid roles for women, emphasizing their dependency on male figures throughout life. These norms, though formulated in historical contexts, continue to influence contemporary social structures, limiting women's autonomy in both domestic and public spheres. The persistence of these beliefs, despite constitutional provisions promoting gender equality, highlights the challenge of dismantling deeply entrenched patriarchal values.

One of the most visible manifestations of gender disparity in India is the significant gap in health and nutrition between men and women. Women experience higher mortality rates due to systemic neglect and discrimination in access to healthcare. The preference for male children often results in the denial of adequate nutrition and medical care for girls, leading to long-term health complications. Malnutrition among women, particularly in rural areas, exacerbates maternal and infant mortality rates. Studies indicate that women consume fewer calories than men and often suffer from anemia, which increases risks during childbirth and perpetuates a cycle of poor health outcomes.

Educational disparities further reinforce gender inequality. Although literacy rates among women have improved over the years, a significant gap remains compared to men. Traditional attitudes continue to prioritize boys' education over girls', resulting in lower enrollment and higher dropout rates for female students. Limited access to education reduces women's employment opportunities, restricting them to low-paying and informal sector jobs. Even in professional settings, women encounter wage disparities and restricted career advancement due to gender biases.

Violence against women remains a critical issue, cutting across all socio-economic groups. Domestic violence, sexual harassment, and honor killings are prevalent, often with limited legal repercussions. Cultural norms tend to normalize such violence, discouraging women from reporting abuse. While legal provisions exist to protect women, enforcement remains weak, and societal stigma further silences victims.

A deeply concerning aspect of gender discrimination is the skewed sex ratio, primarily driven by female infanticide and sex-selective abortions. Despite legal prohibitions, such practices persist due to the socio-cultural preference for male children. The declining female population has far-reaching consequences, including an increase in crimes such as trafficking and forced marriages. The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act of 1994 was introduced to curb sex-selective practices, but its effectiveness has been limited by weak enforcement and societal resistance.

Although legal frameworks in India promote gender equality, societal attitudes often undermine these efforts. The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights, and various policies have been implemented to empower women. The reservation of seats for women in local governance has increased female political

participation, signaling progress in gender representation. However, legislative measures alone cannot dismantle deeply ingrained biases; a cultural shift is necessary to achieve true gender parity.

Several structural issues continue to limit women's agency. Child marriage, though legally prohibited, remains widespread, particularly in rural areas. The law has raised the legal age of marriage over time, but social pressures and economic constraints still lead many families to marry off their daughters at a young age. Additionally, restrictions on women's mobility, particularly in northern India, reinforce their dependency on male family members. Practices such as purdah, which enforce female seclusion, further limit women's access to public spaces and economic opportunities.

Ownership rights and financial independence are crucial for gender equality, yet women continue to face barriers in accessing property and financial resources. Although laws guarantee women's rights to inheritance and land ownership, traditional customs often prevent them from exercising these rights. Economic dependence on male family members restricts women's decision-making power, perpetuating cycles of subordination.

Addressing gender inequality requires a multi-faceted approach that goes beyond legal reforms. Social awareness campaigns, gender-sensitive education, and economic empowerment initiatives are essential to challenge deep-seated patriarchal norms. Encouraging women's leadership in politics, business, and community decision-making can drive systemic change. Moreover, strengthening the enforcement of existing laws and improving access to healthcare and education will contribute to a more equitable society.

Gender inequality in India is not just a social issue but a structural challenge that requires sustained efforts at multiple levels. While progress has been made through legal and policy interventions, true equality can only be achieved through a combination of legal enforcement, cultural transformation, and economic empowerment. The path forward must include reconfiguring societal attitudes towards gender roles, ensuring equal opportunities, and creating an environment where women can participate fully in all aspects of life without fear or restriction.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Who says that , "women are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, they must be under the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son in old age or as widows, in no circumstances she should be allowed to assert herself independently".

- (A) Marx (B) Weber (C) Manu (D) Rosseau

Q2. The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technology Act was passed in which year?

- (A) 1996 (B) 1994 (C) 2000 (D) 2002

10.6 SUMMARY

Gender inequality refers to the unequal treatment and experiences of individuals based on their gender, influenced by biological, psychological, and cultural factors. It manifests in disparities related to

status, power, and prestige across various social settings. Functionalist perspectives argue that gender roles and the division of labor contribute to societal stability. However, feminist theories challenge the idea that gender inequality is natural. Liberal feminists attribute it to societal attitudes such as sexism and discrimination, while radical feminists argue that patriarchy enables male dominance and exploitation. Although progress has been made in reducing gender inequality, it remains a widespread global issue impacting many lives.

10.7 GLOSSARY

- **Feminism:** A movement advocating for gender equality and opposing patriarchy and sexism.
- **Gender:** The socially constructed roles, behaviors, and expectations assigned to individuals based on their sex.
- **Gender Role:** The socially learned behaviors and expectations associated with a particular gender.
- **Gender Stratification:** The unequal distribution of wealth, power, and privilege between genders in society.
- **Patriarchy:** A social system in which men hold dominant positions over women.
- **Sexism:** The belief that one gender is inherently superior to another.

10.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Gender

A2. Biological

Self-Check exercise-2

A1. Sylvia Walby

A2. Capitalism

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Manu

A2. 1994

10.9 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READINGS

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10.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss gender as a significant aspect of social stratification.
2. Critically analyze the feminist perspective on gender inequality.
3. "For a long time, studies on stratification overlooked gender." Critically evaluate this statement.

BLOCK-III
UNIT-11
CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF CASTE

STRUCTURE

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Learning Objectives
- 11.3 Meaning and Definitions of Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 11.4 Characteristics of Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 11.5 Varna and Caste
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 11.6 Changing Dimensions of Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-4
- 11.7 Factors Responsible for Bringing Changes in the Caste System
 - Self-Check Exercise-5
- 11.8 Summary
- 11.9 Glossary
- 11.10 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 11.11 Suggested Readings
- 11.12 Terminal Questions

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Caste serves as a fundamental form of social stratification that is central to India's societal framework. Social structure refers to the stable patterns of interaction between individuals and groups, shaped by societal norms and values that regulate relationships and maintain social order.

Sociologists describe caste, known as *jati* in India, as a hereditary and endogamous social group often linked to a specific region. Traditionally, caste determines occupational roles and holds a predetermined hierarchical status within society.

The caste system, deeply rooted in India's history, remains a distinct form of stratification that has been extensively studied by sociologists and anthropologists. It is defined by features such as endogamy, hereditary transmission of lifestyle and occupation, ritual status, and social norms based on purity and pollution.

Although caste divisions have historically influenced social and economic life, urbanization and government policies aimed at promoting equality have contributed to a gradual decline in caste-based

economic significance. Nevertheless, caste remains an essential subject of academic research, extending beyond Hindu society to comparable hierarchical structures in various communities and regions.

11.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Comprehend the connotation and key structures of the caste system in India.
- Analyze the transformations occurring in various aspects of the caste in contemporary society.
- Identify and evaluate the factors contributing to changes within the system of caste.

11.3 MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF CASTE SYSTEM

The term 'Caste' is derived from the Spanish word 'Casta,' which signifies 'breed,' 'race,' or a set of inherited characteristics. Portuguese explorers used this term to describe the structured social groups they encountered in India, commonly referred to as *Varna Vyavastha* or *Jati Vyavastha*. Over time, the English language adapted the term as 'Caste.'

The primary purpose of the caste system was to regulate group life within society by assigning specific roles and statuses to individuals. This system helped in organizing social interactions and maintaining order within the community.

Definitions of Caste

Some of the definitions of caste are :

- (i) According to Arnold Green, "Caste is a system of stratification in which mobility up and down the Status ladder, at least ideally may not occur."
- (ii) According to Herbert Risley, "Class are a collection of families or group of families bearing a common, name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same heredity callings & regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogenous communities."
- (iii) According to Charles Cooley, "When a class is somewhat strictly hereditary, we may call it a caste."
- (iv) According to Ketekar, "Caste is a social group having two characteristics (a) membership is confined to those who are born of members & includes all persons no born (b) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group."
- (v) According to E. Blunt, "Caste is an endogamous group bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary, imposing on its member certain restrictions in the matter of social intercourse, either following a common traditional occupation a claiming a common origin & generally regarded as forming a single homogenous community."
- (vi) According to MacIver and Page, "When status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then class takes the extreme form of caste".

Self-Check Exercise-1

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Who defines caste as, "Caste is a system of stratification in which mobility up and down the Status ladder, at least ideally may not occur."

- (A) Ketekar (B) E. Blunt (C) MacIver and Page (D) Arnold Green

Q2. Who said, , "When status is wholly predetermined, so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then class takes the extreme form of caste".

- (A) Herbert Risley (B) MacIver and Page (C) Ketekar (D) E. Blunt

11.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF CASTE SYSTEM

Sociologist G.S. Ghurye identified several key features of the caste system that define its structure and functioning in Indian society. These characteristics highlight the rigid social hierarchy, occupational restrictions, and social norms that regulate interactions within and between castes.

1. Segmental Division of Society

Indian society is distributed into multiple castes, each functioning as a discrete social unit. Membership in a caste is depend upon birth and remains fixed throughout an individual's life. This rigid structure limits social mobility, as movement from one caste to another is nearly impossible. Each caste has its own set of traditions, customs, occupational roles, and social expectations that its members must follow.

2. Hierarchy

The caste system follows a hierarchical order where castes are ranked in a specific social structure. Traditionally, Brahmins occupy the highest position, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras at the bottom. This ranking is determined by birth, and shifting from one caste to another is highly challenging. However, with urbanization and industrialization, this rigid stratification is gradually losing its grip, especially in metropolitan areas where diverse communities interact more freely.

3. Restrictions on Commensality and Social Interaction

Each caste imposes strict rules regarding food, drink, and social interactions. Certain foods and beverages are restricted based on caste identity, and sharing meals across caste lines is traditionally discouraged. For example, a Brahmin may refuse to consume food prepared with water by a lower-caste individual but may accept food cooked in pure ghee. Water-sharing rules also apply, with some castes refusing to accept water from others due to notions of purity and pollution.

4. Unequal Civil and Religious Privileges

The caste system enforces an unequal distribution of rights and privileges. Higher castes enjoy social, religious, and economic advantages, while lower castes face systemic discrimination and restrictions. This disparity has historically manifested in limited access to education, religious

sites, and economic opportunities for marginalized communities. However, government initiatives and affirmative action policies have sought to reduce these inequalities in recent times.

5. Limited Occupational Mobility

Under the caste system, occupations are traditionally hereditary. Each caste is expected to engage in specific forms of labor, with little flexibility for individuals to pursue professions outside their caste-based occupation. This system restricted personal choice and economic mobility, though modernization and economic reforms have increasingly challenged this rigidity, allowing individuals to pursue careers based on merit rather than birth.

6. Endogamy and Marriage Restrictions

Marriage within one's own caste or sub-caste is strictly enforced, making endogamy a central feature of the caste system. Many sociologists consider endogamy to be the defining characteristic of caste, as it ensures the preservation of caste boundaries. Any violation of this rule, such as inter-caste marriages, is often met with social disapproval or even severe consequences in traditional settings. However, inter-caste marriages have become more common in urban areas due to changing societal norms and legal protections.

The caste system, once a rigid form of social stratification, has significantly shaped Indian society. Although its impact remains prevalent in many regions, social, economic, and legal developments have led to its gradual evolution. Factors such as urbanization, education, and affirmative action policies have contributed to reducing caste-based discrimination, fostering greater social mobility and inter-caste interactions. However, traces of the system still influence social relationships, making it a crucial area of study in sociology and anthropology.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. All caste enforces on its members with regard to food, drink and social intercourse.

Q2. Castes are distributed into and each sub-caste is an endogamous group.

11.4 VARNA AND CASTE

The caste system in India is closely connected to the *Varna* framework, which classifies Hindu society into four broad categories: **Brahmins** (traditionally priests and scholars), **Kshatriyas** (rulers and warriors), **Vaishyas** (merchants and traders), and **Shudras** (peasants, laborers, and service providers). The first three *Varnas* are regarded as "twice-born" (*Dvija*), as men from these groups undergo the *Upanayana* (sacred thread) ceremony, a privilege denied to the Shudras. Those categorized as "untouchables" fall outside this system and are excluded from the *Varna* hierarchy.

Historical and Conceptual Basis of Varna

The term *Varna* originally meant "color" and was used in early Vedic texts to differentiate between *Arya* (the dominant group) and *Dasa* (subjugated groups). In the *Rig Veda*, *Varna* did not signify a rigid social classification like caste, but over time, occupational divisions became aligned with *Varna*, and the earlier contrast between *Arya* and *Dasa* evolved into a distinction between *Arya* and *Shudra*.

While *Varna* provides an overarching structure for understanding social stratification, the reality of the caste system is much more complex. M.N. Srinivas argues that *Varna* serves as a broad theoretical model, but it does not accurately represent the intricate caste divisions that exist in practice. The concept of ritual purity and pollution underpins this hierarchical structure, influencing social interactions, occupations, and religious practices.

Caste and Class Overlap

Generally, higher castes tend to have greater economic and social advantages, whereas lower castes often face economic hardships. However, this correlation is not absolute. A caste may hold a high ritual status but still rank lower in local caste hierarchies due to economic, political, or educational disadvantages. The fluidity in caste ranking, particularly in the middle strata, illustrates that social status is shaped by both traditional and contemporary factors.

Limitations of the Varna Model

The *Varna* system theoretically consists of only four categories, making no provision for untouchables or numerous other occupational groups that existed even in Vedic times. Moreover, *Varna* does not reflect the extensive caste diversity present across India. G.S. Ghurye notes that each linguistic region contains roughly 200 caste groups, further subdivided into thousands of smaller endogamous units that define an individual's social life. Thus, while *Varna* serves as a broad classificatory scheme, it does not represent the lived reality of caste divisions.

Varna as a Symbolic Framework

Despite its limitations, *Varna* has functioned as a conceptual tool for understanding caste relations across India. According to Srinivas, while the *Varna* model distorts the complexity of caste, it provides a standardized reference for situating different castes within a larger framework. This common structure has fostered a shared social language across India, reinforcing a sense of familiarity and unity, even if it does not always align with social realities.

The *Varna* system offers a broad theoretical classification, but it does not account for the actual diversity and fluidity within the caste system. While it provides a historical and symbolic framework, the real-world caste structure varies significantly across regions. Indian society has undergone significant transformations over time, yet these changes have occurred within the overarching framework of *Varna*, which remains relatively stable while caste dynamics continue to evolve.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The castes are outside the Varna scheme.

Q2. The term literally means 'colour'.

11.5 CHANGING DIMENSIONS OF CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system in India has undergone significant transformations due to modernization, urbanization, industrialization, and democratic governance. Structural, cultural, economic, and political dimensions of caste have all experienced shifts, leading to both the weakening of traditional caste-based

hierarchies and the emergence of new patterns of caste consciousness. The key changes in the caste system are discussed below:

1. Decline in Brahminical Supremacy

Historically, Brahmins occupied the highest status in the caste hierarchy. However, modernization, the spread of education, and socio-political movements have diminished their dominance. Today, social status is increasingly determined by factors such as education, economic power, and political influence rather than hereditary caste position.

2. Changes in Caste Hierarchy

The rigid caste-based stratification is becoming less defined due to occupational diversification, urban migration, and mechanization of agriculture. The traditional link between caste, class, and power is weakening, leading to a more fluid social structure where mobility is possible.

3. Upliftment of Dalits and Scheduled Castes

Government policies of affirmative action, including reservations in education, employment, and politics, have significantly improved the socio-economic conditions of Dalits (formerly referred to as Harijans). This has led to a rise in their social status and participation in mainstream society.

4. Changing Basis of Social Status

In the past, caste was the primary determinant of an individual's status. Today, factors such as wealth, education, professional achievements, and political power have become more significant in shaping social prestige, reducing the rigid hereditary nature of caste-based status.

5. Transformation in Occupational Roles

Traditionally, caste determined one's occupation, with individuals being restricted to the professions assigned to their birth group. This rigidity has declined, and individuals are now free to choose professions based on their skills and interests. The dignity of labor movements, along with economic liberalization, has further encouraged occupational mobility across caste lines.

6. Relaxation of Marriage Restrictions

Endogamy, or marrying within one's caste, was a strict rule in traditional caste society. However, the *Special Marriage Act (1954)* and the *Hindu Marriage Act (1955)* have legally permitted inter-caste marriages. Increased social interaction through education and employment has also contributed to a rise in inter-caste unions, although resistance persists in some communities.

7. Changing Dining Practices

Earlier, strict rules governed dining and food-sharing across castes. Today, such restrictions have significantly weakened. Upper-caste individuals, including Brahmins, now share meals with members of other castes in social and political settings, reflecting a shift in traditional attitudes.

8. Declining Influence of Purity and Pollution Concepts

The traditional Hindu belief system placed great emphasis on notions of purity and pollution, determining social interactions and occupational roles. Over time, these ideas have lost significance, with scientific awareness, hygiene standards, and modern legal frameworks replacing religious sanctions as the basis of purity and impurity.

9. Standardization of Lifestyle Across Castes

Distinct caste-based lifestyles, once a defining feature of social identity, have diminished due to the twin influences of *Sanskritization* (lower castes adopting upper-caste customs) and *Westernization* (adopting modern, globalized lifestyles). As a result, caste distinctions based on attire, customs, and rituals are becoming less prominent.

10. Shift in Inter-Caste Relations

Historically, lower castes were subservient to upper castes, performing tasks assigned to them without resistance. Today, social mobility and legal protections have empowered lower-caste groups, leading to greater assertion of their rights. However, these developments have also triggered inter-caste conflicts, particularly in regions where upper-caste dominance is being challenged.

11. Decline of Caste Panchayats

In the past, caste-based councils (*jati panchayats*) played a crucial role in resolving disputes and enforcing social norms. With the rise of formal legal institutions, their authority has diminished, reducing their role in contemporary social governance.

12. Expansion of Educational Access

Education, once largely restricted to upper castes, is now accessible to all, thanks to government initiatives such as scholarships, reservations, and free study materials for marginalized communities. This has facilitated upward mobility and reduced caste-based educational disparities.

13. Transformation of Political Power Structures

Democratic principles and universal adult suffrage have eroded traditional caste hierarchies in politics. Earlier, governance was dominated by upper castes, but today, lower-caste groups have gained political representation, influencing policymaking and power structures.

14. Rising Caste Consciousness

Paradoxically, while caste rigidity has declined in some areas, caste-based political mobilization has intensified. Affirmative action policies and political competition have heightened caste awareness, sometimes reinforcing caste identities for electoral and social benefits.

15. Emergence of Dominant Castes

The concept of *dominant caste*, as introduced by M.N. Srinivas, refers to castes that wield economic, political, and demographic power in a region. A caste can become dominant based on factors such as land ownership, political representation, numerical strength, ritual status, and access to education.

16. Democratic Decentralization and Caste Representation

The *Panchayati Raj* system has provided political empowerment to lower castes by reserving seats in local governance structures. This has increased their participation in decision-making processes and enabled grassroots leadership.

17. Caste and Politics: A Complex Relationship

Caste has historically influenced politics, from the Varna system to contemporary democratic elections. Today, caste groups act as vote banks, align with political parties, and form caste-based associations. While this has led to the political empowerment of marginalized groups, it has also contributed to caste-based divisions and conflicts.

18. Changing Economic Role of Caste

The traditional *Jajmani* system, which defined economic relations between upper and lower castes, has largely disintegrated due to market economies, land reforms, and industrialization. While caste-based occupations still exist, economic roles are now increasingly determined by individual skills and market forces rather than hereditary factors.

19. Urbanization and Caste Anonymity

In rural India, caste continues to play a significant role in social and economic interactions. However, urbanization has weakened caste identities, as people from diverse backgrounds live and work together. While caste influences aspects like marriage, it has less impact on everyday social and professional interactions in cities.

The caste system in India has experienced substantial transformations due to modernization, democratic governance, economic progress, and legal reforms. Although traditional caste hierarchies have diminished, caste consciousness continues to play a significant role, especially in politics and social mobility. Persistent issues such as caste-based discrimination and inter-caste conflicts highlight that, while the system is changing, its complete dissolution remains a complex challenge. Achieving lasting progress requires sustained efforts in education, economic empowerment, and social reforms that foster equality and gradually eliminate caste-based divisions.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Fill in the blanks

Q1. . The service caste is recognized as '*Kamins*' and they used to provide service to the higher castes known as

Q2. The normalization of life styles is due to the twin processes of and westernization.

11.6 FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR BRINGING CHANGES IN THE CASTE SYSTEM

Although the caste system continues to exist in Indian society, it has undergone significant changes and is no longer as rigid as it once was. Various socio-economic, political, and cultural factors have contributed to these transformations. The major forces responsible for these changes are discussed below:

1. Industrialization and Urbanization

The twin processes of industrialization and urbanization have had a profound impact on traditional caste structures. These forces have introduced occupational diversification, economic independence, and increased social mobility, challenging caste-based hierarchies.

- **Occupational Shifts:** Industrialization has led to a shift from agrarian occupations to non-agricultural professions, diminishing the hereditary occupational divisions associated with caste.
- **Diminishing Ascriptive Status:** Urban workplaces often require merit-based employment, where individuals from lower castes can hold superior positions, challenging the traditional social order.

- **Residential Integration:** Urban housing patterns do not strictly follow caste lines, fostering inter-caste interactions and breaking traditional barriers.
- **Educational Inclusion:** Schools and universities admit students irrespective of caste, leading to shared learning experiences that dilute caste prejudices.
- **Public Sphere Interactions:** Shared public spaces such as transportation systems, workplaces, and markets diminish notions of ritual purity and pollution.
- **Status Redefinition:** In urban centers, economic success and educational qualifications often override caste-based social status.

2. Westernization

Westernization, as described by M.N. Srinivas, refers to the adoption of Western values, institutions, and lifestyles, which have significantly altered caste dynamics.

