

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
SOC CC 410
TOPIC: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

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INTRODUCTION

When we look around we see society is full of differences which are more natural in terms of color of skin, height, sex etc. But more important than the natural differences the sociologists are concerned with social stratification i.e. to look into the institutionalized form of inequality.

Stratification basically implies strata or ranking of individual or group into different strata. Before understanding the concept of Stratification, it is important to **differentiate between the following terms.**

- a) Stratification**
- b) Differentiation**
- c) Inequality**

Most of the times we take these three terms synonymously, but sociologists try to make distinction among them. And in that context we see that:

Differentiation leads to inequality and when inequality is institutionalized, it leads to stratification.

a) Social Stratification: The structured ranking of individuals and groups, and their grading into horizontal layers and strata. The structured ranking of entire group of people that perpetuates unequal economic rewards and power in society.

b) Social Inequality: Condition in which members of society have different amount of wealth, prestige or power. Inequality is the degree of disparity in the distribution of wealth, power, opportunities etc.

c) Social Differentiation: The process by which society becomes increasingly specialized overtime.

Stratification implies institutionalized inequality.

Summary with Examples

Ranking of individuals or groups have unequal access to the rewards and power in the society. And those who would have different access would be on ground of differentiation between people i.e. you try to differentiate one individual from other. Best example is "Difference of Sex" which is a biological difference and this difference leads to a lot of inequalities on a social level because women and men

have unequal shares in the resources, household, economy etc., and therefore there are two strata considered as feminine and masculine.

So, it begins with differentiations and then it turns into unequal distribution resources and allocations of reward, power and prestige in the society. And with over a period of time this differentiation and inequality is accepted by society and normalized and then it becomes a form of stratification. And therefore in sociology social stratification implies specific form of inequality which is institutionalized and is accepted as normal.

There are four basic Principles of stratification

- a)** Social stratification is a trait of society, not simply a function of individual difference
- b)** Social Stratification persists over generations. However most societies allow some social mobility or changes in people's position in a system of social stratification.
- c)** Social mobility upward, downward or horizontal.
- d)** Social stratification is universal but variable. Which means stratification can be found in all the societies, from primitive to modern, but varies because its dimension may differ from one society to another.

Social Stratification is a multidimensional aspect- said by Max Weber

The multidimensional view of stratification, identifies three components of inequality:

- i) Economic standing (wealth and income)
- ii) The amount of social honor or value afforded to one individual or group relative to other. (status in society)
- iii) The ability to influence or force others to do what you want them to do rather than their own wishes. (power)

Life Chances: Max Weber argues about Life chances in respect of stratification. He said along with economy the question is here about "life chances". These chances would depend upon other factors like political and social, rather than economy. He also says in times of danger, affluent and powerful will have better chances of survival than people of ordinary means. Max Weber sees class system closely related to people's life chances, because they get various opportunities to provide themselves with material goods, positive living conditions and favorable life experiences. For example, urban society is an example of class system and we can see people achieving higher status through hard work and talent. So in the context of urban society, those who are earning more will be able to send their children in private schools for better education and because their children go to good schools they will get quality of education, more opportunity and the chances of their children getting good job or high paid job will be more. On the other hand the poor working class labor who is not able to give his child better education will be

deprived of various chances of making his life better. Therefore we say that life chances depends on the living conditions or life experiences.

#Status: Position or rank in the society.

i) Achieved Status: Class or strata placement is primarily due to qualities that can be controlled by the individuals.

ii) Ascribed Status: Status acquired by birth. Strata placement is primarily hereditary.

SOCIAL MOBILITY IN REFERENCE TO SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social Mobility refers to the movement of person or a group from one stratum to another. Social Mobility is more possible in open societies which provide greater opportunities for mobility than the closed society which fixes one's position from birth. Mobility can be measured in terms of frequency, stability and height. It measures how often mobility is taking place both at individual level and group level. Class level mobility is an individual mobility because an individual on the virtue of his or her skill and hard work moves from one strata to another. In terms of these criteria of measurement of mobility, the economic, social and political conditions are taken into consideration which brings changes in class, occupation and power. Mobility comes from the word "mobile" which means movement that means you can from one strata to another. When we talk about Mobility, the significance is, it leads in to the difference in class, occupation, status, prestige and so everything at each level changes.

Q) Why Mobility is required?

Mobility is required because different strata has different prestige, esteem, power and economic standard attached to it. So in order to have access to these resources it is necessary to move from one position to another.

Understanding Social Mobility in relation to the forms of stratification:

1) Caste System: Caste system is an hereditary endogamous social group in which a person's rank and its accompanying rights and obligations are ascribed on the basis of birth in a particular group. As described by different sociologists, caste system is a closed system of stratification in which people can do little or nothing to change their social standing. But as said above, there is a possibility of upward and downward mobility in the caste system. For example- "**sanskritization**" implies that you can move up the ladder or hierarchy i.e.

Vaishyas ----> Kshatriyas -----> Brahmins

(This creates upward mobility)

Similarly, "**De-sanskritization**" implies that you can move down the hierarchy. For example, Brahmins can give up the brahminical lifestyle and adopt a life style of Kshatriyas.