- **Introduction of Modern Education:** English-language education and secular curricula have allowed lower-caste individuals to access knowledge and careers once dominated by upper castes.
- **Egalitarian Values:** Western influences have promoted principles such as democracy, secularism, and human rights, which undermine caste-based discrimination.
- **Social Reform Movements:** Westernized elites played a crucial role in advocating against oppressive caste practices such as child marriage, widow restrictions, and untouchability.
- **Occupational Mobility:** Western-style employment opportunities have weakened caste-based job restrictions, enabling individuals to choose professions based on skill rather than birth.
- **Legal and Institutional Changes:** Many legal reforms and constitutional provisions are rooted in Western democratic ideals, fostering greater social equality.

3. Sanskritization

Sanskritization, a concept introduced by M.N. Srinivas, refers to the process by which lower-caste groups adopt customs, rituals, and lifestyles of higher castes to improve their social status.

- **Cultural Imitation:** Lower castes adopt vegetarianism, teetotalism, and other upper-caste practices to gain higher status.
- **Social Mobility Within the Hierarchy:** While caste remains a rigid structure, Sanskritization allows for slight positional shifts within the caste order.
- **Modification of Rituals and Beliefs:** Over time, dominant lower-caste groups integrate Brahminical traditions, altering their perceived social standing.
- **Limitations of Sanskritization:** Although it facilitates mobility, it does not fundamentally challenge the caste system but rather reinforces its hierarchical nature.

4. Secularization

Secularization refers to the diminishing influence of religious beliefs and rituals in social and moral life, weakening the caste system's ideological foundation.

- **Decline of Religious Justifications for Caste:** As society becomes more secular, caste-based purity and pollution concepts lose significance.

- **Rational Thinking and Scientific Attitude:** Education and exposure to scientific knowledge encourage individuals to question traditional caste-based discrimination.
- **Legal Frameworks Over Religious Codes:** The legitimacy of caste-based restrictions is increasingly replaced by secular laws and policies that promote equality.
- **Differentiation in Social Institutions:** Economic, political, and legal institutions now function independently of caste-based considerations, further reducing its grip on social life.

5. Legislative Measures

The Indian legal framework has played a crucial role in dismantling caste-based discrimination.

- **Constitutional Provisions:** The Indian Constitution enshrines principles of equality, justice, and non-discrimination, directly challenging caste-based hierarchies.
- **Abolition of Untouchability:** The Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955, criminalized untouchability and provided legal recourse for victims of caste discrimination.
- **Inter-Caste Marriages:** The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 and the Special Marriage Act of 1872 facilitated inter-caste marriages, reducing endogamous caste barriers.
- **Reservation Policies:** Affirmative action in education, employment, and politics has provided opportunities for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), enabling socio-economic mobility.
- **Caste Disabilities Removal Act:** This legislation helped eliminate caste-based restrictions on economic and social activities.

6. Social and Religious Reform Movements

India has a long history of reform movements that challenged the caste system and promoted social equality.

- **Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj:** These movements advocated against caste discrimination and promoted universal brotherhood.
- **Bhakti and Sufi Movements:** Saints such as Kabir, Ravidas, and Guru Nanak emphasized devotion over birth-based caste distinctions.
- **Conversion Movements:** Many lower-caste individuals converted to Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam as a means of escaping caste-based oppression.

7. Modern Education

Modern education has played a transformative role in reducing caste-based prejudices and promoting equality.

- **Democratic Values:** Education fosters ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, weakening caste-based exclusivity.
- **Scientific Outlook:** Exposure to rational thought encourages questioning of caste-based discrimination.
- **Inter-Caste Socialization:** Schools and colleges provide platforms for interaction among individuals from different castes, breaking social barriers.

- **Employment Opportunities:** Access to higher education allows lower-caste individuals to secure better jobs, reducing their dependence on upper castes.

8. Emergence of New Social Classes

The rise of new social classes due to economic changes has further diminished the rigidity of the caste system.

- **Shift from Caste to Class:** Industrialization and urbanization have led to the formation of economic classes that often transcend caste lines.
- **Role of Political and Economic Organizations:** Trade unions and political parties mobilize individuals based on economic interests rather than caste loyalties.
- **Class Consciousness Over Caste Consciousness:** Economic disparities are replacing caste divisions as the primary determinant of social inequality.

The caste system in India has undergone significant transformations due to industrialization, urbanization, westernization, sanskritization, secularization, legislative measures, social reform movements, education, and the rise of new social classes. While caste consciousness persists in certain domains, its traditional structures have weakened. The shift from caste-based status to meritocratic and economic considerations suggests a slow but steady movement toward a more egalitarian society. However, caste-based discrimination and political mobilization based on caste identities indicate that the complete dissolution of the caste system remains a complex and ongoing process.

Self-Check Exercise-5

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Which sociologist introduced the term "Westernization" to describe the societal changes in India during British rule?

- (A) Sanskritization (B) Westernization (C) Industriliazation (D) Modernization

Q2. What is the term used to describe the mobility associated with positional change within the caste system?

- (A) Modernization (B) Traditinalization (C) Sanskritizatioin (D) Westernization

11.8 SUMMARY

The caste system has undergone significant changes in contemporary society due to the forces of modernization. These transformations are evident in its structural, cultural, economic, and political aspects. However, some scholars argue that caste continues to exist in a strong and influential manner. Present social conditions still support its persistence, making it a fundamental part of India's socio-religious and politico-economic framework. Caste has adapted to modern times by making necessary adjustments while striving to maintain its relevance. While traditional restrictions related to dress, social interactions, and dining have loosened to some extent, the fundamental structure of the caste system remains intact and continues to function within society.

11.9 GLOSSARY

- **Caste System:** A ranked social structure where persons are assigned status based on birth.
- **Hierarchy:** A system that ranks individuals or groups in an order of authority and control.
- **Jati:** A region-specific sub-group within the caste system, categorized by hereditary occupations, endogamous marriages, and social stratification.
- **Sanskritisation:** A concept introduced by M.N. Srinivas, describing the process by which lower or middle castes attempt to elevate their social status by implementing the customs, rituals, and practices of higher castes, particularly Brahmins and Kshatriyas.
- **Varna:** A broader classification of caste in Hindu society, dividing individuals into four main groups—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra—based on traditional occupations and social roles.

11.10 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Arnold Green

A2. MacIver and Page

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Restrictions

A2. Sub-caste

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Untouchable

A2. Varna

Self-Check Exercise-4

A1. Jajmans

A2. Sanskritization

Self-Check Exercise-5

A1. Westernization

A2. Sanskritization

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11.12 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. How does caste function as a framework for social relationships?
2. Analyze the evolving characteristics of caste in contemporary Indian society.
3. What is meant by the caste system? Discuss the key factors contributing to its transformation in India.

UNIT- 12

DECOMPOSITION OF SOCIAL CLASS

STRUCTURE

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Learning Objectives
- 12.3 Meaning and Definition of Social Class
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 12.4 Type of Social Classes
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 12.5 Determinants of Social Class
 - Self-Check Exercise-3
- 12.6 Social Class in India
 - 12.6.1 Social Classes in Rural India
 - 12.6.2 Social Classes in Urban India
 - Self-Check Exercise-4
- 12.7 Decomposition of Social Class
- 12.8 Summary
- 12.9 Glossary
- 12.10 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 12.11 References/Suggested Readings
- 12.12 Terminal Questions

12.1 INTRODUCTION

The establishment of British rule in India brought significant changes to Indian society, particularly in its class structure. Indian sociologists have explored these transformations using different theoretical approaches. A.R. Desai, for example, adopted a Marxian perspective to study agrarian relations and class dynamics. However, research on the intersection of caste and class in India remains relatively scarce. This limited scholarship can be attributed to historical reasons and, more importantly, the continued overlap between caste and class within India's social hierarchy.

Unlike in Western societies, where class distinctions are primarily based on economic factors such as income and occupation, India's social structure remains deeply rooted in caste. The relationship between caste and class is complex and intertwined, making it difficult to separate the two. Although economic shifts and the growth of non-agricultural employment have led to greater class differentiation, caste continues to play a significant role in determining social mobility and status.

Given India's historically agrarian society, the development of social classes has followed a unique trajectory compared to industrialized nations. The formation and expansion of new social classes

have been influenced by historical, economic, and political factors rather than solely by economic forces. This lesson explores the intricacies of India's class structure, analyzing the interplay between caste and class and their impact on social organization.

12.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Comprehend the concept and various forms of social class.
- Identify the key factors that determine social class.
- Gain insights into the structure of social classes in both rural and urban India.
- Analyze the transformation and reconfiguration of social classes in present-day India.

12.3 MEANING AND DEFINITION OF SOCIAL CLASS

Social class is a fundamental aspect of social stratification and has been examined by various scholars from different perspectives. It denotes a group of people who have a comparable social, economic, or occupational standing within a society. Different sociologists have provided distinct definitions based on their theoretical orientations:

1. **Horton and Hunt** describe social class as a category of people who occupy a similar position along the social status continuum. This suggests that class is defined by relative social standing rather than rigid boundaries.
2. **Ogburn and Nimkoff** define social class as a group of individuals who have the same social status within a given society. Their perspective emphasizes the role of shared status in class formation.
3. **MacIver and Page** characterize social class as a segment of society distinguished from others based on social status. This definition shows the ordered nature of class divisions.
4. **Max Weber** takes an economic perspective, viewing class as a group of individuals with a common place in the market economy. According to Weber, class status is determined by one's economic standing and access to resources, which influence life chances and opportunities.
5. **Karl Marx** defines class based on an individual's association to the means of production. He argues that society is divided into classes primarily through economic structures, where the bourgeoisie (owners of production) exploit the proletariat (working class).

Each of these definitions reflects a unique understanding of social class, showing that it is shaped by multiple factors, including economic position, social status, and market opportunities. While Weber focuses on economic rewards and life chances, Marx emphasizes structural inequality and class struggle. These perspectives help in comprehending how social classes function and evolve in different societies.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Which scholar defines class as a group of individuals sharing a common relationship to the means of production?

- (A) Marx (B) Weber (C) Hortun and Hunt (D) Ogburn and Nimkoff

Q2. Who describes class as a stratum of individuals occupying a similar position on the social status continuum?

- (A) Max Weber (B) Hortun and Hortun (C) Ogburn and Nimkoff (D) Marx

12.4 TYPE OF SOCIAL CLASSES

Social class is a fundamental concept in sociology, and two of the most significant thinkers in its analysis are Karl Marx and Max Weber. Both theorists examined class structures, but they approached the subject from different perspectives.

Marxist Perspective on Class

Karl Marx viewed class as a product of the capitalist mode of production, where society is divided into two main groups:

1. **Capitalists (Bourgeoisie):** These individuals own the means of production, such as factories, land, and resources, and generate wealth through the labor of others.
2. **Workers (Proletariat):** The working class does not own productive resources and must sell their labor power to survive.

Marx emphasized the inherent conflict between these two classes, arguing that capitalists exploit workers by extracting surplus value from their labor. This class struggle, he believed, would eventually lead to revolutionary change.

Weberian Perspective on Class

Max Weber, while acknowledging the economic dimension of class, introduced a more nuanced view. He argued that class divisions are based not only on ownership of property but also on differences in market opportunities. Economic rewards vary according to skills, credentials, and occupational demand. Weber categorized social classes into four main groups:

- **The propertied upper class** – Individuals with significant wealth and ownership of assets.
- **The property-less white-collar workers** – Professionals, managers, and administrators who have marketable skills but do not own production assets.
- **The petty bourgeoisie** – Small business owners and self-employed individuals.
- **The manual working class** – Laborers engaged in physical work, often with lower economic security.

Weber's classification highlights the complexity of social class, recognizing that variations exist even among those who do not own capital.

Contemporary Social Class Structure

In modern societies, social class is often grouped into three broad categories:

1. Upper Class

- This class consists of individuals with substantial wealth, influence, and power.
- In some societies, aristocratic heritage or noble lineage determines upper-class status, while in others, financial success is the primary criterion.
- Members of the upper class often control economic and political institutions, and their wealth is frequently inherited across generations.
- The distinction between old money (inherited wealth) and new money (self-made wealth) can create internal hierarchies within this class.

2. Middle Class

- The middle class occupies an intermediate position between the wealthy elite and the working poor.
- This group includes professionals, small business owners, and white-collar workers.
- The size and composition of the middle class vary across societies. In some countries, it is broadly defined, encompassing individuals who might be considered working class elsewhere.
- Economic security, education, and stable employment are key features of middle-class life. Sociologists such as Ralf Dahrendorf argue that modern economies increasingly require an educated workforce, leading to the expansion of this class.
- Globalization has affected the middle class, as some jobs shift to developing economies while others benefit from technological advancement.

3. Lower Class

- The lower class, often referred to as the working class, comprises individuals engaged in low-wage employment with little financial security.
- This group is further divided into:
 - **The working poor:** Those who are employed but earn insufficient wages to achieve economic stability.
 - **The underclass:** Individuals facing chronic unemployment, homelessness, or dependency on welfare. This group aligns with what Marx termed the “lumpenproletariat.”
- Many lower-class individuals work in blue-collar jobs, often experiencing job insecurity and limited social mobility.

While Marx and Weber laid the foundation for understanding class, contemporary class structures have evolved due to economic and social changes. The rigid dichotomy of capitalists and workers proposed by Marx has been complicated by the rise of new occupational groups, globalization, and technological transformations. Nevertheless, class remains a key factor influencing economic opportunities, social mobility, and life outcomes.

Social class is a central concept in sociology, serving as a vital framework for analyzing social inequality, power dynamics, and opportunities within a society. Two foundational theorists in the study of class are Karl Marx and Max Weber, whose perspectives continue to shape contemporary debates.

Marx's approach emphasizes the economic dimension of class, defining class in terms of one's relationship to the means of production. For him, society is divided into the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labor. This binary division is the driving force behind social conflict and change, as the interests of these two groups are inherently antagonistic.

In contrast, Weber offers a more multifaceted analysis by incorporating economic, social, and political dimensions into the concept of class. He argues that class is not solely determined by economic position but also by factors such as status and party affiliation. Weber's perspective recognizes that social honor and political influence contribute significantly to one's position in the social hierarchy, thus providing a broader understanding of class divisions.

Together, the insights of Marx and Weber illustrate the complexity of social class. While Marx provides a clear-cut analysis of economic exploitation and class struggle, Weber broadens the lens to include the interplay of economic conditions, social prestige, and political power. Their theories offer complementary views that enrich our understanding of how class structures are formed and maintained, and how they influence individual life chances and social mobility.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The lower class consists of individuals employed in low-paying wage jobs with minimal security.

Q2. Members of the working class are sometimes referred to aslaborers.

12.5 DETERMINANTS OF CLASS

An individual's social class can be identified based on several key indicators. The primary factors that determine social class are discussed below:

- **Wealth and Income:** The accumulation of capital and income is a significant factor distinguishing the upper class from other social groups. Individuals with substantial financial resources often attain higher social status and influence. However, economic standing alone does not always dictate class position. For example, a professor may be more respected than a wealthy criminal despite having a lower income, highlighting the role of social perception in class hierarchy. While wealth and income provide access to better opportunities and an elevated lifestyle, class is shaped by a broader set of factors, including education, occupation, and societal values. This interplay suggests that social class is not merely an economic classification but a complex social construct influenced by both material and non-material factors.
- **Occupation:** A person's occupation is a significant indicator of social class. Certain professions, such as doctors, engineers, administrators, professors, and lawyers, are regarded as more prestigious than manual labor or technical jobs. Although high-status occupations often come

with higher incomes, this is not always the case. Occupation also influences other aspects of life, including values, beliefs, and personal relationships, making it a key factor in determining social class.

- **Education:** Social class and education are closely linked. Access to higher education often requires financial resources as well as motivation. Children from affluent families have both the financial means and social encouragement to attend prestigious schools and colleges. The level and quality of education a person attains significantly impact their class position, making education one of the strongest determinants of social mobility.
- **Prestige:** Prestige refers to the level of respect and admiration society assigns to a particular occupation. It is not tied to an individual but rather to the profession itself. Sociologists have ranked occupations based on their social prestige, which is often influenced by wealth, education, and occupation. Other factors such as family background, kinship networks, and residential location can also contribute to an individual's social status. However, education, occupation, and income remain the most visible markers of social class.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Fill in the blanks

Q1. There is a correlation between social class and education.

Q2. The accumulation of is the primary factor that sets the upper class apart from other social groups in society.

12.6 SOCIAL CLASS IN INDIA

British colonial rule profoundly altered Indian society, reshaping its class structure through economic, political, and institutional changes. Indian sociologists have examined these shifts using diverse theoretical perspectives. A.R. Desai, for example, applied a Marxian framework to analyze agrarian class relations. However, studies focusing on class distinctions beyond agriculture—such as those based on income, occupation, and non-agricultural employment—remain relatively scarce. This is largely due to historical complexities and, more significantly, the enduring intersection of caste and class in India's social hierarchy. Unlike in many Western societies, where class is predominantly defined by economic factors, in India, caste and class function in an intertwined manner, making it difficult to analyze them separately.

A comprehensive understanding of India's class system requires an exploration of both contemporary social structures and historical transformations. Traditional Indian society exhibited a hierarchy based on modes of production and ownership, with positions ranging from rulers and feudal lords to merchants, artisans, peasants, and laborers. These social divisions were reinforced by relationships of power and economic dependency.

The monarch occupied the highest status, enjoying loyalty and control over resources while also bearing responsibility for governance and welfare. Among different social groups, traders and business classes demonstrated the greatest mobility, as economic factors occasionally superseded caste-based restrictions. The British colonial administration introduced new political and economic structures that disrupted traditional hierarchies, allowing wealth and power to shift from rural agrarian economies to

urban centers. This transformation facilitated social mobility and altered class distinctions, blending traditional caste-based stratification with emerging capitalist frameworks.

12.6.1 Social Classes in Rural India

Orthodox Marxists categorize Indian agricultural society into two primary classes:

1. **Big landlords**
2. **Agricultural laborers**

However, an alternative perspective acknowledges a more complex class differentiation, historically and in contemporary times. This classification includes agricultural laborers, poor peasants, middle peasants, rich peasants, and landlords. Marxist scholars analyze the relationships between these groups as capitalistic, broadly dividing society into the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.'

T.K. Oommen identifies five distinct rural classes in India:

1. **Landlords:** These individuals own land but do not cultivate it themselves. They either lease it out or employ intermediaries to manage its cultivation.
2. **Rich Farmers:** Engaged in agriculture as a commercial enterprise, they produce for the market with the aim of making a profit. They employ wage laborers and focus on supervising farm operations rather than directly cultivating the land.
3. **Middle Peasants:** These farmers primarily cultivate their own land. However, they may hire laborers for specific agricultural tasks or during peak farming seasons.
4. **Poor Peasants:** Owning small and economically unviable landholdings, they often supplement their income by working as part-time laborers, sharecroppers, or tenants.
5. **Landless Agricultural Workers:** Entirely dependent on agricultural labor for their livelihood, they sell their labor and rely on landlords, rich farmers, and middle peasants for employment opportunities.

12.6.2 Social Classes in Urban India

In urban areas, social classes primarily consist of the following groups:

1. **Commercial and Industrial Classes:** During British rule, production in India shifted towards market-oriented production, leading to the expansion of internal trade. This facilitated the emergence of a trading class engaged in domestic commerce. Simultaneously, India became integrated into the global market, resulting in the rise of merchants involved in export-import businesses. This led to the formation of a commercial middle class. With the introduction of railways and the accumulation of wealth, this affluent commercial class began investing in large-scale manufacturing and modern industries. Initially, investments were directed towards plantations, cotton, jute, and mining—sectors pioneered by the British. Over time, Indian entrepreneurs diversified their industrial activities. Economically and socially, this class became one of the most influential in India.
2. **The Corporate Sector:** Organizations under government ownership and control are categorized as public sector units, whereas those outside the public sector fall under the private sector. Private-sector firms can be classified into individually owned and collectively owned entities. Collectively owned enterprises include partnership firms, joint Hindu family businesses, joint-

stock companies, and cooperatives. Among these, the joint-stock company, commonly referred to as the corporate sector, is the most significant. The private corporate sector consists of joint-stock companies that do not fall under the public sector.

3. **Professional Classes:** The economic and administrative systems established by British rule created a demand for educated Indians trained in law, technology, medicine, economics, administration, and other modern disciplines. To meet this need, the British introduced modern education in India, leading to the establishment of educational institutions at a growing scale. Schools and colleges specializing in legal, commercial, and general education were created to support both the economy and state administration. This resulted in the emergence of a professional class associated with modern industries, agriculture, commerce, finance, administration, journalism, and other fields. The professional class includes lawyers, doctors, teachers, managers, engineers, technologists, agricultural scientists, and government officials.
4. **Petty Traders, Shopkeepers, and Unorganized Workers:** Urban areas have also seen the rise of small traders and shopkeepers who have expanded alongside the growth of cities and towns. This group acts as an intermediary between producers and consumers, purchasing goods from manufacturers or wholesalers and selling them to the public. Their livelihood depends on profit margins from buying and selling commodities. Over time, this class has expanded significantly, particularly after India's independence.
5. **Working Classes:** The emergence of the working class in India can be traced back to the British colonial period, during which the establishment of modern industries, railways, and plantations contributed to its formation. As sectors such as plantations, factories, mining, transportation, and railways expanded, the working class grew in size and significance. A substantial portion of this class consisted of displaced peasants and artisans who, due to economic hardship, were compelled to seek wage labor. Their living and working conditions were marked by low wages and financial instability, often resulting in chronic debt, as their earnings were insufficient to support themselves and their families.

Self-Check Exercise-4

Fill in the blanks

- Q1. An organization that operates under government ownership and control is referred to as a sector entity.
- Q2. The Indian working class primarily emerged from impoverished and displaced artisans.

12.7 DECOMPOSITION OF SOCIAL CLASS IN INDIA

India is witnessing a growing trend of class fragmentation, where individuals from the same social class or caste are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of their economic status, occupations, and lifestyles. This process of social differentiation has led to significant variations among people of similar backgrounds. For instance, the bourgeoisie is no longer a homogeneous group but is now divided between business owners and managerial professionals. Similarly, the working class is fragmented

based on regional differences, skill levels, and variations in lifestyles and consumption patterns. The middle class, once considered a relatively uniform category, has also become more diverse, encompassing professionals, administrators, technical workers, government employees, and private-sector workers, each with distinct socio-economic experiences.

A.R. Desai highlighted how the Indian state has embraced capitalist property norms as a fundamental aspect of its developmental approach. While orthodox Marxism emphasizes economic determinism, scholars have argued for the need to incorporate indigenous concepts to better understand India's distinct social dynamics. V.M. Dandekar, in his analysis of India's class structure and conflicts, categorized different social classes, emphasizing how class divisions in India are shaped by both historical and contemporary socio-economic transformations. This perspective underscores the complex interplay between economic development, social mobility, and class differentiation in modern India.

1. **Agrarian Classes**
2. **Industrial Classes**
3. **Professional Classes**
4. **Business and Mercantile Classes**

Dandekar questioned the applicability of Marxist class theory to India, arguing that large-scale industries and monopoly capitalism operate differently here than in Western nations. The effectiveness of trade unions and collective bargaining has also diminished. While class conflict exists, so does class cooperation, and the presence of multiple intermediary classes between the wealthy and the impoverished must be acknowledged.

The emergence of a new middle class, particularly during British rule and even more so after independence, challenges the idea of a binary class structure. While the working class lacks property, it still has opportunities for upward mobility. Additionally, with the Indian state functioning as a welfare state, it has become the largest employer, raising questions about whether a democratic welfare system can be as exploitative as a monopoly capitalist system.

In Indian society, class remains a complex phenomenon, intertwined with caste, occupation, factions, and political pressure groups. Rather than focusing solely on the highest and lowest classes, the emergence of a growing middle class has become a significant feature of contemporary India. In recent decades, an upper-middle class has also gained prominence, particularly among highly skilled professionals in science and technology, leading to new patterns of social mobility.

Ultimately, class functions as an integral part of India's social stratification, similar to caste. However, class structures, relationships, and conflicts are not uniform or rigid. While there are objective indicators for identifying class distinctions, class also operates as a dynamic unit of interaction within the broader social framework.

12.8 SUMMARY

India is witnessing a clear trend toward class fragmentation. Neither Marxist nor Weberian perspectives fully capture the complexities of class structure in Indian society. Individuals within social classes and even castes are becoming increasingly distinct from one another due to progressive social differentiation. Even people from similar backgrounds exhibit growing variations. The bourgeoisie is now divided into owners and managers, while the working class experiences divisions based on region, skill

level, and diverse lifestyles and consumption patterns. The middle class is also becoming more heterogeneous, with clear distinctions between professionals, administrators, technical workers, government employees, and private-sector workers.

12.9 GLOSSARY

- **Achieved Status:** A social position attained voluntarily, reflecting individual abilities and efforts.
- **Decomposition of Class:** The process by which social classes become more differentiated and lose their homogeneity.
- **Life Chances:** The probability of individuals accessing opportunities and benefits in society.
- **Prestige:** The social value attributed to different occupations.
- **Social Class:** A categorization of people based on similarities in wealth, power, and prestige.

12.10 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Marx

A2. Hortun and Hunt

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Economic

A2. Blue-collar

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Reciprocal

A2. Wealth

Self-Check Exercise-4

A1. Public

A2. Peasants

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12.12 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Define social class and discuss its key determinants.
2. Analyze the process of class fragmentation in India, highlighting its implications.
3. Discuss class as a system of societal stratification in the Indian context.

UNIT- 13

CASTE-CLASS NEXUS

STRUCTURE

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Learning Objectives
- 13.3 Difference between Caste and Class as a Form of Social Stratification
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 13.4 Caste and Class Nexus
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 13.5 Summary
- 13.6 Glossary
- 13.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 13.8 References/Suggested Readings
- 13.9 Terminal Questions

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The interplay between caste and class has been a central theme in sociological analyses of social stratification in India. Contrary to the conventional belief that caste and class operate as distinct entities—one rooted in cultural tradition and the other in economic structure—scholars emphasize their interconnectedness. Historical and socio-political factors, including colonial interventions, state policies, and theoretical frameworks influenced by Western thought, have often obscured the nuanced relationship between these two dimensions of inequality. However, neither a caste-exclusive nor a class-centric perspective adequately captures the complexities of Indian social hierarchy.

The caste-class nexus does not suggest a simple one-to-one correspondence between caste position and economic status. Instead, it underscores how the relationship between the two has evolved over time, shaped by social movements, economic shifts, and institutional frameworks. While caste has historically influenced access to resources and opportunities, it has not been an immutable system. Instances of social mobility, collective resistance, and intra-caste differentiation challenge the notion of caste as a rigid structure. Moreover, mechanisms for negotiating social status have existed at both individual and group levels, complicating the idea of a monolithic caste hierarchy.

In contemporary India, caste increasingly functions as an interest-based category rather than merely a traditional cultural identity. The emergence of new occupational groups—ranging from industrialists and entrepreneurs to professionals and government employees—has reshaped patterns of social stratification. Economic liberalization, urbanization, and political mobilization have further contributed to the reconfiguration of caste-class dynamics. Thus, understanding social inequality in India requires an integrated approach that recognizes the shifting intersections between caste and class rather than treating them as separate or static constructs.

13.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Comprehend the conception of the caste-class nexus.
- Distinguish caste from class as systems of social stratification.
- Analyze the perspectives of various sociologists on the caste-class relationship.

13.3 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CASTE AND CLASS AS A FORM OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Caste and class are two primary systems of social stratification. While caste is a significant feature of Indian society, class-based stratification is prevalent across the world. Caste refers to a social group in which individuals are ascribed a permanent position within a hierarchical structure, with restrictions on social interactions. It is considered the most rigid and distinctly graded form of social hierarchy, often described as a highly closed system. In contrast, class is more fluid, with individuals occupying social positions that may be inherited but can also change based on achievements and circumstances. Unlike caste, class divisions are not legally or religiously defined, making them less rigid and more adaptable.

Key Differences Between Caste and Class

- **Open vs. Closed System of Stratification:** The class system is more flexible and allows upward mobility, as individuals can improve their status through effort and success. As Hitler stated, "a class system is an open system of rating levels," meaning that if upward mobility is restricted, the class system turns into a caste system. In a class system, individuals are not bound to the status of their birth and can improve their position through wealth and accomplishments. Conversely, the caste system is rigid and hereditary. A person remains in the caste they are born into throughout their lifetime, and their children inherit the same status. Unlike class, caste does not allow individuals to change their position based on personal achievements, making it a closed and inflexible system.
- **Religious vs. Secular Basis:** The caste system is deeply rooted in religious beliefs, particularly in Hinduism. Maclver noted that caste distinctions are maintained primarily due to strong religious convictions. The system is justified through religious myths, making it sacred and unchallengeable. According to the Bhagavad Gita, the Creator assigned duties and responsibilities to different castes, and failing to fulfill these duties resulted in rebirth in a lower caste. The religious foundation of the caste system contributed to its endurance over centuries. In contrast, class divisions have no religious basis. They emerge from economic, social, and political factors rather than religious doctrines, making class stratification a secular phenomenon.
- **Marriage Practices:** The caste system enforces strict endogamy, requiring individuals to marry within their own caste. Marrying outside one's caste often results in social ostracization. In contrast, class does not impose such restrictions. Individuals from different economic or social backgrounds can marry without losing their status. For example, a wealthy person may marry someone from a lower economic background without facing exclusion from their class group.

- **Class Consciousness vs. Caste Identity:** Class stratification is often characterized by a sense of class consciousness, where individuals recognize their position within the hierarchy and may work collectively to improve their status. Caste, on the other hand, does not necessarily require such subjective awareness; individuals inherit their status without the need for collective action.
- **Prestige and Social Status:** Caste-based hierarchy has a well-established and rigid structure of prestige. The position of different castes is traditionally fixed, leaving little room for change. In contrast, class-based stratification lacks a strict order of prestige. Economic and social mobility allow individuals to alter their status. However, legal and policy decisions in India, such as the Supreme Court's ruling on job reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) under Article 16(4) of the Indian Constitution, have blurred the distinction between caste and class by using caste as a criterion for identifying backwardness. This legal perspective equates caste with class in determining social disadvantage, reflecting the continued overlap between these two forms of stratification in contemporary India.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1. A person who marries outside their caste is considered as.....

Q2. According to the Creator is believed to have assigned specific duties and roles to the four varnas.

13.4 CASTE AND CLASS NEXUS

The concept of a nexus refers to the interconnectedness between different structural and cultural elements within a society. In the context of caste and class, this implies:

- **Interdependence:** Both caste and class influence each other in various ways, shaping social structures and interactions.
- **Contradictions and Similarities:** While caste is traditionally rigid and hierarchical, class offers mobility. However, both create social divisions.
- **Power Dynamics:** One group often exercises control over the other, reinforcing social inequalities.

The Complex Relationship Between Caste and Class

The caste-class nexus suggests that neither caste nor class can be examined in isolation. Tensions and contradictions between the two are evident and lead to diverse socio-economic consequences across different communities. Some sociologists argue that caste is being replaced by class, while others maintain that caste continues to shape class relations.

In societies with flexible class structures, individuals can experience upward or downward mobility within the social hierarchy. In contrast, more restrictive systems limit such movement, resembling the characteristics of a caste-based structure. Ogburn and Nimkoff noted that when opportunities for class mobility are constrained, the system begins to function similarly to a caste system. Several sociologists argue that caste represents a unique form of social stratification that, in varying degrees, can be observed across different societies. Perspectives on Caste and Class in Indian Society

Some scholars argue that Indian society is best understood through the lens of caste. Caste, as a deeply ingrained ideological system, governs social life, particularly among Hindus, but also influences other communities. Despite claims that class is overtaking caste, caste remains a dominant force, particularly in areas like marriage and social alliances. Class distinctions are emerging, but they do not entirely replace caste; rather, they coexist in a complex relationship.

Two Key Schools of Thought:

1. **Caste is breaking down, and class is taking its place:** Sociologists like P. Kolenda argue that in rural India, class is gaining prominence, with a rising middle class replacing traditional caste-based distinctions. Jan Breman's research in Gujarat also supports this view, highlighting how economic policies and capitalist production modes have created class divisions.
2. **Caste and class are interwoven:** Others contend that class exists within caste rather than replacing it. For instance, within the Brahmin caste, there are both wealthy and impoverished individuals, demonstrating an internal class hierarchy.

Empirical Studies and Regional Variations

- **Andre Beteille** (West Bengal): Certain castes in rural areas are evolving into economic classes, though this process is complex.
- **Jan Breman** (Gujarat): Government policies, particularly the Green Revolution, have intensified class divisions among different caste groups.
- **Iqbal Narain and P.C. Mathur** (Rajasthan): Rajputs have formed alliances with Baniyas and Jains, diminishing the influence of Brahmins, demonstrating the fluid nature of caste and class interactions.
- **Agricultural Class Structure:** In rural India, landholding patterns create distinct economic classes:
 - Big farmers
 - Small farmers
 - Marginal farmers
 - Landless laborers

MacIver noted that when status is predetermined with no scope for mobility, class takes on the characteristics of caste. Sangeetha Rao posited that if caste were detached from religious elements, it could parallel class in function.

Historical and Marxist Interpretations

B.R. Ambedkar viewed caste as an evolution of class divisions, where social distance was maintained through endogamy. The Mandal Commission emphasized that caste remains a key determinant in identifying social backwardness, equating it with class.

Marxist scholars have equated caste with class, arguing that caste movements often reflect class struggles. Sripad Amrit Dange referred to non-Brahmin castes as non-Brahmin classes, highlighting how caste-based struggles often align with class-based economic issues.

The Role of Caste and Class in Modern India

Despite economic changes, caste continues to play a significant role in structuring social and economic relations. Studies show that caste influences land ownership, labor relations, and political power. While class distinctions are emerging, caste-based networks continue to shape economic opportunities and social mobility.

- **Beteille's Analysis (Tanjore):** Caste, class, and power intersect in complex ways, with class distinctions emerging but not fully replacing caste hierarchies.
- **Bailey's Study (Orissa):** Economic stratification does not strictly follow caste lines, though caste still influences political and economic relations.
- **Electoral Politics:** Caste remains a crucial factor in voting behavior, political alliances, and leadership selection.

Caste and class are not entirely separate; rather, they are intricately connected. While economic transformations and social mobility have introduced class-based distinctions in Indian society, caste continues to play a crucial role in shaping social hierarchy. Scholars such as Yogendra Singh and K.L. Sharma advocate for an integrated perspective that considers both caste and class in analyzing Indian society. Instead of perceiving caste as solely a ritualistic framework and class as a completely fluid structure, it is important to recognize their historical and structural interconnection. This perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of social stratification in India, highlighting how caste and class continuously influence and reshape each other in dynamic ways.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Which study of a Punjab village highlights that wealthy farmers belong to the Jat Sikh community, while Harijans primarily work as laborers on their farms?

- (A) Andre Beteille (B) K.S. Singh (C) A.P. Singh (D) P.K. Bose

Q2. F.G Bailey did his study in which village of Orissa?

- (A) Rampura (B) Sripuram (C) Bisipara (D) Rampur

13.5 SUMMARY

Caste and class are deeply interconnected, shaping social and economic structures in a way that makes them inseparable. While caste carries hereditary distinctions, class introduces economic stratification within caste groups, leading to internal differentiation. The two systems operate in tandem, reinforcing social hierarchies and sustaining economic disparities. The overlap between caste and class is evident in the way economic deprivation often aligns with caste-based discrimination, creating a shared class consciousness among marginalized groups.

The caste system serves as a mechanism for economic exploitation, as caste hierarchy is often reflected in land ownership patterns and access to resources. This structural arrangement ensures that social status and economic power remain concentrated within certain groups. Caste not only dictates occupational roles but also shapes the broader social framework, as noted by B.R. Ambedkar, who argued that it does not merely divide labor but fragments society itself.

From an analytical standpoint, caste and class offer different but intersecting perspectives on social stratification. While class highlights economic inequality, caste embeds these disparities within cultural and historical contexts, making them more rigid. Together, they reinforce systemic inequality, influencing social mobility and access to opportunities.

13.6 GLOSSARY

- **Caste System:** A form of social stratification where status is determined by birth and remains largely fixed.
- **Caste-Class Nexus:** The connection among caste and class, which does not always support directly. It examines how caste and class interact in different social and economic contexts over time.
- **Prestige:** The level of respect or social value assigned to different occupations within a society.
- **Social Class:** A categorization of individuals based on their economic resources, influence, and social standing.

13.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Outcaste

A2. Bhagavad Gita

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. A.P Singh

A2. Bisipara

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13.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain the concepts of caste and class.

2. Analyze the relationship amongst caste and class with relevant examples.
3. Compare caste and class as distinct structures of social stratification.

UNIT- 14

EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS

STRUCTURE

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Learning Objectives
- 14.3 Concept of the 'Middle Class'
 - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 14.4 Emergence of Middle Class in India
 - 14.4.1 Rise of Middle Class during British Rule in India
 - 14.4.2 Rise of Middle Class after Independence in India
 - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 14.5 Summary
- 14.6 Glossary
- 14.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 14.8 References/Suggested Readings
- 14.9 Terminal Questions

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The study of the middle class within modern capitalist societies has often lacked a systematic framework, a gap that is particularly evident in the Indian context. Defining the Indian middle class remains a contested issue, as there is no universal agreement on its defining characteristics. Its emergence can be linked to British colonial policies, economic restructuring, and industrial growth. From the mid-eighteenth century onward, the rise of new professional opportunities contributed to the formation of this social group.

The trajectory of the Indian middle class differs markedly from that of its Western counterpart. In the West, the middle class primarily emerged as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, which, in the eighteenth century, spurred large-scale mechanized production through economic and technological advancements. In India, however, this class developed gradually over nearly two centuries of British rule, shaped by transformations in land ownership, legal structures, Western education, technological adoption, capitalist enterprises, and the expansion of commerce and communication networks. The colonial administration played a crucial role in defining the contours of India's middle class, influencing its economic, social, and political positioning. Unlike the Western middle class, which was largely a product of industrial capitalism, the Indian middle class evolved within a colonial framework that both facilitated and constrained its development.

14.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand the theory of the middle class.
- Clarify the features that contributed to the development of the middle class in India during British rule.
- Analyze the causes behind the rise of the middle class in India after independence.

13.3 CONCEPT OF MIDDLE CLASS

From a materialistic perspective, the concept of the "middle class" gained prominence during the period of Pax Britannica. In Western societies, particularly after the Industrial Revolution, social classes were generally divided into upper, middle, and lower categories based on economic status. Positioned between the working class and the elite, the middle class comprises individuals and households with relatively higher levels of education, stable income, and property ownership. This group is predominantly engaged in professional, managerial, and administrative occupations.

A defining feature of the middle class is its economic stability, which enables the fulfillment of both material and social aspirations. Education serves as a key determinant, as members typically possess specialized skills that enhance their financial security and upward mobility. Beyond individual advancement, the middle class plays a crucial role in shaping societal structures by fostering innovation, supplying skilled labor, and contributing to long-term social cohesion. Its influence extends beyond economics, reinforcing institutional stability and driving cultural and intellectual progress.

From a sociological perspective, the middle class presents unique challenges in terms of its definition and role in society. Both Karl Marx and Max Weber examined social class through the lens of property ownership. While Marx viewed society as divided primarily into two classes—those who own the means of production and those who do not—Weber offered a more nuanced perspective. He argued that the non-property-owning population is not a homogenous group, as individuals with specialized skills and market value (such as doctors, engineers, and professionals) occupy a different "class situation" than unskilled laborers. Unlike Marx, who predicted a polarization of society into two opposing classes, Weber suggested that capitalism would lead to the expansion of the white-collar middle class.

C. Wright Mills, in his 1951 study of the American middle class, further divided this class into two subgroups: the upper-middle class, composed of highly educated professionals with economic stability, and the lower-middle class, consisting of semi-professionals with lesser security. Although these groups overlap, they have distinct characteristics and experiences.

Sociologist John Urry, building on Marx's concept of surplus value, argued that capitalism's expansion necessitated a growing middle class to sustain consumption and manage complex industrial systems. This class, while not owning the means of production, holds a privileged position within workplace hierarchies.

Modern sociologists, including Anthony Giddens, largely define social classes based on economic factors. Giddens identifies three major classes in advanced capitalist societies:

- The **upper class**, which derives its status from owning productive assets.
- The **middle class**, which is distinguished by educational and technical qualifications.
- The **working or lower class**, which relies on manual labor for economic survival.

These classes differ in their approaches to securing economic rewards within capitalist economies. The middle class, in particular, plays a critical role in bridging economic disparities, ensuring social mobility, and sustaining economic development.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1. In 1951, directed one of the earliest significant studies on the middle class in the United States.

Q2. Anthony Giddens categorizes advanced capitalist society into a major classes.

14.4 EMERGENCE OF MIDDLE CLASS IN INDIA

The middle class first emerged in Western Europe alongside industrialization and urbanization. Initially, the term referred to the rising bourgeoisie and industrial entrepreneurs who played a key role in economic transformation. Over time, it expanded to include skilled professionals who occupied a position between industrial capitalists and the working class.

However, the historical development of the middle class in India followed a different trajectory. Unlike in the West, where it was a product of industrial capitalism, the Indian middle class emerged in the 19th century under British colonial rule. British policies, including the introduction of Western education, administrative reforms, and economic changes, facilitated the growth of this class. While the colonial administration benefited from their services, this group later became a driving force in India's independence movement, advocating for political and social reforms.

After independence, the Indian middle class continued to play a significant role in shaping the country's economic and social policies. It influenced decision-making processes, contributed to the expansion of industries, and played a crucial role in governance, education, and professional sectors. Over time, this class has evolved, adapting to new economic and technological developments while maintaining its influence in India's socio-political landscape.

14.4.1 Rise of Middle Classes during British Rule in India

B.B. Misra, in his pioneering study of India's middle class, highlights that while pre-British India possessed several economic structures conducive to capitalist growth—such as artisan industries, occupational specialization, merchant guilds, and a money economy—certain political and social constraints prevented the emergence of a middle class. The absolute power of the monarchy hindered private investment, as rulers monopolized profitable trade ventures. Rather than being used for productive purposes, wealth remained stagnant in private households, obstructing the circulation of capital, which is essential for capitalist development. Additionally, caste-based restrictions on occupation and rigid social hierarchies limited mobility and technological progress. Trade and industry were often looked down upon by the priestly and warrior classes, further inhibiting economic dynamism. The agrarian economy and lack of widespread education reinforced these barriers. Since property rights were closely tied to caste identity, land ownership remained rigid, discouraging participation in trade and commerce.

The establishment of British rule disrupted these traditional structures and initiated economic and social changes that facilitated the rise of a middle class. The British introduced political stability, legal contracts, and a formal legal system that replaced customary practices, fostering an economic environment where caste distinctions were no longer absolute barriers to mobility. Western education, which was largely caste-neutral, opened new opportunities, while increasing trade created the financial capital necessary for industrialization. However, it was the upper castes who initially benefited the most from these changes due to their existing social and economic advantages. They migrated to urban centers, received Western education, and entered new professions, primarily in administrative and commercial sectors concentrated in major British-controlled cities like Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras.

The Composition of the Middle Class

The emerging middle class during British rule can be categorized into four distinct groups based on their roles in the new economic order:

1. **The Commercial Middle Class** – This group consisted of middlemen and brokers who worked with foreign trading companies and indigenous banking houses. By the late 18th century, the indigo plantation economy in rural areas created a class of clerks, supervisors, and contractors who facilitated trade. The expansion of commerce, banking, and agency houses in the early 19th century further strengthened this class.
2. **The Moneyed Middle Class** – The introduction of policies allowing land transfers enabled moneylenders, brokers, and creditors to invest in land. A new class of landed elites emerged as individuals leased land for indigo production and managed plantations. The recognition of under-tenure rights in 1765 also contributed to the formation of a landed middle class.
3. **The Industrial Middle Class** – This segment remained relatively small due to the slow pace of industrialization. Initially, British civil servants and European entrepreneurs dominated industrial investments. However, Indian business communities, including Bengalis in Calcutta and Parsis in Bombay, gradually entered industrial ventures.
4. **The Educated Middle Class** – The most significant and influential segment of the middle class was composed of professionals who emerged with the introduction of Western education. The establishment of formal legal institutions created a new class of lawyers, while advancements in medical and engineering education produced doctors and engineers. The printing industry, journalism, and publishing also gained prominence. However, key administrative and technical positions remained largely controlled by Europeans and Anglo-Indians.