2) Class System: Class System is system of stratification in which a person's position depends upon to a great extent upon the achievements and his ability to use to advantage the inborn characteristics and wealth that he may possess. Social class is a de facto group (not legally or religiously defined and sanctioned), so they are relatively open. Class is always seen in terms of economic standing. It is an example of open system of stratification where individual have the capacity to move up the ladder and change their lifestyle i.e. called upward mobility. There is also a possibility of downward mobility. It may be due to unseen consequences, the economic position of an individual or a group is not the same over a period of time.

How social Mobility is different from Social Stratification?

Mobility and Stratification are different from each other in the sense that Stratification implies that society is divided into different strata whereas Mobility means the movement between the strata. Therefore stratification talks about structure of society and mobility talks about movement within the structure.

Note: To know How mobility works in close system its important to know about Sanskritization.

Sanskritization: The Term Sanskritization was introduced by M.N.Srinivas. It refers to a process where by people of lower caste collectively try to adopt upper caste practices and believes as preliminary step to acquire higher status in society. It is a process of imitation, so by imitating the upper caste's traits, in a generation or so, they could claim higher position in the hierarchy od caste.

TYPES OF SOCIAL MOBILITY

On the Basis of Direction

1) Horizontal Mobility: Horizontal Mobility refers to a movement of individual or a group who changes their position in social structure without changing their position in social hierarchy. For example- An agricultural worker migrates to city and become wage laborer. But with industrialization every task requires specialization, so you cannot move from one structure to another without knowing the specialized skill, so skill restricts horizontal mobility.

We shouldn't ignore **Anthony Gidden's** point of view in this, he says, there is a great deal of horizontal mobility in Modern society, and he prefers to define t as **Lateral Mobility**.

For example: A person who was an engineer, did engineering from an average college initially, he later did MBA from the same college and became a manager, but there no such hike in his position. Initially he was doing engineering job and later he is doing managerial job. So here we can see that his position remains the same and that is why it is considered as horizontal mobility or lateral mobility.

2) Vertical Mobility: Vertical Mobility refers to change in position along social hierarchy. Most people seek upward vertical mobility because it has got value and it is seen as a reward in the society. On the other hand most people avoid downward vertical mobility because it is stigma and it generates discontentment.

Anthony Giddens says that vertical mobility is an up and down movement on socio-economic scale. Sociologically speaking vertical mobility is studied more as it has social implications.

Anthony Giddens says that sometimes both horizontal and vertical the mobility are seen in Tandem

For Example: A person who did engineering from below average college and later he does MBA from a very renowned college say IIM, and gets a job in MNC i.e. multinational company.

In the above example we can see both the mobilities happening together and that is because he has changed his skill type also and also his financial condition.

On the basis of Speed of Mobility

1) Inter-generational Mobility: It refers to change in position between the generations. For example: Son of rikshaw puller becoming professor or IAS officer. Explanation: A rikshaw puller who works in a city and he works day and night to send his children to school/ college to acquire knowledge and later his son/daughter becomes an IAS officer or Professor. So here we can clearly see the change in the in standard of living and social position of the father and son/daughter. The rikshaw puller has worked hard in bettering his next generation. Therefore we can see the inter-generational mobility here.

2) Intra-generational Mobility: It refers to change in the position within a generation i.e. within the lifetime of a person. For example: A person is appointed as clerk and then to become a superintendent. Generally this mobility is experienced in occupation and entrepreneurial activity.

"Merton calls it a Status Sequence", which means we can see sequential rise in the status of a person.

#On the basis of System of Stratification

1) Open System: Open system is refers to a system of stratification where norms allow or **prescribe** mobility. It further means that if you have skill then you can move upward in the status hierarchy. Only Meritocracy leads to a situation where you occupy top positions. In open society higher mobility can be seen. For example: class system.

2) Close System: Close system refers to a system of stratification where norms **proscribe** or ban mobility. It is also called as ascribed system which means if you are born in higher caste or community only then are you accepted in the society otherwise not. For example: caste system.

Absolute Mobility VS Relative Mobility

The change in actual position of a person in actual terms is considered as Actual Mobility. For example: Increase in income of a person. On the other hand Relative Mobility is a situation in which mobility of a person is adjudged in comparison to others. Like for example, A person is at a certain position and people around him suddenly become poor, so in such a situation his status got increased in comparison to his surroundings. It can be explained with another example also that, suppose if a person's salary is around 50k, and the salary of people around him increased rapidly, so in that case the person's social status and financial status disintegrates.

Sponsored Mobility VS Contested Mobility (R.H. TURNER)

1) Sponsored Mobility: Mobility which occurs due to outside support. For example like government sponsor lower caste with some concessions or reservations in context of merit etc.

2) Contested Mobility: The mobility which is acquired through open competitions.

NOTE: Some Important points to remember for examination:

- 1) Sanskritization- M.N.Srinivas**
- 2) Dominant Caste- M.N.Srinivas**
- 3) Westernization- M.N.Srinivas**
- 4) Modernization- Daniel Lerner**
- 5) Anthony Giddens view on Mobility**

- # Focus on Types of social mobility on the basis of direction.**
- # Social Mobility in relation with social stratification.**
- # Importance of social Mobility**
- # Social Mobility In context of Indian society**