A defining characteristic of the Indian middle class was that its social standing was not solely based on traditional caste hierarchies but also on access to education, economic success, and professional expertise.

The Middle Class and British Rule

Despite their initial role in supporting British governance and commerce, the Indian middle class gradually evolved into a political force that challenged colonial rule. British authorities sought to create a class of intermediaries who would assist in administration rather than develop original ideas or economic structures. As Pavan K. Verma notes, the Indian middle class was predominantly composed of government employees, lawyers, teachers, and doctors, largely drawn from traditional upper castes.

Ahmad and Redfield argue that while the Indian middle class resembled its European counterpart in terms of its rise through trade and accumulation of wealth, a key difference was its political subordination. In contrast to the European middle class, which emerged as an independent force that reshaped governance and industry, the Indian middle class initially operated under British control.

However, this dynamic shifted after the Revolt of 1857. The middle class, which had previously collaborated with the British, increasingly sought political power. By the early 20th century, it had become a formidable force advocating for national unity and independence.

Sociologist Sanjay Joshi emphasizes that traditional indicators such as income and occupation do not fully capture the nature of the Indian middle class. While economic factors played a role, the power and influence of this class were derived not solely from wealth but from cultural leadership and self-fashioning. The middle class sought to define and propagate modernity in India, positioning itself as the vanguard of social transformation.

In conclusion, the rise of the Indian middle class was a complex process shaped by colonial policies, economic transformations, and shifts in social structures. Initially benefiting from British rule, this class later became instrumental in opposing it, playing a central role in shaping modern India's political and social landscape.

14.4.2 Rise of Middle Classes after Independence

India's independence in 1947 ushered in a new era of social, economic, and political transformation. The newly independent nation embraced democratic principles, advocating for secularism, justice, equality, and freedom for all its citizens, irrespective of caste, religion, or socio-economic background. To realize these ideals, India adopted a planned development model aimed at fostering economic growth across agricultural, industrial, and tertiary sectors. The government's interventionist approach led to the formulation of various economic programs and development schemes that required a growing workforce of trained professionals, leading to a significant expansion of the middle class.

Economic Expansion and the Growth of Urban Middle Class

Post-independence, India's economic strategy emphasized state-led industrialization and modernization. The government took an active role in establishing heavy industries, public sector enterprises, and infrastructural projects. This, in turn, increased employment opportunities, particularly in the government sector. The bureaucracy, technical professions, and managerial roles within state-owned enterprises provided stable employment for many, contributing to the expansion of the urban middle class.

The industrial and service sectors also experienced considerable growth, albeit at a relatively slower pace compared to some other developing economies. The rise in population, particularly in urban centers, fueled demand for banking, insurance, healthcare, hospitality, media, and advertising services. These industries required skilled professionals, which further bolstered the middle-class workforce.

Agrarian Transformation and the Rise of the Rural Middle Class

The Green Revolution, introduced in the late 1960s and 1970s, had a profound impact on India's rural economy. The adoption of high-yield seeds, mechanized farming, and modern irrigation techniques

increased agricultural productivity, leading to the economic upliftment of landowning farmers. The newfound prosperity among sections of the agrarian community resulted in a shift in aspirations—many families started investing in education, particularly in English-medium schools and higher education institutions, to secure non-agricultural employment for the next generation.

Alongside changes in education, there was a noticeable shift in consumption patterns. Previously considered unnecessary luxuries, consumer goods such as televisions, motor vehicles, and household appliances became desirable symbols of status and progress. As a result, a segment of the rural population developed economic and professional ties with urban centers, blurring the traditional rural-urban divide. Unlike the older urban middle class, which largely aligned itself with nationalist ideals, this emerging rural middle class was more localized in its political outlook. The growing economic power of this group led to increased demands for regional autonomy and greater political representation.

The Emergence of the Dalit Middle Class

Another significant development in post-independence India was the rise of a middle class within the Dalit communities. The introduction of affirmative action policies, such as reservations in education and government employment, enabled greater social mobility for historically marginalized groups. Over time, a new Dalit middle class emerged, primarily engaged in government jobs and service-sector employment.

While this segment of the middle class faced persistent social discrimination, its economic and educational advancement played a crucial role in challenging traditional caste hierarchies. The emergence of an educated Dalit middle class also led to increased political mobilization, with demands for greater representation and rights within Indian democracy.

The evolution of India's middle class after independence was shaped by a combination of state policies, economic reforms, and social mobility. While the urban middle class expanded through industrialization and growth in the service sector, the Green Revolution facilitated the rise of a rural middle class with increasing economic and political influence. Simultaneously, affirmative action policies created opportunities for Dalit communities, allowing them to enter the middle class despite facing socio-cultural challenges.

Unlike the colonial-era middle class, which was largely confined to urban elites, the post-independence middle class became more diverse and regionally distinct. It played a significant role in shaping economic policies, political movements, and cultural trends, reflecting the complex and dynamic nature of India's social structure.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Only after the that it initiated to accept the political role of opponent for authority with the British.

Q2. Middle classes appeared for the first time in with the growth of trade and urban economy.

14.5 SUMMARY

The middle class has played a pivotal role in shaping modern Indian society. However, its influence grew substantially in the 1990s with the liberalization of the Indian economy. The adoption of new economic policies, coupled with the increasing effects of globalization, contributed significantly to the expansion of this social group. Debates on its size, consumption patterns, and projected growth have become essential for analyzing current social and economic developments. Today, the middle class dominates traditional and radical life in India. However, it cannot be considered entirely modern. Modernization goes beyond the possession of advanced technology, luxury goods, and digital proficiency—it also involves changes in social attitudes and relationships. In urban India, many aspects of social life remain deeply rooted in traditional norms and expectations, limiting the full realization of modernity. Despite economic and technological advancements, personal and social interactions often continue to reflect conventional values.

14.6 GLOSSARY

- **Globalization:** The expansion of economic and trade relationships on a worldwide scale, fostering increased interdependence among nations.
- **Industrial Revolution:** A epoch of major fiscal and technical transformation that shifted societies from agrarian-based economies to industrialized urban centers, leading to mass production in factories.
- **Middle Class:** A socio-economic group positioned amongst the working class and the upper class, often characterized by moderate levels of income, education, and occupational status.
- **Modernization:** A practice of societal transformation in which less developed societies adopt characteristics of more advanced societies, including changes in economic structures, governance, and cultural norms.
- **Social Class:** A categorization of individuals based on similarities in wealth, power, and social status.

14.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. C. Wright Mills

A2. Three

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Mutiny of 1857

A2. Western Europe

14.8 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READINGS

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14.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the notion of the middle class. How does its historical development in Western societies differ from its evolution in India?
2. Analyze the factors and processes that contributed to the advent of the middle class in India.
3. Compare and contrast the old and new middle class in the Indian context.

UNIT- 15

CHANGING RACE, ETHNIC AND MINORITY RELATIONS

STRUCTURE

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Learning Objectives
- 15.3 Conceptual Understanding of Race, Ethnicity and Minority Group
 - Self-Check Exercises-1
- 15.4 Dimensions of Ethnic and Racial Relations in India
 - Self-Check Exercises-2
- 15.5 Minorities in India
 - 15.5.1 Rise and Growth of Communalism in India
 - Self-Check Exercises-3
- 15.6 Summary
- 15.7 Glossary
- 15.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 15.9 References/Suggested Readings
- 15.10 Terminal Questions

15.1 INTRODUCTION

India has experienced a rise in ethnic tensions and conflicts in recent years, posing significant challenges to the process of nation-building. Sociologists highlight that India's vast diversity—encompassing caste, religion, language, culture, and ethnicity—contributes to both social cohesion and fragmentation. The increasing competition for limited economic resources and the heightened awareness among various communities to preserve their cultural heritage have intensified ethnic identity assertions. Disparities in economic development have further exacerbated feelings of exclusion among certain groups, often driving them toward identity-based political mobilization.

While India's diversity spans multiple dimensions, religion has historically played a central role in shaping group identities. The classification of majority and minority communities has primarily been based on religious affiliation, leading to official recognition of religious minorities at the national level. Although the Indian Constitution does not explicitly define minorities, it acknowledges the existence of religious and linguistic minority groups. The aspirations and demands of these communities, while rooted in their rights to cultural and political representation, have at times created tensions that challenge national unity. Understanding these dynamics requires a nuanced approach that considers both the structural inequalities and historical contexts shaping ethnic and religious identities in India.

15.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will

- Comprehend the thoughts of race, ethnicity, and marginal groups.
- Examine various aspects of traditional and tribal relations in India.
- Evaluate the ancient framework of majority-minority associations in India.
- Investigate the factors contributing to the growth of socialism in India.

15.3 CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF RACE, ETHNICITY AND MINORITY GROUP

In sociology, the terms race, ethnicity, and minority groups carry distinct meanings. Race refers to socially recognized physical differences, while ethnicity pertains to a shared cultural identity. Minority groups, on the other hand, are communities that experience social, political, or economic subordination, regardless of their racial background or geographical origin. The following sections analyze these concepts in detail.

Race: A Social Construct

Historically, the concept of race has evolved across different societies and time periods. Initially, it was closely linked to ancestry and familial lineage but later became associated with external physical traits. Earlier racial classifications categorized people based on geographical origin, skin color, or ethnic background, often leading to stereotypes and biases. For example, racial groups were labeled after regions (such as Mongoloid and Caucasoid) .

Modern understandings of race, however, emphasize that it is more of a **social construct** rather than a purely biological reality. In contemporary discussions, race is often analyzed through socio-economic and political lenses rather than genetics. J.S.B. Haldane, in his work *What is Race*, published by UNESCO, defined a race as a group that shares certain inherent physical characteristics and originates from a particular geographical region. This definition underscores the historically perceived link between race and territory.

Ethnicity: Cultural Identity and Belonging

The term **ethnicity** originates from the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning "nation." Initially, it was used to describe primitive societies that shared a collective identity based on government and economy. Ethnicity is often associated with racial distinctions; however, it goes beyond physical attributes to include shared cultural elements such as language, religion, traditions, and customs.

Ethnicity shapes social identity, fostering a sense of belonging among members of a particular group. The sociologist Milton Yinger outlined three key characteristics of ethnicity:

1. **External Recognition:** Ethnic groups are perceived by outsiders as distinct based on religion, language, or geographical origin.
2. **Internal Self-Identification:** Members of ethnic groups recognize themselves as unique from others due to cultural markers.
3. **Collective Activities:** Ethnic groups engage in common cultural practices to preserve their identity.

Unlike race, which is often imposed by society, ethnicity is more self-defined and fluid, as people can embrace multiple cultural identities over time.

Minority Groups: Beyond Numerical Strength

The concept of minority groups is not merely about population size but revolves around power dynamics in society. In several cases, minority groups are socially and politically marginalized, regardless of their numbers.

Traditionally, the dominant group enjoys control over monetary and administrative resources, granting them privilege and influence. In contrast, the minority group is positioned in a subsidiary role, often facing systemic disadvantages. However, numerical strength does not always determine dominance.

Historical examples challenge the statement that minorities are always weaker:

- **British Rule in India** – A small British population ruled over a vast Indian majority.
- **Apartheid in South Africa** – A white minority controlled the black majority.
- **Bengali Immigrants in Assam (1980s)** – Despite being a minority, they held influential positions.

These cases illustrate that power, rather than population size, determines a group's status in society. The term “**majority minority**” describe situations where a numerically smaller group exerts significant control over resources and governance.

Defining Minority Groups: Sociological Perspectives

Louis Wirth (1945) defined these groups as one that is singled out for differential and unequal treatment due to its cultural or physical characteristics. This results in discrimination and exclusion, reinforcing its subordinate status in society. He also emphasized that minority status is based on power relations rather than numbers, as seen in apartheid South Africa.

Building on this, **Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris (1958)** identified five key features of minority groups:

1. **Unequal treatment** – They experience discrimination and lack control over their lives.
2. **Distinctive physical or cultural traits** – Differences such as skin color or language set them apart.
3. **Involuntary membership** – People are born into a minority group rather than choosing it.
4. **Awareness of subordination** – A shared sense of discrimination fosters group consciousness.
5. **High in-group marriage rates** – Minority groups tend to marry within their community to preserve cultural identity.

The idea of race, ethnicity, and minority groups are deeply intertwined with historical, social, and political realities. Race is largely a socially constructed category, while ethnicity is rooted in shared culture and identity. Minority status, rather than being solely a function of arithmetic strength, is a reflection of power imbalances within a society. These concepts are crucial for understanding social hierarchies, discrimination, and the persistent struggles for equality across the world.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The majority and minority groups share a relationship of

Q2. The word 'ethnic' originates from the term 'ethno,' which means 'nation.'

Q1. There exists a relationship of between the majority and minority groups.

Q2. The term 'ethnic' is derived from the word 'ethno' meaning 'nation'.

15.4 DIMENSIONS OF ETHNIC AND RACIAL RELATIONS IN INDIA

The ethnic and racial relations has gained significance due to multiple interrelated factors. Scholars have identified main cause for this growing interest, including migration, cultural interactions, technological advancements, urbanization, and conflict. These factors shape ethnic and racial dynamics in India, a country known for its immense diversity in terms of race, language, religion, and caste.

Factors Influencing Ethnic and Racial Relations**1. Migration**

The movement of people across regions, both within and beyond national borders, has contributed to the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups in specific areas. Migration introduces cultural diversity and influences the social fabric of a region.

2. Cultural Contact

When people migrate, they bring their traditions, languages, and customs with them. This interaction between different cultural groups leads to either assimilation or the creation of distinct ethnic enclaves. The nature of these interactions varies depending on historical, social, and economic factors.

3. Technological Advancements

Developments in transportation and communication have facilitated the movement of individuals, ideas, and goods. These advancements have a significant role in shaping ethnic relations by increasing cross-cultural exchanges and fostering global interconnectedness.

4. Urbanization and Population Density

The rapid growth of cities has led to a convergence of people from different social, cultural, and geographic backgrounds. Urban centers serve as melting pots of diverse ethnic groups, often leading to both cultural fusion and competition for resources.

5. Conflict and Ethnic Tensions

Ethnic and religious conflicts have attracted global attention. In India, tensions between different groups have occasionally escalated into communal violence. These conflicts highlight the complexities of ethnic relations and the role of political and economic factors in shaping group interactions.

Ethnic Diversity in India

India's diversity is not limited to physical traits but extends to behavioral patterns shaped by language, region, religion, and caste. **Punekar (1974)** identified these four elements as the key bases of ethnic identity in India. While sub-castes, dialects, sub-regions, and religious sects exist, ethnicity is most prominently manifested at the broader levels of caste, language, religion, and region.

1. Language and Regional Identity

Language and region are closely linked in India, as the country's states have largely been reorganized on linguistic lines. During colonial rule, administrative divisions were arbitrary, but after independence, language-based demands led to the creation of states such as Andhra Pradesh (1953) for Telugu speakers. This trend continued, resulting in states like Gujarat for Gujaratis and Kerala for Malayalees.

Language plays a crucial role in shaping ethnic identity, fostering group solidarity, and drawing boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Migrant communities often establish cultural associations to maintain their linguistic and regional identities, such as Tamil associations in North India or Bengali associations abroad.

2. Religion as an Ethnic Identifier

Religious identity is another significant aspect of ethnic differentiation in India. The country is home to multiple religious communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians. While there is historical evidence of peaceful coexistence among these groups.

Hindus form the majority community, and this numerical dominance has influenced political narratives. However, economic disparities exist within and between religious groups. For instance, the Zoroastrian (Parsi) community, despite its small population, holds substantial economic power.

Religious conflicts, especially between Hindus and Muslims, have remained a recurring challenge in Indian society. Communal divisions arise when one group asserts its identity in ways that marginalize or challenge another, resulting in social and political tensions.

3. Caste and Ethnic Identity

Caste is significant bases of ethnic identity in India. It functions as both a unifying and divisive force in ethnic relations. People having the same caste across dissimilar linguistic regions may identify with one another, yet intra-caste divisions often limit interactions such as intermarriage.

The caste system has historically ranked social groups in a hierarchical manner, with Brahmins occupying the highest position, followed by Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (laborers). Those considered "outcastes" or Dalits faced severe social discrimination.

Caste identity has traditionally dictated occupation, social interactions, and access to resources. While the **varna system** theoretically allowed for social mobility, in practice, caste status was closely tied to economic and political power. Over time, lower castes have sought upward mobility through **Sanskritization**, a process of adopting higher-caste customs to improve social status.

Indigenous and cultural relations in India are shaped by historical, social, and political factors. Language, religion, caste, and regional identity serve as the primary bases of ethnic differentiation. While India has witnessed both peaceful coexistence and ethnic tensions, power dynamics remain crucial in defining majority-minority relations. The interplay of these factors continues to influence the social fabric of the nation, highlighting the need for inclusive policies that address ethnic disparities and promote social harmony.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Fill in the blanks

Q1. had ritual purity and also enjoyed better access to financial and administrative power, as well as education.

Q2. The system has allowed for some degree of flexibility in social mobility.

15.5 MINORITIES IN INDIA

The existence of minority groups is a universal phenomenon, with such communities present in almost worldwide. These groups, whether defined by religion, language, culture, or race, strive to maintain their discrete individuality and resist forced assimilation. Ideally, minorities should be permissible to preserve their unique characteristics without discrimination. However, in reality, dominant groups often impose their religious, cultural, or ideological beliefs on minority communities, leading to conflicts and, in extreme cases, violence. History has shown that persecution and forced assimilation of minorities have resulted in devastating consequences, including wars and large-scale suffering.

India presents a particularly complex scenario, given its vast diversity. The country is home to various minority groups. These groups are determined to safeguard their distinct identities, and any efforts to assimilate them have often resulted in serious socio-political repercussions. The most tragic example of this was the Partition of India in 1947, which was largely driven by religious divisions and led to immense human suffering. Even today, managing minority issues remains one of the most challenging tasks for Indian society and governance.

Despite being a multi-lingual, religion has historically been prominent factor in defining majority and minority communities. Although the Indian Constitution does not explicitly define minorities, it provides recognition to religious and linguistic minorities. While the reorganization of states based on language in 1956 significantly addressed linguistic minority concerns, religious minority issues continue to pose challenges to national unity and social harmony.

Religion has played a fundamental role in shaping group identities in India, influencing various aspects of life, including socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Often, religious perspectives are applied to problems that are essentially social or economic in nature. This deep-rooted connection between religion and identity has even influenced the way Indian history is categorized, with different periods being labeled as Hindu, Muslim, and Christian eras. The division between majority and minority communities throughout history has been highly complex, further complicating contemporary social and political relations.

14.5.1 Rise and Growth of Communalism in India

To understand the rise of communalism in India, it is indispensable to examine the ancient framework in which it developed. British colonial rule have a significant role in fostering communal divisions, as the colonial administration often prioritized division over unity. A politically and socially unified India not in the best interest of British rule, leading to policies that encouraged fragmentation.

Religious reform movements highlighted distinct issues faced by each community. While there were common difficulties that addressed collectively, such efforts were never seriously pursued. This lack of unity further prevented political consolidation, allowing religious differences to deepen. The use of

Hindu religious symbols in socio-political movements also contributed to the alienation of other religious communities, fueling communal tensions.

The British administration took advantage of these divisions, actively encouraging fragmentation. Due to this, communalism became entrenched in Indian society before nationalism could emerge as a unifying force. The legacy of these historical developments continues to shape majority-minority relations in India today, influencing the rights, status, and treatment of minority communities.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Q1. The..... and oppression of minorities have historically led to violent conflicts and wars.

Q2. The of India does not provide a specific definition for minorities but acknowledges the existence of both religious and linguistic minority groups.

15.6 SUMMARY

Ethnic associations in India always intricate because of the nation's immense diversity, comprising over 2,000 ethnic groups. Each region exhibits a unique blend of ethnicities, traditions, and cultural practices. Historically, interactions among these groups have been both harmonious and conflicting. The present-day classification of majority and minority communities in India is due to the prolonged historical process that dates back to ancient times. The emergence and evolution of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism within India, along with the arrival of other religious communities from outside, contributed to the ongoing formation of minority groups. The sustained interaction between different religious communities also led to large-scale conversions to Islam and Christianity, giving rise to a composite Indian culture.

During ancient and medieval times, relationships between majority and minority communities did not emerge as a significant problem. However, with the advent of representative governance under British rule, these relationships became a major socio-political issue. Communal divisions, which already existed before colonial rule, were further deepened by British administrative policies. The Indian society was historically segmented along various lines, but the presence of kingship and feudal structures prevented these divisions from significantly affecting the political landscape.

The reforms introduced by the British colonial government categorized Indian society based on religion and caste, reinforcing divisions that served their governance strategy. Rather than attempting to unify these communities, the British administration encouraged and exploited their divisions, fostering a sense of minority consciousness. This led to the intensification of communalism, which later culminated in the Partition of India. The division of the subcontinent was believed to be a solution to communal tensions, but subsequent events demonstrated that partition alone cannot permanently resolve ethnic or religious conflicts. Instead, a sustainable solution lies in acknowledging pluralism, addressing the genuine concerns of minority communities, and safeguarding their rights through institutional mechanisms that promote peaceful coexistence.

15.7 GLOSSARY

- **Assimilation:** A process through which a minority or migrant group gradually adopts the cultural traits and identity of the dominant group, ultimately merging into it.

- **Communalism:** A belief system that prioritizes religious identity over all other aspects of personal and group identity, often leading to hostility and aggression towards those belonging to different religious or non-religious backgrounds.
- **Dominant Group:** A social group that holds greater power, influence, and privilege within a society compared to subordinate groups.
- **Ethnicity:** A shared cultural identity that may include language, heritage, religion, and other cultural attributes.
- **Minority Group:** A segment of society that experiences differential and often unequal treatment due to its distinct cultural, religious, or ethnic identity.
- **Social Construction of Race:** A perspective that race is not determined by biological factors but is instead shaped by social perceptions and cultural interpretations.
- **Stereotypes:** Generalized and oversimplified beliefs about particular groups of people, often leading to misconceptions and biases.
- **Subordinate Group:** A social group that has comparatively less power and influence than the dominant group in a given society.

15.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Inequality

A2. Greek

Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Twice-born caste

A2. Varna

Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Suppression

A2. Constitution

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15.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Provide a critical analysis of ethnic and minority relations, with a specific focus on India.
2. Define ethnicity and briefly discuss ethnic minorities in the Indian perspective.
3. Write the key characteristics of minority groups? Support your answer with relevant examples.

BLOCK-IV

UNIT-16

GENDER AND CASTE

STRUCTURE

- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Learning Objectives
- 16.3 Feminist Perspective on Gender with Respect to Socio-Cultural Groups
- 16.4 Gender and Caste
- 16.5 Role and Identity of Women in Caste Based Society
- 16.6 Summary
- 16.7 Glossary
- 16.8 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 16.9 References/Suggested Readings
- 16.10 Terminal Questions

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Indian society is divided along multiple lines, including caste, class, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Deep-rooted patriarchy and gender norms, which favor boys over girls and enforce rigid separations between men and women from an early age, intersect with practices like child marriage to construct a social environment where the manipulation of women—especially Dalit women—is normalized. Patriarchal power structures influence every aspect of life, leading to various discriminatory practices such as female infanticide, gender-based neglect, and dowry-related violence. These systemic inequalities often place women at risk of exploitation, particularly at the hands of men in powerful positions.

Kate Millett (1968) argued that women are assigned a status similar to that of a caste, where social mobility between genders is nonexistent, and men receive preferential treatment in all aspects of life. According to her, gender is an ascribed status, and power dynamics shape relationships between men and women.

In India, patriarchy casts a heavy shadow over women's lives, affecting them across different castes and classes. However, Dalit women, face the harshest forms of discrimination and violence owing to the intersection of caste and gender biases. They endure oppression from society at large, men within their communities, and even male family members. Practices such as the Devadasi system—where young girls, sometimes as young as 12, are dedicated to the goddess Yellamma and later forced into prostitution—along with honor killings, sexual violence, unsafe working conditions, and lack of access to essential services like water, sanitation, and employment, remain widespread challenges.

16.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit

- Analyze the interconnection amongst caste and gender.
- Explore feminist perspectives on the intersectionality of gender and socio-cultural divisions.
- Examine the role and identity of women in caste-based societies.
- Understand the systematic subjugation of women within caste-based social structures.

16.3 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER WITH RESPECT TO SOCIO-CULTURAL GROUPS

Feminism today acknowledges that the classification of "woman" is not a monolithic identity but rather a diverse and multifaceted one. Women from different socio-cultural backgrounds experience varying degrees of access to rights, opportunities, and citizenship. This recognition has been instrumental in broadening feminist discourse to include intersectionality, which considers how multiple social identities—such as caste, class, race, and religion—shape women's lived experiences.

Western feminist thought has evolved in response to critiques from non-Western and African American scholars who pointed out the limitations of mainstream feminist narratives. They argued that traditional feminist discourse largely represented the experiences of white, middle-class women while ignoring the impact of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status on women's oppression. Black feminists emphasized that the challenges faced by women of marginalized communities are distinct from those of privileged groups due to systemic racism and socio-economic exclusion. Sylvia Walby, for instance, highlighted that women of color experience the labor market differently from white women due to racial discrimination, which significantly impacts their employment opportunities and working conditions.

A similar pattern can be observed in India, where caste plays a critical role in shaping gender experiences. Dalit women, for example, face not only gender-based discrimination but also the social exclusion associated with caste. Their participation in the labor market is restricted by notions of purity and pollution, preventing them from securing jobs as cooks or in other roles that involve direct contact with upper-caste individuals. Instead, they are relegated to menial jobs such as cleaning, washing clothes, and caregiving. These restrictions reinforce caste-based inequalities and limit their economic and social mobility.

For a long time, Indian feminist movements hesitated to address caste-related disparities among women. A major reason for this was the fear that acknowledging caste divisions would fragment the broader feminist struggle. Early feminist movements in India primarily focused on issues such as violence against women, with landmark cases like the Mathura rape case in the 1970s drawing national attention. While feminist activists did recognize caste as a factor in class-based struggles—such as organizing rural women workers or addressing poverty and sexual violence—they often treated caste as a socioeconomic issue rather than an independent structure of oppression.

This approach, however, overlooked the fact that upper-caste feminists often benefit from caste privilege, which grants them better access to education, employment, and decision-making spaces. By

framing caste as merely an economic category rather than a deep-rooted social hierarchy, mainstream feminism failed to fully address the systemic oppression Dalit women face. This omission became a point of contention in the 1990s when Dalit women began questioning the mainstream feminist movement for its inability to address their unique struggles.

Dalit feminist discourse highlights that Dalit women experience a triple burden—gender oppression, economic deprivation, and caste-based discrimination. Unlike upper-caste women, who primarily struggle with gender inequality within their own social class, Dalit women must also contend with casteist violence, exclusion, and systemic marginalization. Furthermore, while the broader women's movement challenges patriarchy, Dalit feminists argue that caste hierarchy itself is a fundamental form of oppression that must be dismantled for true gender equality to be achieved.

In response to these critiques, Dalit women's movements have emerged with a distinct perspective, advocating for an intersectional approach that acknowledges how caste structures shape women's lives. Their activism has expanded the feminist discourse in India, forcing mainstream movements to reconsider their frameworks and address caste-based violence and discrimination as central issues rather than peripheral concerns.

By analyzing the interplay among caste and gender, it becomes clear that women's oppression in India is not uniform but varies significantly based on socio-cultural positioning. A more inclusive feminist movement must recognize and address these intersecting forms of discrimination to ensure that all women—not just those from privileged backgrounds—benefit from gender justice.

Self-Check Exercise-1

Fill in the blanks

Q1. The writings from feminists have focused on the distinct problems of women from discriminated groups

Q2.suffer a triple deprivation owing to gender, poverty and caste.

16.4 GENDER AND CASTE

Caste in the Indian subcontinent is a deeply entrenched hierarchical system that enforces social stratification founded on birth. Contrary to the notion of caste as a "divine division of labor," it is, in reality, a rigid structure that dictates occupational roles and denies individuals the freedom to change their social and economic status. This continuity is maintained through endogamy and social exclusion, ensuring that caste identities remain intact across generations.

Whereas Gender mentions to the societal norms associated with one's biological sex. These norms dictate behavior, mobility, and access to power, primarily serving to control individuals outside the framework of cisgender, heterosexual male privilege. As B.R. Ambedkar aptly stated, "Women are the gateway to the caste system," highlighting the crucial role women play in sustaining caste hierarchy. The intersection of caste and gender means that a person's caste not only shapes their social identity but also determines how gender norms are imposed upon them, both within and outside their community.

Caste, Gender, and Social Control

A woman's chastity is often equated with the honor of her caste. Consequently, upper-caste (Savarna) men exert control over the sexuality of women within their caste to maintain the supposed

"purity" of their lineage. This control is internalized and perpetuated by Savarna women, who conform to patriarchal and casteist structures in return for social privileges. Those who reject these norms often face severe social consequences, including ostracization and violence.

Violence against women is frequently used as a means to assert caste dominance. Caste-based sexual violence is not just an act of gendered oppression but also a mechanism to humiliate and subjugate marginalized castes. Power hierarchies are evident in the way different groups exercise control: upper-caste men dominate both upper-caste women and lower-caste men and women; upper-caste women, while subordinated by their own men, exert power over lower-caste individuals; and lower-caste men, though marginalized, often replicate patriarchal norms by oppressing women within their own communities. Consequently, Dalit women remain the most oppressed, bearing the burden of both caste-based and gender-based discrimination.

Marriage as a Tool of Oppression

In upper-caste households, women are subjected to stringent social controls, particularly regarding marriage. Family members, including fathers and brothers, may withdraw financial or emotional support from a woman who refuses to conform to prescribed marriage norms. Marriage serves as a primary institution through which caste and gender hierarchies are reinforced. Endogamy—marriage within the same caste—is strictly enforced to preserve caste boundaries, while any deviation is met with severe repercussions.

In contrast, lower-caste women, though also subject to patriarchal control, often engage in economic activities outside the home. However, this does not necessarily indicate greater social freedom; rather, it is a necessity driven by economic conditions. Unlike upper-caste women, who are confined to the domestic sphere due to caste-based prohibitions against manual labor, lower-caste women must work to sustain their families. Their employment, however, does not translate into empowerment, as they continue to experience caste discrimination and gender-based violence both in and outside the workplace.

Caste, Gender, and Occupational Restrictions

The caste system has traditionally governed both social roles and the division of labor, including gender-based work responsibilities. Women's roles have been tightly controlled through explicit rules and symbolic messages that reinforce their inferiority. In agriculture, for instance, women are allowed to perform tasks such as weeding and transplantation but are barred from plowing, which is considered a male domain. As caste groups achieve upward mobility, women are often withdrawn from labor outside the home, reinforcing gendered restrictions on mobility.

Historically, the system of caste also shaped religious and cultural constraints on women. The exclusion of both women and Shudras from the sacred thread ceremony, the similar punitive measures prescribed for harming a woman or a Shudra, and the disowning of religious privileges to both groups illustrate how caste and gender were deeply intertwined in maintaining social hierarchy.

Marriage, Sexuality, and Caste Hierarchy

Marriage regulations have historically reinforced both caste and gender oppression. The theories of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriages demonstrate this asymmetry. *Anuloma* marriage, in which an upper-caste man marries a lower-caste woman, was accepted, as it maintained caste purity from a patriarchal standpoint. However, *pratiloma* marriage, where an upper-caste woman married a lower-

caste man, was strictly prohibited and often met with extreme punishments, including social ostracization and even death.

The accessibility of lower-caste women to upper-caste men, while lower-caste men faced severe punishment for approaching upper-caste women, further underscores the asymmetrical power dynamics. This pattern of control extended to early marriages, rigid endogamy, and the sacrosanct nature of marriage, which bound women to their husbands for life. Such practices were instrumental in restricting female autonomy, particularly over their sexuality and mobility.

The intersection of caste and gender reveals a deeply entrenched system of oppression that regulates every aspect of women's lives—from their sexuality and marriage to their labor and social mobility. While upper-caste women face rigid domestic restrictions, lower-caste women bear the triple burden of caste, gender, and economic deprivation. Recognizing these intersecting structures is crucial for dismantling both gender-based and caste-based inequalities. Any effort toward gender justice in India must account for caste dynamics to ensure that the most marginalized women—Dalit and lower-caste women—are not left behind in the fight for equality.

Self-Check Exercise-2

Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. A marriage where a boy of upper caste marries a girl of lower caste is approved?

Q1. Name the marriage type where the upper caste boy marries a lower caste women.

(A) Pratiloma (B) Anuloma (C) Levirate (D) Sorrowate

Q2. A marriage of women ceremonially unpolluted group with men of lower caste?

(A) Anuloma (B) Sorrowate (C) Levirate (D) Pratiloma

16.5 ROLE AND IDENTITY OF WOMEN IN CASTE BASED SOCIETY

The individuality of women in caste-based societies cannot be examined without considering the role of patriarchy. Patriarchy is an integral part of identity formation, intersecting with caste and class to shape social hierarchies. Men, in most cases, hold dominant positions, while women remain subordinate across different caste groups. A significant number of women conform to these inequalities, as deviating from prescribed roles can lead to social ostracization, strained relationships, and, in extreme cases, even fatal consequences. Women are often regarded as the bearers of community honor, leading to strict control over their autonomy. The pervasiveness of patriarchal norms forces women to negotiate within these constraints rather than resist them outright.

Chastity, Caste, and Control Over Female Sexuality

A woman's chastity is closely tied to caste status, with stricter sexual norms imposed on upper-caste women. The higher a caste is positioned in the social hierarchy, the greater the control over its women's sexuality. For instance, Brahmin women are expected to remain virgins before marriage, remain faithful to one husband, and observe celibacy in widowhood. In contrast, women from lower castes, such as sweeper communities, face fewer restrictions—premarital virginity may not be strictly enforced, extramarital relationships may be tolerated, and remarriage for widows is socially accepted.

The stringent control over upper-caste women's sexuality serves to preserve lineage purity, which is crucial in maintaining the caste's social standing.

Women's Mobility and Domesticity in Upper Castes

Women from upper-caste backgrounds experience significant restrictions on their mobility. They are largely confined to the domestic sphere, with their primary role centered around maintaining household sanctity and caste purity. An essential aspect of this purity is the regulation of food consumption and preparation. Feminist anthropologist Leela Dube has argued that women are key agents in maintaining caste boundaries through food practices. Upper-caste women are tasked with ensuring food purity, safeguarding against external contamination, and adhering to strict dietary rules that reinforce caste hierarchies. Their knowledge and adherence to these traditions grant them respect within their community. However, this respect is conditional—women who defy these norms face severe consequences, ranging from social exclusion to punitive measures.

Purity, Pollution, and Gendered Caste Hierarchies

In upper-caste societies, the notions of purity and pollution are more strictly enforced on women than on men. Higher-caste men do not face the same level of self-pollution as women and are not expected to engage in tasks involving direct contact with impurity. In contrast, upper-caste women are often regarded as impure due to natural bodily functions like menstruation and childbirth. They are also assigned household duties considered polluting, reinforcing their subordinate position. Traditionally, women from twice-born castes were placed on par with Shudras in terms of exclusion from sacred rituals, such as Vedic learning, further highlighting their lower social status.

Lower-Caste Women and the Shared Burden of Impurity

In lower-caste communities, the distinction between male and female purity is less pronounced. Unlike upper-caste women, lower-caste women are involved in monetary events and share contaminating chores with their male counterparts. Their roles often include midwifery, cleaning, washing, and waste disposal—occupations that encompass direct contact with societal impurities. However, lower-caste men are not exempt from performing impure labor, as they too engage in caste-mandated occupations that involve pollution. This shared burden creates a comparatively less rigid gender division among lower castes. Nonetheless, women's economic contributions are still carried out within the constraints of patrilineal norms and caste-based control over labor.

Caste and Gender as Interlocking Systems of Oppression

The extent of control over women increases with caste status. Upper-caste women face stricter social constraints and limited mobility, while lower-caste women, though more economically active, remain subjected to caste- and gender-based exploitation. The caste system not only dictates occupational roles but also enforces gender norms that restrict women's autonomy and reinforce patriarchal authority. Thus, the intersection of caste and gender creates a layered system of oppression, where women's identities are shaped by both their caste status and their adherence to patriarchal expectations.

A critical analysis of caste and gender reveals that the oppression of women is not uniform across social groups but varies depending on caste location. While upper-caste women are confined by rigid purity norms, lower-caste women experience economic exploitation and caste-based violence. Understanding these interwoven structures is essential in addressing gender inequality in India, as caste and gender continue to operate as powerful tools of social control.

Self-Check Exercise-3

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Women in upper-caste societies largely live their lives within constraints.

Q2. feminist anthropologist has asserted that women play a crucial role in preserving caste boundaries by preparing food and ensuring its purity.

16.6 SUMMARY

Caste is a fundamental institution in Hindu society, shaping social structures and relationships. Gender have a crucial role in the functioning of the caste system, influencing women's lives in profound ways. Society in India is deeply patriarchal, and women's compliance with caste and class hierarchies is not always passive; in some cases, they actively uphold and reinforce these structures. Women are often treated as inferior to men, with their autonomy and sexuality being strictly controlled.

The caste system contributes to the rigid stratification and hierarchy of Indian society, with caste and gender being deeply interlinked. While upper-caste women face gender-based discrimination, they are afforded certain privileges—contingent on their adherence to patriarchal norms. In contrast, lower-caste women face the dual burden of caste and gender oppression, making them the most marginalized group within this social order.

16.7 GLOSSARY

- **Caste System:** A hierarchical system of social stratification based on inherited status, determining an individual's social position, occupation, and interactions.
- **Devadasi:** Women dedicated to temple service through rituals resembling Hindu marriage, historically serving deities but later subjected to exploitation.
- **Feminism:** Advocacy for social equality between the sexes, challenging patriarchy and systemic discrimination.
- **Gender:** A set of socially constructed roles and expectations associated with individuals based on their perceived sex.
- **Intersectionality:** A framework that examines how overlapping social identities—such as caste, gender, and class—create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. For example, lower-caste women face compounded discrimination due to both caste and gender hierarchies.

16.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Black

A2. Women

Self-Check Exercise-2

- A1. Anuloma
- A2. Pratiloma

Self-Check Exercise-3

- A1. Familial
- A2. Leela Dube

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16.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Analyze the interconnections between caste, gender, and social stratification.
2. Critically evaluate the position of women in a caste-based society.
3. Explain how gender functions as an organization of stratification in Indian society.

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## UNIT- 17

### GENDER AND CLASS DIVISIONS

#### STRUCTURE

- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Learning Objectives
- 17.3 Gender and Class
  - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 17.4 Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Class
  - 17.4.1 Radical Feminism
  - 17.4.2 Materialist Feminism
  - 17.3.3 Dual System Theory
  - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 17.5 Summary
- 17.6 Glossary
- 17.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 17.8 References/Suggested Readings
- 17.9 Terminal Questions

#### 17.1 INTRODUCTION

Social inequality involves analyzing the roles individuals occupy within the social structure. The concept of class is frequently employed in sociological research to assess individuals' positions in production and market systems and to examine how these positions shape their material well-being and life opportunities. However, class on your own does not regulate life chances; other factors also play a crucial role. One such factor is gender. Empirical research highlights that gender significantly influences individuals' opportunities in the labor market. This recognition has led scholars to explore the intersection of class and gender more closely.

Traditionally, stratification theory has centered on men's positions in occupational structures, often neglecting women or identifying them constructed on the position of their male family members. Feminist scholars have challenged these assumptions, arguing that gender-based inequalities are deeply embedded within class systems and should be an integral part of class analysis. Theoretically, feminists contend that viewing the family as a single unit, where all members share the same class status, overlooks the internal gender disparities within households. Empirically, the increasing participation of married women in the workforce questions the long-standing notion of the male head of the household as the sole economic provider.

## 17.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson,

- Analyze how class and gender contribute to women's subordination in comparison to men.
- Examine the connection of gender and class within the framework of social stratification.
- Explore various feminist perspectives that help in knowing the association between class and gender.

## 17.3 GENDER AND CLASS

Understanding social inequality often involves examining different dimensions such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity. However, integrating these aspects into a unified analysis is complex. Within anthropology, class has been a central concept in theorizing social inequality. Class analysis traditionally addresses three main concerns:

- Defining class categories and determining how individuals are assigned to them.
- Examining social mobility and the movement of individuals between classes.
- Exploring the effects of class position and mobility on political action and social awareness.

Gender, along with caste, ethnicity, location, and other factors, significantly contributes to social stratification. Scholars argue that understanding gender inequalities solely through class divisions is challenging. While class divisions are clearly visible in contemporary societies, gender inequalities have historical roots that predate modern class systems. For example, even in hunting-gathering societies—where class distinctions were absent—men held dominant positions over women. This suggests that gender inequality operates independently but often intersects with class-based disparities in modern societies.

### Traditional Class Analysis and Gender Bias

Historically, class analysis largely ignored gender. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, sociologists studying class rarely considered gender relations. Many justified this omission by claiming resource constraints, while others simply followed the conventional assumption that women's class position was derived from their male relatives.

A key figure in this debate, John Goldthorpe, argued in 1983 that class analysis should focus on men because women's economic contributions were relatively insignificant. His stance was not meant to endorse sexism but rather to acknowledge that most women, particularly married women, were economically dependent on their husbands. Consequently, Goldthorpe maintained that a woman's class position should be determined by her husband's occupation and status.

However, this perspective faced significant criticism. Feminist scholars pointed out that defining class solely through male breadwinners disregarded the growing number of women entering the labor force. Additionally, treating the family as a single economic unit ignored inequalities within households. Over time, these critiques led to a shift in how sociologists analyzed class and gender.

### The Intersection of Class and Gender

By the 1960s, the feminist movement began challenging traditional sociological frameworks. As more women became part of the paid workforce, scholars questioned why class was determined only by the status of the male head of household. This led to a broader discussion on whether class and gender should be analyzed separately or together.

In advanced capitalist societies, the increasing number of dual-income households posed a challenge to conventional class analysis. Scholars debated whether class should be measured at the individual or household level. Goldthorpe continued to argue that all members of a household shared the same class position, as men were generally the primary earners. In contrast, feminists contended that some households were supported by women and that many had both partners contributing equally to the household income. As a result, they advocated for a joint classification model, incorporating the economic status of both spouses.

These debates eventually led to the concept of intersectionality, which examines how multiple dimensions of inequality—such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity—interact to shape life opportunities. However, not all scholars fully accepted this approach.

### **Alternative Perspectives on Class and Gender**

Sociologist Erik Olin Wright contributed to the debate by conducting empirical research on class and gender in countries such as Australia, Japan, Sweden, and the United States. His findings demonstrated that gender significantly influenced access to authority positions. However, Wright sought to defend Marxist class theory by arguing that class and gender should be treated as distinct concepts. He suggested that, in abstract terms, class is "gender-neutral," just as patriarchy is "class-neutral." In his view, the relationship between class and gender should be analyzed separately at the theoretical level, with their interactions examined only in concrete, real-world situations.

Pierre Bourdieu's work on class and status has also been influential in understanding the intersection of class and gender. British sociologist Beverley Skeggs applied Bourdieu's framework in her study of working-class women in northwest England, analyzing how class and gender identities are formed through cultural and social processes. Other scholars have argued that class should be determined by an individual's occupation rather than their household circumstances, acknowledging that economic roles within families have changed significantly.

### **Ongoing Debates**

Despite decades of research, the debate over class and gender remains unresolved. Feminist critiques continue to challenge traditional class analysis, and ongoing economic transformations—such as the rise of female-headed households and increased female labor force participation—demand new theoretical models. The shift towards intersectional approaches highlights the need to analyze multiple layers of inequality rather than viewing class or gender in isolation. The evolving role of women in the economy and society ensures that discussions on class and gender will remain a central concern in sociological research.

### **Self-Check Exercise-1**

Fill in the blanks

Q1. Goldthorpe substantiates his position on gender using data from the ..... Mobility Survey.

Q2. .... work on class and status has been very influential and many sociologists have drawn on it for their own studies.

## **17.4 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER AND CLASS**

Feminist thought has significantly reshaped the analysis of economic structures, introducing new perspectives on traditionally undervalued areas of labor, such as domestic work and caregiving. Feminists have critiqued conventional economic theories that fail to acknowledge the gendered dimensions of labor. Their contributions have expanded economic analysis by incorporating issues such as women's unemployment as a reserve army of labor, occupational segregation, part-time work, and the gendered effects of job flexibility. The relationship between gender and class continues to be a key focus in feminist discussions. Various feminist perspectives provide distinct interpretations of economic structures and their influence on gender disparities.

### **17.4.1 Radical Feminism**

Radical feminists argue that male control over women's sexuality is a fundamental source of female oppression. Theorists such as Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone have been instrumental in this discourse. Millett, in particular, analyzed patriarchy as a central structure that subordinates women, emphasizing that this subordination is not rooted in biological differences but is socially and culturally constructed. She identified various institutions—such as the family, education system, and economy—as mechanisms that sustain male dominance. Additionally, she highlighted the role of ideology, including religious and cultural narratives, in perpetuating women's oppression.

Radical feminists reject the notion that economic factors alone determine gender inequality. Instead, they emphasize the cultural, ideological, and psychological dimensions of women's subjugation. This perspective led to a broader critique of mainstream economic models, which failed to account for systemic gender oppression. Radical feminists advocate not merely for reforms within existing structures but for a fundamental reorganization of society to dismantle patriarchal power. In the United States, this strand of feminism has sometimes been referred to as cultural feminism, emphasizing the importance of redefining gender roles and cultural norms.

### **17.4.2 Material Feminism**

Materialist feminism, which draws on Marxist materialist theories, asserts that historical and economic conditions shape social relations, including gender dynamics. Unlike Marxist feminism, which applies Marx's framework directly, materialist feminism modifies and expands it to include gender as an independent axis of oppression.

Heidi Hartmann critiques traditional Marxist class analysis for being "gender-blind," arguing that Marxist theory primarily focuses on economic structures without adequately addressing why women, in particular, perform unpaid domestic labor. While acknowledging the Marxist assertion that women's oppression is linked to capitalist exploitation, Hartmann argues that patriarchy operates as an independent system alongside capitalism. This perspective suggests that women's subordination cannot be understood solely through class analysis, as gender inequality existed in pre-capitalist societies and continues in non-capitalist contexts.

The debate on domestic labor gained prominence in the 20th century, with early thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor advocating for the recognition of housework as legitimate labor.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1903) further argued that housework should be regarded as productive labor that benefits society. Despite these early contributions, mainstream economics largely ignored the role of domestic labor until the 1960s, when feminist scholars reignited the discussion under the concept of "New Home Economics."

Throughout the 1970s, feminists and Marxists increasingly examined the gendered division of labor within households. Many feminists, drawing on Althusser's superstructure theory, argued that patriarchy is reinforced by economic structures and ideological mechanisms. Early feminist studies sought to develop a theoretical framework that positioned patriarchy within broader economic relations, linking domestic labor and paid employment to the overall structure of gendered exploitation.

### 17.4.3 Dual System Theory

Dual system theory combines elements of both Marxist and radical feminist perspectives, asserting that capitalism and patriarchy operate as interconnected but distinct systems of oppression. Theorists such as Zillah Eisenstein (1981) argue that capitalism and patriarchy are symbiotic, with one reinforcing the other. According to this view, patriarchy provides the ideological and legal structures that sustain male dominance, while capitalism ensures the economic exploitation of labor—both paid and unpaid.

Eisenstein suggests that changes in one system inevitably influence the other. For example, the rise in women's participation in the labor market due to capitalist expansion has led to increased political demands for gender equality. However, this expansion has also created contradictions, as women continue to face discrimination in employment while bearing the primary responsibility for domestic labor.

Juliet Mitchell (1975) takes a slightly different approach, distinguishing between the economic sphere, which is governed by capitalist relations, and the ideological sphere, which is shaped by patriarchal norms. She draws on Freudian psychoanalysis to argue that patriarchy operates at the level of the unconscious, reinforcing gender norms through socialization and cultural conditioning. This perspective highlights how deeply ingrained gender ideologies persist even in societies that have undergone economic transformations.

Heidi Hartmann, on the other hand, focuses on the economic implications of gender inequality, arguing that both wage labor and domestic work are sites of patriarchal exploitation. She contends that women's disadvantaged position in the labor market makes them economically dependent on men, which in turn reinforces their subordination within marriage and family structures. Unlike some Marxist feminists who view patriarchy as a product of capitalism, Hartmann emphasizes that patriarchy predates capitalism and has historically structured economic relations.

A key question that emerges from feminist analyses is whether the concept of class is useful in understanding gender relations. Class theory has strengths in identifying economic inequalities and material conditions that shape social hierarchies. However, its limitations lie in its tendency to overlook non-economic dimensions of women's subordination.

While class analysis effectively explains economic disparities, it often fails to capture the cultural, ideological, and psychological aspects of gender inequality. Moreover, traditional class theories have been closely tied to capitalist social structures, making it difficult to extend them to non-capitalist or pre-capitalist contexts. Feminist critiques have highlighted the need for a more comprehensive framework that considers both material conditions and the broader social structures that sustain gender oppression.

Feminist perspectives have significantly expanded the scope of economic analysis by integrating gender as a central category of study. Radical feminists emphasize the cultural and ideological foundations of patriarchy, while materialist feminists focus on the intersection of economic structures and gender dynamics. Dual system theorists attempt to synthesize these perspectives by examining the interplay between capitalism and patriarchy. Despite ongoing debates, feminist scholarship has made it clear that gender and class cannot be understood in isolation—both systems are deeply intertwined, shaping individuals' opportunities and experiences in complex ways.

### Self-Check Exercise-2

#### Fill in the blanks

Q1. .... system theory is a synthesis of Marxist and radical feminist theory.

Q2. Hartmann sees ..... relations crucially operating at the level of the appropriation of women's labour by men, and not at the level of ideology and the unconscious.

## 17.5 SUMMARY

Feminist scholars initially struggled to apply traditional class categories to women's experiences, as these categories were largely based on paid employment and failed to account for the unpaid labor women perform within households. Materialist feminists made progress by examining how gender operates within both production (the workforce) and reproduction (domestic labor). However, class is not solely about economic conditions; it also encompasses societal perceptions of value, respectability, and status.

Gender is deeply intertwined with class, influencing both material conditions and social hierarchies. Culture offers a broader framework for understanding gender by integrating it with class from multiple perspectives. Sylvia Walby argues that class should remain focused on economic inequality, as expanding its definition too far would dilute its original meaning. However, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of different forms of "capital"—such as social and cultural capital—provides a way to incorporate non-economic factors into the investigation of class and gender relations.

## 17.6 GLOSSARY

- **Gender:** Socially constructed roles, behaviors, and expectations assigned to individuals based on their perceived sex.
- **Intersectionality:** A framework that examines how different forms of oppression—such as gender, class, and race—interact, making some groups more vulnerable than others. For example, women from lower economic backgrounds may face more significant challenges than their wealthier counterparts.
- **Patriarchy:** A system in which men hold main command and control key aspects of society, including politics, economics, and family structures.
- **Social Class:** A hierarchical separation of society built on economic status, power, and social influence.

## 17.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

### Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Oxford

A2. Bourdieu's

### Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Dual

A2. Patriarchal

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## 17.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Analyze the interconnections between gender and class critically.
2. Discuss the different perspectives on the relationship between gender and class.
3. Why has gender been overlooked in traditional class analysis? Explain with reasons.

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## **UNIT- 18**

### **ISSUES IN GENDER EQUALITY**

#### **STRUCTURE**

- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Learning Objectives
- 18.3 Meaning of Gender Inequality
- 18.4 Gender Socialisation and Gender Inequality
- 18.5 Issues in Gender Equality
- 18.6 Perspectives on Gender Inequality
  - 18.6.1 Functionalist Perspective on Gender Inequality
  - 18.6.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender Inequality
- 18.7 Summary
- 18.8 Glossary
- 18.9 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 18.10 References/Suggested Readings
- 18.11 Terminal Questions

#### **18.1 INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality is a fundamental human right, yet there remains a persistent disparity in access to opportunities and decision-making power between men and women worldwide. Women, on a global scale, face limitations in economic participation, reduced access to education at both basic and higher levels, increased health and safety risks, and lower levels of political representation. When women and girls are empowered, they positively impact their families, communities, and nations, generating a chain reaction that benefits society as a whole.

In almost all societies, men tend to hold greater power, wealth, status, and influence than women, which assists as the basis of gender inequality. The unequal distribution of social, political, economic, and cultural resources, highlighting that gender is a crucial factor in social stratification. Historically, research on stratification overlooked gender, often treating women as if they did not exist or were irrelevant in discussions of power, wealth, and prestige. Consequently, studies focusing on gender and stratification have emerged relatively recently, largely influenced by feminist scholarship. The key approaches to know the roots of gender inequality is examining the procedure of gender socialization. This lesson will explore significant aspects of gender equality and its various dimensions.

#### **18.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the completion of this lesson, you will be able to:



Comprehend the concept of gender inequality.

- Analyze the socialization in perpetuating gender inequality in society.
- Discuss contemporary problems linked to gender equality.
- Evaluate various perspectives on gender inequality.

### 18.3 MEANING OF GENDER INEQUALITY

The term *gender* refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles, responsibilities, and behaviors attributed to men and women in a given society. In contrast, *sex* is a biological and physiological distinction between males and females. From a sociological perspective, the debate over gender differences and inequalities has led to three broad theoretical approaches:

1. **Biological Determinism:** This perspective argues that behavioral differences between men and women are rooted in biological and genetic factors. It suggests that natural differences in physicality, hormones, and brain structure lead to inherent variations in abilities and social roles.
2. **Socialization and Gender Roles:** This approach emphasizes the role of culture, family, and social institutions in shaping gender identities. It argues that individuals learn gender roles through upbringing, education, and media exposure, reinforcing societal expectations of masculinity and femininity.
3. **Social Constructionist View:** Scholars within this framework contend that both gender and sex are entirely socially constructed, meaning that differences between men and women arise from social conventions rather than biological reality. They argue that what society defines as "male" and "female" behavior is subject to change based on historical and cultural contexts.

#### Gender Inequality and Its Manifestations

Gender inequality encompasses both visible and hidden disparities that individuals face due to their gender. It is evident in multiple areas, including disparities in education, employment opportunities, wages, leadership roles, and political participation. This issue is often described as *gender bias* or *gender stratification*, where social structures privilege one gender over another.

In India, gender inequality is particularly prevalent in rural areas, where traditional beliefs often regard daughters as a financial burden. However, gender disparities are not confined to villages; they persist in urban spaces as well, including workplaces, educational institutions, and social settings. The unequal distribution of opportunities, resources, and responsibilities contributes to the continued marginalization of women.

#### Defining Gender Inequality

Experts define gender inequality in multiple ways, reflecting the complexity of the issue. A fundamental definition describes it as the *unequal allocation of opportunities based on perceived gender differences*. Another perspective frames gender inequality as the *disparities in power, status, and prestige between men and women in social groups and institutions*. While the first definition highlights inequality in access to opportunities, the second underscores the deeper structural and cultural biases that sustain these inequalities.

Addressing gender inequality requires acknowledging both these dimensions—structural barriers and cultural perceptions—while actively working toward inclusive policies and attitudinal shifts. It is not

merely a question of individual success but a larger issue of systemic change that benefits society as a whole.

### **Self-Check Exercise-1**

#### **Fill in the blanks**

Q1. .... refers to the obvious or hidden disparities among individuals based on the performance of gender.

Q2. .... is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviours assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society

## **18.4 GENDER SOCIALISATION AND GENDER INEQUALITY**

Gender socialization is a continuous process through which individuals acquire behaviors, roles, and expectations linked to their gender within a specific society. It significantly influences how men and women view themselves and engage with the world. This process shapes the privileges and constraints associated with different genders, reinforcing societal norms that define gender roles.

In most societies, gender roles are clearly demarcated, with distinct expectations for men and women. The process of gender socialization begins in childhood and is facilitated by various agents such as family, schools, peer groups, media, and religious institutions. Children absorb these roles both consciously and subconsciously, shaping their understanding of masculinity and femininity.

### **Agents of Gender Socialization**

1. **Family** – Parents and close relatives play a fundamental role in shaping gender identity. From an early age, boys and girls are treated differently, influencing their behavior and self-perception. For example, boys are often encouraged to be independent and assertive, while girls are expected to be nurturing and obedient.
2. **Education System** – Schools reinforce gender roles through curriculum choices, interactions with teachers, and peer influences. Boys are often encouraged to pursue subjects like science and mathematics, while girls may be steered towards humanities or domestic skills.
3. **Peer Groups** – Children and adolescents adapt to gender norms through their social interactions. Boys are often praised for displaying dominance and competitiveness, whereas girls are expected to prioritize cooperation and emotional intelligence.
4. **Media and Popular Culture** – Movies, advertisements, and television programs often depict stereotypical gender roles. Male characters are frequently portrayed as strong, aggressive, and action-oriented, while female characters are shown as submissive, nurturing, and confined to domestic roles.
5. **Religious and Cultural Influences** – Many religious and cultural traditions reinforce specific gender roles, prescribing how men and women should behave, dress, and interact in society.

### **Gender Socialization and the Reinforcement of Inequality**

Gender socialization perpetuates inequality by assigning different societal roles and expectations to men and women. For instance, from childhood, boys are often taught that they must grow up to be providers and decision-makers, while girls are conditioned to prioritize caregiving and household responsibilities. This division is reinforced through social rewards and punishments:

- **Positive Sanctions** – Behaviors aligned with gender expectations are encouraged and rewarded. For example, a boy who chooses a toy gun is praised for exhibiting "masculine" traits such as bravery and strength.
- **Negative Sanctions** – Behaviors that do not conform to gender norms are discouraged. A girl who expresses interest in a traditionally "male" activity, such as playing with toy cars or engaging in rough sports, may face disapproval or be redirected toward more "feminine" activities like playing with dolls or cooking sets.

These patterns contribute to long-term disparities in power, prestige, and economic opportunities. Gender roles become deeply ingrained, influencing career choices, leadership opportunities, and economic independence.

### **Gender Inequality and Societal Development**

Gender inequality has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond individuals to the broader socio-economic structure. It restricts economic growth, limits access to education and employment, and hinders political participation. In many developing nations, including India, gender disparities remain evident in multiple sectors:

- **Education** – Girls often face obstacles in accessing quality education due to cultural biases, financial constraints, and early marriage practices.
- **Employment** – Women are underrepresented in leadership positions and high-paying industries, facing wage gaps and workplace discrimination.
- **Health** – Discriminatory practices such as preferential treatment for male children, inadequate healthcare access, and higher maternal mortality rates highlight gender disparities in health outcomes.

### **Gender as a Basis of Social Stratification**

Gender is a key determinant of an individual's opportunities, shaping their access to resources and life choices. While the roles of men and women vary across cultures, no known society has placed women in a position of greater power than men. Historically, men's roles have been more highly valued and rewarded, reinforcing a hierarchy where women bear primary responsibilities for child-rearing and household duties, while men dominate economic and political spheres. The division of labor has led to disparities in wealth, status, and decision-making power. Although significant advancements have been made in achieving gender equality globally, deeply ingrained biases still contribute to social stratification. To eliminate gender inequality, it is essential to break down these structural obstacles and reshape societal norms, fostering a more just and inclusive community.

### **Self-Check Exercise-2**

#### **Fill in the blanks**

Q1. .... have traditionally been expected to be strong, aggressive even dominating.

Q2. .... are responses by individual or groups that encourage expected behaviours.

## **18.5 ISSUES IN GENDER EQUALITY**

**Gender equality** talk about a state where men and women have equal access to opportunities, resources, and rights, including financial independence, education, and personal growth. A key aspect

of achieving gender equality is **women's empowerment**, which involves enhancing a woman's self-esteem, decision-making abilities, access to resources, and control over her personal and professional life. However, gender equality is not just about women—it also involves transforming the social connections between men and women. The involvement of men and boys in challenging gender norms is essential for achieving equality. Several key issues need to be addressed to ensure gender equality, including education, health, economic disparities, political participation, violence against women, and sexual harassment.

### **1. Women's Education**

Education has a vital role in achieving gender equality. While progress has been made, a significant number of girls worldwide still lack access to education. In developing countries, nearly one-fourth of school-aged girls do not attend school. Families with limited resources often prioritize the education of boys over girls, particularly in situations where school fees, uniforms, and learning materials are unaffordable. Additionally, many girls are required to contribute to household chores, childcare, and water collection, limiting their opportunities for schooling.

Investing in girls' education yields significant benefits. Educated women tend to delay marriage, have fewer and healthier children, and are more likely to educate their own children. They also have greater employment opportunities and increased participation in civic and political activities.

### **2. Women's Health**

Ensuring women's health and well-being is fundamental to gender equality. Health is a basic human right that includes not only freedom from disease but also access to adequate nutrition, housing, employment, and medical care. These factors contribute to overall well-being and personal development.

HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects women due to limited access to healthcare, unequal power dynamics in relationships, and gender-based violence. Maternal health is another critical concern, as many women, particularly in low-income countries, face inadequate prenatal and postnatal care. High rates of child marriage further exacerbate health risks, with many girls giving birth before their bodies are physically ready. Access to quality maternal healthcare is essential for ensuring the well-being of both mothers and children, ultimately contributing to broader social and economic development.

### **3. Economic Empowerment**

Despite making up more than half of the global population, women own only a small percentage of the world's wealth. Women and girls often spend long hours performing unpaid domestic labor and, in some regions, still face legal and social barriers to owning property, inheriting wealth, accessing credit, or securing fair wages. Moreover, women remain underrepresented in decision-making roles both at home and in the public sphere.

One of the most visible economic disparities is the gender wage gap. According to a 2013 International Labour Organization report, women globally earn 23% less than men for work of equal value. This figure does not account for the many women working in informal economies without labor protections, meaning the actual wage gap is likely even higher. Addressing these economic inequalities is crucial for promoting financial independence and long-term economic stability for women.

### **4. Political Empowerment**

Women's participation in political decision-making is essential for ensuring gender equality and fostering true democracy. Raising the number of women in leadership positions leads to better accountability and more inclusive policies. Equal political representation enables women to directly influence decisions that impact their lives and communities.

Despite some progress, women remain significantly underrepresented in politics. Globally, women make up only a fraction of legislative bodies, with men outnumbering them four to one. Achieving gender equality in political participation requires systemic changes that promote equal opportunities and representation at all levels of governance.

## **5. Violence Against Women**

Gender-based violence stems from deeply entrenched social hierarchies that place men in dominant positions over women. These power imbalances create conditions where physical, psychological, and verbal violence against women becomes widespread. Studies indicate that more than one-third of women worldwide have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime, whether in public spaces, at home, or in the workplace.

Addressing gender-based violence requires legal protections, education on gender equality, and social reforms that challenge cultural norms perpetuating such violence. Stronger policies, effective law enforcement, and community-based interventions are necessary to create safer environments for women and girls.

## **6. Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence that involves unwelcome advances, inappropriate remarks, and other forms of intimidation that undermine a person's dignity. It occurs in workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces, creating hostile and unsafe environments for women.

This form of harassment may include physical contact, sexual comments, jokes, displaying explicit content, or other coercive behaviors. It often places women in vulnerable positions, affecting their job security and professional growth. Tackling sexual harassment requires stronger legal frameworks, workplace policies, and cultural shifts that discourage such behavior and promote respect and dignity for all individuals.

Achieving gender equality requires addressing multiple interconnected issues, including education, health, economic and political participation, violence, and workplace safety. Gender equality is not only about improving the conditions for women but also about reshaping societal structures that limit opportunities for both men and women. Systemic changes, legal reforms, and societal shifts are necessary to create a world where individuals, regardless of gender, have equal access to resources, opportunities, and rights.

## **Self-Check Exercise-3**

### **Multiple Choice Questions**

Q1. Which form of violence show power intimidates, humiliates, and affects another person's dignity.

- (A) Domestic Voilence    (B) Sexual Harassment    (C) Child Marriage

Q2. Women's constitutes how much percentage of world's population?

(A) 50%

(B) 45%

(C) 33%

(D) 20%

## 18.6 PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER INEQUALITY

In sociology, gender discusses the socio-cultural distinctions among men and women, shaping their roles and responsibilities in society. The differentiation between sex and gender emerged to challenge the assumption that women's subordination is a natural consequence of their biological makeup. Gender inequality is a distinct form of social and economic disparity that exists both in public and private spheres. It arises not only from economic disparities but also from societal rules and perceptions that define gender roles and expectations.

Sociologists have long studied the causes and persistence of gender inequality, leading to various theoretical perspectives that seek to explain male dominance in economic, political, and familial structures. The following sections discuss key sociological approaches to understanding gender inequality at a societal level.

### 18.6.1 Functionalist Perspective on Gender Inequality

The functionalist perspective argues that the division of labor between men and women is grounded on biological differences. Functionalist thinkers, such as **George Murdock**, suggest that in all societies, men and women perform tasks suited to their biological abilities. In his cross-cultural study of over 200 societies, Murdock (1949) found that while gender roles are not biologically programmed, they provide an efficient structure for organizing society. Women are typically responsible for domestic duties, while men take on external economic roles.

Another prominent functionalist, **Talcott Parsons**, focused on the role of the family in industrial societies. He believed that clear gender roles were essential for maintaining family stability. According to Parsons, women should fulfill expressive roles, offering emotional support and care to children, while men should take on instrumental roles, serving as breadwinners. Parsons argued that these complementary roles ensure family cohesion and social stability, reinforcing traditional gender roles as a necessary part of a well-functioning society.

### 18.6.2 Feminist Perspective on Gender Inequality

Feminist theories aim to understand gender inequality and propose strategies for its elimination. Different branches of feminism have developed distinct explanations for gender disparities, focusing on factors such as sexism, patriarchy, and capitalism. These perspectives, though varied, provide valuable insights into the structural nature of gender inequality.

#### Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism attributes gender inequality to societal norms and cultural attitudes rather than inherent biological differences. One of its earliest advocates, John Stuart Mill, argued in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) that legal and political reforms, such as granting women the right to vote, were essential for achieving gender equality.

This perspective emphasizes eliminating discrimination in areas such as education, employment, and media representation. Liberal feminists believe in working within existing legal and political systems to bring about gradual change through policy reforms. Unlike radical and socialist feminists, they do not interpret women's subordination as part of a broader oppressive system. While liberal feminism has played a crucial role in advancing women's rights over the past century, critics argue that it does not adequately address the deep-seated structural factors that sustain gender inequality. Its focus on legal and institutional reforms often overlooks the systemic nature of oppression that intersects with class, race, and economic power.

### **Socialist and Marxist Feminism**

Socialist feminism, grounded in Marxist conflict theory, critiques liberal feminism for failing to consider the economic and class-based dimensions of gender inequality. It draws from the work of Friedrich Engels, who provided one of the earliest Marxist interpretations of women's subordination.

Engels contended that capitalism reinforces gender oppression by concentrating economic resources and power in the hands of a few men. He linked patriarchy to the emergence of private property, arguing that wealth accumulation under capitalism further entrenches male dominance. This perspective suggests that gender oppression cannot be fully eradicated without dismantling capitalist structures that perpetuate economic disparity. Unlike liberal feminists, socialist feminists view gender inequality as inseparable from class struggle, asserting that both capitalism and patriarchy must be addressed simultaneously to achieve true equality.

1. **Men control wealth and property**, reinforcing their dominance.
2. **Capitalism exploits women's unpaid labor** in the home, such as childcare and household work.
3. **Women are socialized to consume**, making them dependent on male-dominated economic structures.

Socialist feminists believe that liberal feminism's reformist approach is inadequate. They argue that dismantling capitalism and patriarchy is essential for achieving true gender equality. Many advocate for the collective organization of childcare, housework, and economic production to liberate women from domestic slavery. Following Marxist principles, some believe that a socialist revolution is necessary to establish a society where resources and responsibilities are equitably shared.

### **Radical Feminism**

Radical feminism argues that women are systematically oppressed by men, who benefit from this imbalance of power. This perspective centers on patriarchy, which radical feminists view as a widespread and enduring system present across various societies and historical eras.

Unlike other feminist perspectives, radical feminists emphasize the family as a primary institution of women's oppression. They argue that:

- **Men exploit women's unpaid domestic labor**, which allows them to dominate both at home and in the workforce.
- **Women are systematically excluded from positions of power and influence**, maintaining male dominance in politics, business, and culture.

Radical feminists also highlight the regulator of women's bodies and sexuality as a main aspect of patriarchal oppression. Shulamith Firestone (1971), a prominent radical feminist, argued that men dominate women by controlling reproduction and child-rearing. She claimed that the biological capacity of women to bear children makes them dependent on men for protection and economic support. This biological difference, according to Firestone, has been institutionalized through the nuclear family, where men hold power over women. She proposed that women's emancipation requires abolishing traditional family structures and power dynamics.

The examination of gender inequality has resulted in various theoretical perspectives, each providing distinct interpretations of the continued dominance of men in society.

- **Functionalist theories** emphasize gender roles as necessary for societal stability.
- **Liberal feminism** focuses on legal and political reforms to challenge discrimination.
- **Socialist feminism** critiques capitalism's role in reinforcing patriarchy and advocates for systemic economic changes.
- **Radical feminism** highlights the role of patriarchy in controlling women's lives, particularly in family structures and reproductive roles.

While these perspectives differ in their approach, they collectively highlight the complex social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to gender inequality. Addressing these disparities requires a combination of policy changes, social activism, and shifts in cultural attitudes to create a more equitable society for all.

#### Self-Check Exercise-4

##### Fill in the blanks

Q1. The core idea of ..... feminism is that men are accountable for and gain from the exploitation of women.

Q2. Liberal feminism seeks to understand gender inequalities through the lens of social and ..... attitudes.

## 18.7 SUMMARY

Women and girls constitute half of the global population, representing an equal share of the world's potential. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a critical factor in fostering stable societies, enhancing human capabilities, and driving sustainable development. Studies indicate that empowering women leads to increased economic productivity and overall growth. Despite progress, substantial disparities persist in securing equal rights and opportunities for both men and women.

Addressing this gap requires the eradication of gender-based violence and the assurance of equal access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political representation. Furthermore, promoting gender parity in employment, leadership, and decision-making roles across all sectors is essential for building a more inclusive and just society. Achieving true equality necessitates structural changes that challenge deep-rooted biases and create equitable systems that benefit all individuals.



## 18.8 GLOSSARY

- **Gender:** A socially constructed system of roles, responsibilities, and expectations that define how societies perceive and categorize men and women.
- **Gender-Based Violence:** Any form of violence inflicted on individuals due to their gender, often targeting women based on societal perceptions of inferiority. This includes physical abuse, sexual assault, psychological harm, and human trafficking.
- **Gender Equality:** The principle of ensuring that individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities.
- **Patriarchy:** A societal structure where men predominantly hold power and authority in political, economic, and social spheres, often perpetuating systemic gender inequality.
- **Women's Empowerment:** The process of enhancing women's confidence, decision-making abilities, access to resources and opportunities, and overall control over their lives to drive positive change.

## 18.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

### Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Gender Inequalities

A2. Gender

### Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Men

A2. Positive sanctions

### Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. Sexual Harassment

A2. 50%

### Self-Check Exercise-4

A1. Radical

A2. Cultural

## 18.10 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READINGS

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### 18.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Explain how **gender socialization** contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality.
2. Analyze the different **theoretical perspectives** on gender inequality, highlighting their key arguments and criticisms.
3. Define **gender equality** and discuss the major **challenges and concerns** related to achieving it in modern society.

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## UNIT- 19

### GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS

#### STRUCTURE

- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Objectives
- 19.3 Concept and Definitions of Human Rights
- 19.4 Gender and Human Rights
  - 19.4.1 International Conventions on Women's Human Rights
- 19.5 Summary
- 19.6 Glossary
- 19.7 Answers to Self-Check Exercises
- 19.8 References/Suggested Readings
- 19.9 Terminal Questions

#### 19.1 INTRODUCTION

The rights of women and girls form an essential component of human rights, encompassing various dimensions such as healthcare, education, political participation, economic independence, and protection from violence. These rights are fundamental to ensuring equality and justice, enabling every woman and girl to live with dignity and without discrimination. The realization of gender equality is not just a matter of individual well-being but also a crucial factor in achieving global peace, security, and sustainable development.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reaffirm the central role of governments in safeguarding and promoting human rights, emphasizing that gender equality must be pursued within a human rights framework. This international commitment underscores the responsibility of states to create legal and institutional mechanisms that ensure the full realization of women's rights. Despite global efforts, structural inequalities persist, with legal, social, and cultural barriers continuing to limit women's access to fundamental freedoms in various societies.

Human rights represent a universal aspiration for dignity, security, and freedom. However, the recognition and implementation of these rights often depend on the socio-political context of different regions. Women's rights, in particular, have been subject to systemic discrimination, with many facing legal restrictions, societal biases, and economic marginalization. Although the specific challenges vary across countries, a common pattern of gender-based discrimination remains evident, leading to widespread violations of fundamental rights.

Addressing these inequalities requires a multidimensional approach, including legal reforms, policy interventions, and shifts in societal attitudes. Governments, civil society, and international organizations must work collectively to dismantle the barriers that hinder women's empowerment. Without ensuring gender equality, the broader vision of human rights remains incomplete, highlighting

the need for sustained efforts to eliminate discrimination and uphold the principles of justice and equality for all.

## 19.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completing this chapter, you

- Gain an understanding of the conception and definitions of human rights.
- Learn about women's human rights and the various challenges associated with their implementation in today's world.
- Explore different international conventions aimed at protecting and promoting women's human rights.

## 19.3 CONCEPT AND DEFINITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights encompass the inherent freedoms and entitlements granted to every individual from birth until death, irrespective of nationality, beliefs, or way of life. While these rights are inalienable, certain limitations may be imposed under specific circumstances, such as legal penalties or concerns related to national security. Grounded in principles of dignity, fairness, equality, respect, and autonomy, human rights are safeguarded by legal frameworks at both national and international levels to ensure their protection and enforcement.

The modern emphasis on human rights gained momentum in the aftermath of World War II, a period of immense devastation and loss. In response to the widespread atrocities, the United Nations (UN) took a leading role in advocating for fundamental freedoms and ensuring global commitment to human rights. The term "human rights" became more prominent in international discussions during this time. A landmark achievement in this pursuit was the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948, by the UN, establishing a global standard for protecting and promoting human dignity and freedom.

### Definitions of Human Rights

Various scholars and institutions have attempted to define human rights, emphasizing their inherent and universal nature:

1. **United Nations (UN):** Human rights are inherent to human existence and essential for living a dignified life. They form the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.
2. **Christian Bay:** Human rights encompass claims that should receive legal and moral protection to ensure that fundamental needs are met. This definition highlights the necessity of institutional safeguards to guarantee human well-being.
3. **D. D. Raphael:** Human rights, in a broad sense, refer to the rights of all human beings. More specifically, they are the rights individuals possess simply by virtue of being human, emphasizing their universality and non-negotiable nature.
4. **Scot Davidson:** Human rights serve two key purposes—shielding individuals from excessive state control and ensuring a supportive environment where people can reach their full potential. This perspective underscores the balance between protection from oppression and the creation of opportunities for personal development.

5. **David Selby:** Human rights are those rights that belong to every individual solely because they are human. This definition reinforces the notion that human rights are not privileges granted by governments but inherent entitlements that should be universally upheld.

Human rights are not merely legal constructs but also moral imperatives that guide societies toward greater fairness and justice. They function as safeguards against discrimination and oppression while also setting aspirational goals for human development. The evolution of human rights discourse reflects the dynamic nature of global politics, economics, and social justice movements. Despite legal recognition, the realization of human rights remains a challenge due to political conflicts, economic disparities, and cultural resistances. Addressing these challenges requires both legal enforcement and societal commitment to upholding the principles of dignity, equality, and freedom for all.

### Self-Check Exercise-1

#### Fill in the blanks

- Q1. Human rights received global consideration after ..... during which millions of lives were lost.
- Q2. .... described human rights as assertions that should be legally and morally protected to ensure the fulfillment of basic needs.

## 19.4 GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Achieving gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women are integral to the realization of human rights. Despite progress in multiple areas, gender-based discrimination continues to persist globally, restricting women's access to opportunities and rights. A comprehensive understanding of how these inequalities manifest is essential for designing effective strategies to address them.

**Gender equality** refers to the principle that individuals, regardless of gender, should have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It does not suggest that men and women must be identical, but rather that their rights and access to resources should not be determined by gender. Gender equality acknowledges the varying needs, priorities, and aspirations of different individuals, ensuring fairness in social, economic, and political spheres.

Closely linked to this is **gender equity**, which focuses on creating fair conditions that enable both men and women to achieve equal outcomes. While equality is the ultimate goal, equity serves as the mechanism to reach that objective. Gender equity often intersects with social justice, yet cultural norms, religious beliefs, and traditional practices frequently reinforce disparities, disproportionately disadvantaging women. Addressing these issues requires systemic change, including policy reforms and shifts in societal attitudes.

### International Commitments to Women's Rights

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), often referred to as the Women's Bill of Rights, mandates that governments take active measures to:

- Eliminate violations of women's rights by individuals, groups, or institutions.
- Challenge and transform social and cultural norms that reinforce gender stereotypes.

- Ensure women have equal access to education and information.
- Remove barriers to healthcare services.
- Guarantee equality in marriage and family relations.

In addition, global conferences serve as platforms for reaffirming commitments to gender equality. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) reinforced the principles outlined in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993), emphasizing that women's rights and the rights of girl children are inalienable components of universal human rights. Despite these international frameworks, gender-based discrimination remains deeply entrenched in many societies.

### **Persistent Challenges and the Path Forward**

While human rights are universally recognized, gender-based discrimination manifests in various forms, with violations differing across regions. Women and girls often face additional layers of discrimination due to societal structures that marginalize them. One of the most pervasive yet underreported human rights violations is gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence. Research indicates that at least one in three women globally has experienced physical assault, sexual violence, or coercion—highlighting the urgent need for systemic interventions.

Ensuring gender justice requires more than just legal protections; it necessitates documenting rights violations, raising awareness, and advocating for structural changes. Nations that fail to uphold fundamental human rights should face international scrutiny and accountability. The enforcement of women's rights is not about imposing external values but rather about upholding universal principles of justice, equality, and dignity—values rooted in collective human history and ethical reasoning.

Ultimately, human rights extend beyond the notions of liberty and freedom; they embody the broader ideals of fairness, security, and societal progress. Without addressing gender inequality, the vision of universal human rights remains incomplete. Governments, civil society, and international organizations must collectively work towards dismantling discriminatory structures and ensuring that gender justice becomes a lived reality for all.

## **19.4.1 International Conventions on Women's Human Rights**

Over the past six decades, international initiatives have led to the establishment of numerous agreements designed to promote and protect women's rights. These conventions have influenced national legal frameworks and helped shift societal perceptions about gender equality. Women's rights movements have played a pivotal role in ensuring that gender issues are integrated into international law, reinforcing the necessity of legal and policy interventions to eliminate discrimination.

### **Early Foundations of Women's Rights Advocacy**

The formal recognition of women's rights at the international level can be traced back to the early 20th century. The Inter-American Commission of Women, established in 1928, was the first intergovernmental body dedicated to advocating for women's rights, emerging from persistent activism by organizations such as the Pan-American Association for the Advancement of Women. The momentum generated by women's activism in the 1920s and 1930s set the stage for further institutional progress, leading to the formation of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1946.

The adoption of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948** was a defining moment, affirming that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that discrimination based on sex, among other factors, is unacceptable. However, while the UDHR established fundamental human rights principles, further actions were necessary to ensure their implementation in the context of gender equality.

### **Key International Conferences and Agreements**

A series of global conferences and legal instruments have progressively strengthened commitments to women's rights.

- **Mexico City Conference (1975)**: Held during International Women's Year, this event introduced the **World Plan of Action** and declared **1975–1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women**, highlighting the need for global commitment to gender equality.
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979)**: Often regarded as the **International Bill of Rights for Women**, CEDAW legally defined gender-based discrimination and established obligations for governments to eliminate such disparities. It was also the first human rights treaty to recognize women's **reproductive rights**, acknowledging culture and tradition as factors that shape gender roles.
- **Copenhagen Conference (1980)**: This Second World Conference on Women advanced policies on property rights, inheritance, child custody, and nationality rights for women, addressing legal inequalities that often disadvantaged them.

### **The Rise of Global Feminism**

The **Nairobi Conference (1985)** marked a major turning point, often described as the "birth of global feminism." With participation from **157 governments and 15,000 NGOs**, it emphasized that women's issues were interconnected with broader social issues. The **Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women** acknowledged the failure of previous commitments and called for concrete measures to integrate women's concerns into national policies.

The **Vienna Conference on Human Rights (1993)** further strengthened this momentum by reinforcing the principle that **women's rights are an inalienable part of universal human rights**. The conference condemned gender-based violence and discriminatory cultural practices, establishing a stronger international consensus on the need to address violence against women.

At the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), a shift in perspective emerged, emphasizing that development policies should focus on individual rights rather than demographic targets. The conference highlighted gender equality, reproductive rights, women's education, and healthcare as essential components of sustainable development.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) built upon these previous efforts, providing a detailed framework with 12 priority areas for achieving gender equality. It introduced a human rights-based approach to legal and political strategies, making it one of the most comprehensive commitments by UN member states.

### **Integrating Women's Rights into Development Goals**

In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) included gender equality as a key objective. MDG 3 aimed to promote gender equality and empower women, but its primary target—eliminating gender disparities in education—was too narrow to address the full spectrum of gender-based

inequalities. Additionally, issues such as violence against women and discriminatory laws were not adequately included in the framework. MDG 5 focused on reducing maternal mortality rates, yet progress was uneven across different regions, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach in the post-2015 development agenda.

The Rio+20 Conference (2012), held in Brazil, assessed progress on sustainable development and reaffirmed the importance of gender equality in political, economic, and social decision-making. The conference's outcome document, *The Future We Want*, called for the accelerated implementation of commitments made under CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Millennium Declaration.

### **Challenges and the Path Forward**

Despite significant international agreements, full gender equality remains elusive. While legal frameworks have been established, their enforcement varies across countries due to cultural, political, and economic barriers. Many nations have ratified conventions such as CEDAW but fail to implement policies effectively, leaving systemic discrimination intact.

Moreover, gender-based violence remains one of the most pressing human rights violations, with domestic violence, sexual harassment, and unequal access to resources still affecting millions of women globally. Addressing these issues requires:

- Strengthening legal enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with international agreements.
- Raising awareness through education and advocacy.
- Holding governments accountable for their human rights obligations.

The struggle for women's rights is not merely a legal issue but a fundamental aspect of social justice and human development. Achieving gender equality demands continuous global cooperation, policy innovation, and active participation from both governments and civil society. Only through sustained efforts can the vision of universal human rights and gender justice be fully realized.

### **Self-Check Exercise-2**

#### **Multiple Choice Questions**

Q1. Where did the 'World Conference on Human Rights' was held in 1993?

- (A) Australia                      (B) Vienna                      (C) Brazil                      (D) Brussels

Q2. In 2000, the international community decided to how many time-bound Millennium development goals to be accomplished by 2015?

- (A) Seven                      (B) Ten                      (C) Eight                      (D) Eleven

## **19.5 SUMMARY**

Women's rights are a fundamental and inseparable part of human rights, encompassing the freedoms and entitlements that belong to women and girls of all ages. However, these rights are often subject to recognition, neglect, or restriction due to legal, cultural, and societal factors. Like all human rights, women's rights are safeguarded by international legal frameworks, and global forums provide opportunities for nations to reaffirm their commitment to gender equality. Despite gender equality being a recognized human right, significant disparities continue to exist in access to opportunities, decision-



making authority, and resources. Women worldwide frequently face economic disadvantages, restricted educational access, heightened health and safety risks, and underrepresentation in political leadership. Addressing these inequalities is not only essential for achieving gender justice but also plays a vital role in broader global development efforts.

Empowering women and ensuring their rights fosters positive change at all levels of society. When women and girls have equal access to education, economic opportunities, and leadership roles, they contribute meaningfully to their families, communities, and nations. Their participation strengthens social and economic structures, driving sustainable development and benefiting society as a whole.

## 19.6 GLOSSARY

- **Gender:** The roles, behaviors, and responsibilities that society assigns to men and women based on societal and ethnic norms.
- **Gender-Based Violence:** Acts of violence directed at women due to their perceived lower status, including physical abuse, sexual violence, psychological harm, and human trafficking.
- **Gender Equality:** The state where every person has equal power, rights, and access to opportunities.
- **Human Rights:** The fundamental rights that belong to all individuals solely established on their humanity.
- **Women's Empowerment:** The method of enhancing a woman's self-worth, decision-making ability, access to resources, control over her own life, and capacity to bring about social change.

## 19.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

### Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Second World War

A2. Christian Bay

### Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Vienna

A2. Eight

## 19.8 REFERENCES/SUGGESTED READINGS

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### **19.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Provide a critical analysis of gender and human rights within the framework of contemporary society.
2. Discuss the various international initiatives undertaken for the protection of women's human rights.
3. Define human rights and evaluate the present status of women's human rights in the modern world.

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## **UNIT-20**

### **PATRIARCHY AND POWER**

#### **STRUCTURE:**

- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Learning Objectives
- 20.3 Understanding Gender Roles
  - Self-Check Exercise-1
- 20.4 Theoretical Perspectives on the Origin of Patriarchy
  - Self-Check Exercise-2
- 20.5 Sexuality of Women and Male Dominance
  - Self-Check Exercise-3

## 20.6 Historical Perspective on Women's Productive and Reproductive Roles

### 20.6.1 Patrilocality, Matrilateral Kinship and Patriarchy

### 20.6.2 Marriage Pattern and the Institutionalisation of Patriarchy and Male Dominance

#### Self-Check Exercise-4

## 20.7 Summary

## 20.8 Glossary

## 20.9 Answers to Self-Check Exercises

## 20.10 References/Suggested Readings

## 20.11 Terminal Questions

## 20.1 INTRODUCTION

Gender is a dynamic concept that helps in analyzing the differing positions of men and women in society. The objective of studying gender is not to create a divide or conflict between the sexes but to highlight the factors responsible for inequality and address them effectively. Understanding gender roles allows us to recognize that these roles emerge from social interactions rather than being strictly tied to biological differences. Masculinity and femininity are not inherently linked to being male or female but are instead shaped through socialization.

Despite living in what is considered a modern or even post-modern era—rooted in ideas of equality and universality—real-world observations often contradict these ideals. Many aspects of traditional societies, where status was primarily determined by birth within a specific community, caste, or group, continue to influence social structures. Prejudice and discriminatory attitudes persist, showing that societal transformation has been slow in overcoming these ingrained divisions.

## 20.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completion of this chapter, we

- Understand and articulate the key concepts related to gender roles.
- Explain the structures of patriarchy and matriarchy in society.
- Analyze how patriarchy maintains itself and protects its interests.

## 20.3 UNDERSTANDING GENDER ROLES

In everyday life, the term "gender" primarily refers to the relationships between men and women within households, communities, markets, and state institutions. It involves analyzing how social norms, rules, and practices influence the distribution of resources and responsibilities between the sexes. Often, gender is mistakenly used interchangeably with sex, which refers to the biological distinctions between males and females based on genetic and anatomical differences. Ann Oakley (1972) was among the first social scientists to differentiate between sex as a biological trait and gender as a social construct.

According to the United Nations (2001), gender refers to the culturally defined roles and behaviors expected of men and women. The UN clarifies that gender is a social construct, distinct from biological sex. Unlike sex, which is determined by biology, gender roles and behaviors evolve over time and can change significantly, sometimes quite rapidly. Even though some aspects of gender roles may have originally been based on biological differences, societies have reinforced and upheld these roles through cultural norms and expectations.

The concept of gender gained prominence in feminist and sociological discussions in the early 1970s. Within sociology, gender is used to explain behavioral differences between men and women, categorized as "masculine" or "feminine." Feminist scholars argue that these differences are not inherently biological but are instead shaped by patriarchal societal structures. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) famously stated that one is not born a woman but becomes one, emphasizing the socially constructed nature of gender.

Judith Butler (2011) further elaborates that while sex is biological and exists naturally, gender is a social construct imposed on this biological distinction. Society assigns labels of "male" and "female" at birth, which pertain to biological sex. However, gender itself is shaped through socialization rather than biology.

The World Development Report (2012) defines gender as the socially constructed norms and ideologies that influence the behaviors and roles of men and women. Understanding gender relations and the underlying power structures is essential for analyzing how individuals access and control resources, make decisions, and are impacted by political and social changes. Recognizing these dynamics is crucial for achieving social development and equity.

### **Self-Check Exercise-1**

#### **Fill in the blanks**

- Q1. .... the first social scientists to distinguish the theory of gender from the concept of sex.
- Q2. .... argues that sex is natural and comes first.

## **20.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORIGIN OF PATRIARCHY**

Societies are often structured based on the lineage through which inheritance, property, names, and titles are passed. When lineage is traced through the father's line, the society is classified as patrilineal, while societies that trace descent through the mother's line are termed matrilineal. Since a majority of societies across the world follow patrilineal descent, patriarchal social structures have become dominant, whereas matrilineal societies remain less common and are often considered primitive in nature.

Defining patriarchy is complex, as with many social phenomena, and no single definition can fully encompass its depth. Instead, it is more effective to understand it as a system of social structures and practices where men hold power and systematically dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby, 1990). Patriarchy is deeply embedded within institutions such as family, kinship, marriage, religion, caste, class, and race, which reinforce male dominance. It operates as a power hierarchy that privileges men, placing them in a superior position while subjecting women to various forms of subordination. Historically, patriarchy has been reinforced through control over resources, particularly land, which is

typically inherited through the male line. This economic dominance then extends into control over women's labor, reproduction, and autonomy. However, variations in kinship systems, such as matrilineal and bilateral kinship structures, can influence power dynamics within families and challenge patriarchal norms to some extent.

### **Feminist Perspectives on Patriarchy**

Feminist thought has long engaged with the concept of patriarchy, analyzing its origins and impact on society. Various schools of feminist thought provide different interpretations of how patriarchy emerged and how it can be dismantled.

#### **Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism, which originated in the 18th century, is rooted in the philosophy of individual rights and equality. Early advocates of this movement opposed the subordination of women and challenged the legal and social structures that perpetuated gender inequality. **Mary Wollstonecraft's** *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is widely regarded as a foundational text in liberal feminist thought. She emphasized the importance of women's education and political participation as essential steps toward achieving equality with men.

In the 19th century, **John Stuart Mill** expanded on these ideas, asserting that women should have equal opportunities to engage in public and political life. He argued that women's full participation in society was necessary to establish true equality (Mill, 1869; Eisenstein, 1981). Liberal feminism continues to advocate for equal legal and political rights, emphasizing reforms that promote gender parity within existing social structures.

Liberal feminists emphasize the importance of providing equal opportunities for women in public life, criticizing the confinement of women to domestic roles. They reject the notion that femininity inherently makes women unsuitable for public engagement. However, liberal feminism has faced criticism for being overly individualistic and failing to address the structural and institutional foundations of male dominance. It focuses on securing legal rights and opportunities for women rather than challenging the societal structures that sustain patriarchy. Additionally, it has been critiqued for its elitist tendencies, as its advocacy often benefits upper-class and upper-caste women while overlooking the struggles of women marginalized by class, caste, and race. Another limitation of liberal feminism is its lack of a comprehensive theory explaining the historical origins of patriarchy and male dominance.

#### **Marxist Feminism**

Marxist feminists attempt to address this gap by linking the emergence of patriarchy to the rise of private property and class structures. Friedrich Engels (1948) argued that patriarchy originated with the establishment of private property and the inheritance of wealth through the male line. This transition led to men gaining control over women's labor, reproduction, and social roles. Marxist feminists also connect patriarchy to capitalism, asserting that capitalism thrives on gender-based exploitation, with women providing unpaid domestic labor that sustains the economic system.

However, Marxist feminism has been critiqued for reducing patriarchy to a byproduct of capitalism and class oppression rather than recognizing it as an independent system of domination. Furthermore, it does not fully explain the presence of gender-based oppression in pre-capitalist and non-capitalist societies. Anthropological evidence suggests that male dominance existed before the emergence of private property, challenging the Marxist view that patriarchy is solely an outcome of economic structures.

### **Anthropological Insights on the Origin of Patriarchy**

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss provides an alternative perspective on the origins of patriarchy, emphasizing kinship and social exchange. He argued that the control of women's sexuality and reproduction originated from the practice of exogamy, where women were exchanged between different clans or groups. This system of exchange was rooted in the incest taboo, which prohibited sexual relations between close relatives and necessitated the movement of women between social groups. Over time, this practice reinforced male control over women's bodies and social roles, contributing to the institutionalization of male dominance.

The origins and persistence of patriarchy cannot be attributed to a single cause. While liberal feminism focuses on individual rights and legal reforms, it overlooks the structural and institutional aspects of male dominance. Marxist feminism highlights the role of private property and capitalism in sustaining patriarchy but does not fully account for gender oppression in pre-capitalist societies. Anthropological perspectives suggest that male dominance may have emerged from social practices such as kinship exchange and control over female sexuality. Understanding patriarchy requires a multidimensional approach that considers historical, economic, and social factors. A nuanced analysis of patriarchy allows for more effective strategies to challenge and transform oppressive gender structures.

### **Self-Check Exercise-2**

#### **Fill in the blanks**

- Q1. .... as an ideology has always tried to deal with the question and conception of patriarchy.  
 Q2. Liberal Feminism is founded on the philosophy of ..... rights.

## **20.5 SEXUALITY OF WOMEN AND MALE DOMINANCE**

The regulation of female sexuality has long been a fundamental aspect of patriarchal societies, serving as a tool for maintaining male dominance. This control is primarily exercised within the frameworks of marriage, family, and kinship, particularly in patrilineal societies such as India. These institutions function as mechanisms for reproducing and reinforcing patriarchal structures, ensuring that women's sexuality remains under the surveillance of male authority figures.

A key aspect of this control is the societal expectation of female virginity before marriage. A virgin bride is often considered ideal, and any deviation from this norm is viewed as moral transgression. However, the consequences of premarital sexual activity are disproportionately severe for women compared to men. Traditional beliefs categorize female sexual transgression as an internal form of pollution, which is perceived as more permanent and damaging, whereas male transgression is considered external and thus more easily rectifiable. The concept of internal and external pollution is deeply embedded in caste-based social hierarchies, where notions of purity are maintained through selective marital alliances and the regulation of female sexuality (Béteille, 1991; Dube, 2009).

### **Caste, Hypergamy, and Control Over Female Sexuality**

The intersection of caste and patriarchy further intensifies the regulation of female sexuality. The practice of hypergamy, which allows a woman to marry a man of a higher caste, is socially tolerated to some extent, whereas hypogamous unions—where a woman marries a man of a lower caste—are

strictly forbidden. Any breach of this norm can result in severe social consequences, including ostracization and even violence. The prevalence of honor killings in response to inter-caste marriages exemplifies the extreme measures taken to maintain caste purity and male control over female sexuality. This form of control extends beyond individual families, becoming a collective concern of the entire caste, community, or village. Women's sexuality is thus not viewed as a private matter but as a shared resource that must be safeguarded to uphold social hierarchies.

Anthropological studies, such as D.N. Majumdar's *The Himalayan Polyandry*, provide further insight into how patriarchal societies regulate female sexuality. His research on the Jaunsar-Bawar region in Dehradun documented cases of fraternal polyandry, where a woman was married to multiple brothers within the same household. This arrangement effectively restricted her sexual and reproductive autonomy within the family unit, ensuring that property and lineage remained intact. Similarly, the practice of levirate marriage—where a widow is expected to marry her deceased husband's brother—functions as a means of keeping women and their offspring within the patrilineage, thereby securing rights over inheritance and property. These customs reinforce the notion that women's bodies, labor, and reproductive capacity are commodities owned and controlled by their male relatives.

### **Marriage, Dowry, and Women's Economic Subjugation**

The control over female sexuality is closely linked to the economic subjugation of women. In Hindu marriage rituals, the power dynamics between the bride's and groom's families are evident in the exchange of dowry and gifts. The bride is often perceived as a financial liability, and her family is expected to provide compensation to the groom's family to finalize the marriage alliance. This commodification of women not only reinforces their subordinate status but also disregards their contributions to household labor. Domestic work, although essential for family well-being, is devalued and considered non-productive, rendering women economically dependent and powerless within the household.

Leela Dube (2009) highlights how patriarchal control extends beyond marriage to the everyday surveillance of women by their male relatives. In South Asian societies, brothers are often assigned the responsibility of monitoring their sisters' movements and interactions. This 'protective' role grants them authority over women's choices, dictating their behavior under the pretext of preserving family honor. Dube documents cases from Andhra Pradesh where brothers reprimand their sisters for seemingly innocuous actions, such as standing at the doorstep in the evening—a behavior they associate with prostitutes signaling potential clients. This rigid control over female mobility and expression further restricts women's autonomy.

### **Contrasting Kinship Structures: South Asia vs. Southeast Asia**

While patriarchal control over female sexuality is deeply entrenched in patrilineal South Asian societies, comparative studies indicate that matrilineal and bilateral kinship systems in Southeast Asia offer greater flexibility. Dube (1988; 2000; 2009) observes that in countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, women experience fewer restrictions on their sexual behavior and mobility. Although Islamic influence has introduced certain limitations on pre-marital sexual relations, these restrictions apply equally to men and women. In Malaysia, for instance, women frequently migrate to urban centers for work, leaving their husbands behind to manage household affairs—an arrangement that would be unthinkable in most South Asian contexts. Similarly, in Thailand, women can engage in sex work to support their families and later reintegrate into mainstream society through marriage, a concept that is inconceivable in rigidly patriarchal South Asian societies.



Dube's comparative analysis suggests that the degree of control over female sexuality is not universal but shaped by kinship structures and socio-cultural norms. In Southeast Asian societies, the absence of strict patrilineal inheritance reduces male authority over women's sexuality, allowing them greater agency in personal and economic matters. The fundamental difference lies in the perception of female sexuality—while South Asian patriarchies construct women's sexuality as a resource controlled by men, Southeast Asian societies do not universally adhere to this view.

The regulation of female sexuality is a critical mechanism through which patriarchy maintains its dominance. In patrilineal societies, women's sexual behavior is closely tied to caste, marriage, and family honor, leading to stringent restrictions and, in extreme cases, violence. The dowry system and the economic devaluation of women further reinforce their subordination. However, comparative studies highlight that alternative kinship structures, such as matrilineality and bilateral descent, can mitigate these controls and grant women greater autonomy. Understanding these variations provides insight into how patriarchal norms operate and offers possibilities for challenging and reshaping gendered power structures.

### Self-Check Exercise-3

#### Multiple Choice Questions

Q1. Who in his monograph named 'The Himalyan Polyandry' on the people of JaunsarBawar region of Dehradun documented fraternal polyandrous marriage alliance between a bride and all the brothers of a particular household where the marriage gets solemnised.

- (A) Sylvia Walby   (B) Kary Millet   (C) R.K. Mukherji   (D) D.N. Mazumdar

Q2. The marriage where a man of higher caste can have union with a woman of lower caste is called as?

- (A) Polygamy   (B) Hypergamy   (C) Hypogamy   (D) Sorrorate

## 20.6 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S PRODUCTIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE ROLES

To understand the deep-rooted structures of patriarchy, it is essential to historically examine the relationship between women's productive and reproductive roles. Uma Chakraborty, in her study on Brahminical patriarchy in early India, explores this relationship across different historical periods. Drawing from pre-historic, proto-historic, and early historic sources, she examines the evolving role of women in both economic and reproductive spheres.

In the early stages of human society, particularly during the hunting and food-gathering phases, women were not solely confined to childbearing. They actively participated in food collection and, in some cases, hunting. This assertion finds support in archaeological discoveries, such as the cave paintings of Bhimbetka and other sites in central India, where women are depicted wearing headgear, a possible indication of status and authority, and engaging in hunting activities. Moreover, their reproductive role was highly valued, as they were regarded as 'life-givers'—a status closely linked to beliefs about life and death. This reverence is reflected in the worship of mother goddesses, an aspect observed in early religious and cultural traditions.

The Indus Valley Civilization provides some evidence of the significance of women, though the exact nature of gender relations remains uncertain due to the undeciphered script. Archaeological findings, including female figurines, representations of mother goddesses, and the iconic dancing girl statue, hint at the recognition of women's reproductive and possibly economic contributions. However, without textual evidence, it is difficult to determine the extent of patriarchy during this period.

The consolidation of patriarchy became more evident with the arrival of the Aryans. Early Vedic texts suggest that Aryans engaged in conflicts with the indigenous population, during which they seized cattle, land, and women. This marks one of the earliest recorded instances of women being captured and subjugated. These captive women were assigned roles that served the Aryan social structure and were even used as gifts, indicating a clear assertion of control over their sexuality.

Subsequent texts, including the *Arthashastra* and *Manusmriti*, explicitly laid out guidelines for regulating women's behavior, emphasizing restrictions on both their productive and reproductive functions. The state also exercised authority over women's sexuality, with laws stipulating that a king could punish women for adultery. These regulations were based on the principle that a woman's sexuality needed strict control, first by her husband, and in his absence or failure to do so, by the state. Such measures further confined women to the domestic sphere, reducing recognition of their productive contributions (Chakravarti, 1993).

### **20.6.1 PATRILOCALITY MATRILATERAL KINSHIP AND PATRIARCHY**

Kinship structures play a crucial role in shaping social organization, as they determine group membership and regulate relationships within a society. In a patrilineal kinship system, a son continues to be a part of his natal family, whereas a daughter is expected to leave her parental home after marriage and join her husband's family. Through such membership rules, societies maintain continuity and reinforce their structural foundations. These kinship arrangements are particularly significant in sustaining patriarchal systems.

Post-marital residence patterns provide insight into the principles governing kinship. Leela Dube highlights this connection by stating that residence is both a material and ideological manifestation of kinship principles (Dube, 2009). In a patrilocal residence system, which is prevalent in most parts of India, the married couple resides with the groom's family. This arrangement is based on the assumption that a daughter is not a permanent member of her natal household and must relocate after marriage. The implications of this system extend to her economic and reproductive autonomy, as well as inheritance rights. Daughters are often denied a share in their parental property under the justification that any inheritance given to them would ultimately benefit their husband's family. Additionally, the practice of dowry is frequently cited as a substitute for property inheritance, further weakening a woman's economic standing. Under patrilocality, women also experience constraints on their sexuality, with their reproductive functions being regulated by their husband and in-laws, often through the expectation that they bear male offspring.

Karin Kapadia, in her study of Brahmins and non-Brahmins in the village of Aruloor, Tamil Nadu, examines the institution of matrilineal kinship and argues that socio-economic changes have led to its decline, with patrilineal kinship and dowry practices gaining prominence. This shift has reinforced male dominance and lowered the status of women in society. Among the non-Brahmins of Aruloor, matrilineal kin, such as the mother's brother (MB) and mother's brother's son (MBS), traditionally

played an important role in a woman's life and her children's well-being. Prospective grooms for a woman's daughter were often chosen from among these relatives, and the MB was responsible for providing costly gifts at significant life events for his sister's children. These gifts, referred to as *sir*, were considered a form of inheritance for women, in contrast to the dowry and *stridhan* practiced among patrilineal groups.

Among the Brahmins of Aruloor, patrilineal kinship holds greater importance, as matrilineal kin do not serve as potential grooms. Women in these communities are married to individuals outside their immediate kin group, forming new relationships with their in-laws, unlike the more familiar ties observed among non-Brahmins. However, over time, even among non-Brahmins, matrilineal kinship has diminished in significance, and dowry has become more widespread. A dowry-based marriage is increasingly viewed as a marker of social status, prompting families to adopt it as a means of gaining symbolic capital (Kapadia, 1990; 1993; 1994).

A similar transformation from bride-price to dowry is evident among the Gonds of Vidarbha in Maharashtra. This shift can be attributed to the community's increased interaction with the dominant social groups where dowry is the norm. The pressure to conform to prevailing social expectations, coupled with the fear of ridicule, has led to the adoption of dowry practices among the Gonds. This transition has significant consequences for the subjugation and subordination of women, as it reinforces their economic dependence on their marital families and perpetuates gender inequalities (Khattri et al., 2012).

#### **20.6.2 MARRIAGE PATTERN AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF PATRIARCHY AND MALE DOMINANCE**

The institution of marriage serves as a crucial mechanism for reinforcing patriarchy and male dominance. In India, marriages are largely arranged, where decisions are made by the elders of the family rather than the individuals getting married. This reflects a deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset that prioritizes family authority over personal choice. Kate Millet, in her seminal work *Sexual Politics*, conceptualizes patriarchy in two ways: (i) the dominance of men over women, and (ii) the control exercised by older men over younger men and women. Arranged marriages in India align with the second aspect, as senior male members in the family hold the power to decide matrimonial alliances, thereby maintaining generational control.

Dipankar Gupta, in his analysis of Hindu marriage traditions, emphasizes that arranged marriages remain the norm across both rural and urban India. The consequences of defying this system are evident in the severe social backlash faced by couples who choose their own partners, often in the form of caste-based and *khap* panchayat interventions. He argues that arranged marriages perpetuate structural inequalities between bride-giving and bride-taking families, reinforcing a hierarchical framework of male dominance. Bride-takers (the groom's family) are perceived as superior to bride-givers (the bride's family), a status differential that is ritualistically reinforced in marriage ceremonies. One such example is *pao pooja*, where the bride's father is required to worship the feet of the groom, symbolizing the ritual subordination of the bride's family to the groom's family.

Another significant ritual reflecting male dominance is *kanyadaan*, where the bride is given away as a gift to the groom's family. This act is considered the highest form of religious offering, unmatched by any other, further entrenching the hierarchical relationship between bride-givers and bride-takers. However, patriarchy does not operate solely through men; it is also mediated through women within the groom's family, particularly the mother-in-law. Once a woman gives birth to a male child, she transitions into the

category of bride-takers, granting her a newfound status and authority. This is why many women also internalize the preference for a male child, as it directly impacts their power dynamics within the household. The mother-in-law's control over the daughter-in-law's domestic responsibilities is a clear manifestation of how patriarchy functions beyond just male dominance—it is deeply embedded in generational hierarchies and power negotiations within families.

Thus, marriage in India is not merely a social or religious institution but a crucial site for the institutionalization of patriarchy. It dictates not only gender roles but also intergenerational power structures, ensuring the continued dominance of older male authority figures while co-opting women into its framework. The system's ability to adapt and persist across generations highlights the complexity of patriarchal control, where power is distributed and exercised in both overt and subtle ways.

### **Self-Check Exercise-4**

#### **Fill in the blanks**

- Q1. According to the ..... Feminism the world historic defeat of women began with the advent of private property.
- Q2. The Arthashastra and ..... outlines the behaviour of women and laid down rules for controlling their productive and reproductive capacities.

## **20.7 SUMMARY**

This unit provided an in-depth analysis of the interrelated concepts of patriarchy and male dominance, focusing on their impact on women's rights and societal roles. It examined contemporary issues such as molestation cases and property inheritance laws to illustrate how patriarchal structures persist. The discussion also explored the role of the state in shaping legal frameworks that often reinforce gender biases, particularly in inheritance laws, which tend to favor male heirs.

The historical development of patriarchy as a social system was also explored, with various feminist perspectives offering insights into its origins. Liberal feminism advocates for individual rights and promotes women's participation in public and political life as a pathway to equality. However, critics argue that this approach prioritizes individual agency while overlooking the deeper structural roots of patriarchy.

Marxist feminism connects women's oppression to the emergence of private property, asserting that economic structures are central to gender-based subjugation. However, this perspective has been critiqued for integrating women into the broader framework of class struggle without developing a distinct theory of patriarchy's origins. Additionally, some argue that patriarchal dominance existed before the establishment of private property, with control over women's reproductive and productive capacities playing a foundational role in its development.

Radical and revolutionary feminists emphasize that patriarchy is rooted in the regulation of female sexuality. They argue that cultural and social constructs, particularly those surrounding motherhood, have historically contributed to restricting women's autonomy. This perspective underscores the ways in which psychological and societal mechanisms have reinforced patriarchal dominance over time.

## 20.8 GLOSSARY

- **Patriarchy** – A communal system in which authority and right are predominantly held by men.
- **Matrilateral** – Relating to kinship ties on the mother's side of the family.
- **Feminism** – The movement advocating for women's rights and gender equality.

## 20.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

### Self-Check Exercise-1

A1. Aan Oakley

A2. Judith Butler

### Self-Check Exercise-2

A1. Feminism

A2. Individual

### Self-Check Exercise-3

A1. D.N. Mazumdar

A2. Hypergamy

### Self-Check Exercise-4

A1. Marxist

A2. Manusamriti

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#### **20.11 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. How do you define patriarchy?
2. What are the different theories regarding the emergence of patriarchy?
3. In what ways are women's productive and reproductive roles linked with male supremacy and patriarchal structures
4. How has patriarchy been historically reinforced in the Indian context?



