
Social Stratification and Class Formations Under Colonial Rule

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ABSTRACT:

Social stratification means in the domain of sociology and how the concept had appeared sporadically in the writings of the philosophers, social as well as political thinkers through different periods of history. This paper is also introduces you about social inequality and natural inequality and helps you to draw the differences between them along with major dimensions of social stratification. Further we explain what hierarchy is and how it is intimately tagged with caste and class. Furthermore this unit describes how social stratification by nature relates to the unequal distribution of power, privilege and prestige in the society Social stratification generally refers to the socially ordered hierarchical positions of men in the human society. It is manmade. Right from antiquity to the present or in other words right from the dawn of human civilization i.e., starting from the simplest societies to the present day complex modern societies stratification is an inevitable phenomenon, and interestingly it is continuing through the ages. No human society is unstratified and hence it can be said that there is no society known to the mankind at different phases of history that does not make some distinction between individuals by ranking them in higher and lower positions in the society or societies where they live.

KEYWORDS:

Evolutionary, social stratification, characters, equality and inequality,
Equality and Social Justice.

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INTRODUCTION

Colonialism is the internal disarticulation and external integration of the rural economy and the realization of the extended reproduction of capital not in the colony but in the imperialist metropolis. Colonialism is a social formation in which different modes of production coexist from feudalism to petty commodity production to agrarian, industrial and finance capitalism. Unlike capitalism, where the surplus is appropriated on the basis of the ownership of the means of production, under colonialism surplus is appropriated by virtue of control over state power. 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 tend 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.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

1. To know the evolutionary process social stratification
2. To study equality and inequality to stratification
3. To study the equality and social justice and
4. To study the characteristics of social stratification

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study has conducted with the help of secondary sources of data. The secondary data are drawn, classified, and studied from the

publications, monthly journals on social stratification & class formations under colonial rule, including the annual reports. Wherever, necessary reference was also made to different issues of bulletins viz., social stratification & class formations under colonial rule. Apart from this, different editions of daily newspapers were also used for collecting the information on social stratification & class formations under colonial rule.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PAPER

Social stratification with the history of the development of the thoughts on stratification over the ages. Further, you would be able to understand the difference that exists between the social and the natural inequalities, the concept of hierarchy and the nature of social stratification. The colonial state is integral to the structuring and functioning of the colonial economy and society. It is the mechanism by which the metropolitan capitalist class controls and exploits the colony. The colonial state serves the long term interests of the capitalist class of the mother country as a whole, not of any of its parts. Under colonialism all the indigenous classes of the colony suffer domination. No class is a junior partner of colonialism. Thus even the upper most classes in the colony could begin to oppose colonialism as it went against their interests. It is useful to remember that big landlords led the anti-colonial movements of Poland and Egypt. This is a major difference between colonies and semi-colonies, where there are compradors, native classes that are part of the ruling class. The role of the colonial state was greater than the capitalist one. The state itself was a major channel of surplus appropriation. The metropolitan ruling class used the colonial state to control colonial society

THE EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification as a institution evolved when the technologies of production underwent basic changes. Innovations of animal husbandry and agriculture necessitated more complex technologies and settled forms of community life. These economies also began to generate economic surpluses and accumulation of wealth either in the form of cattle or food gains. With assured food resources population began to grow as never before and barter and exchange, or commodities began to take place on a larger scale. In course of time. Tools of exchange were invented which could reflect values of commodities in a growth of sections of societies who had more control on wealth and power. With development of rela-

tively complex technologies and division of labour, not only specialized groups emerged but a division between the rural and urban centers also came into existence in course of time. The complexity of social structure elaborates institutions of social control over the emerging new social realities. Such as institutionalized form of religion, strata of functionaries specialized into differed form of work, culture specialists classes etc. The institution of social stratification came into being as a result of an evolutionary functional necessity at such a historical moment.

EQUALITY AND INEQUALITY TO STRATIFICATION

1. EQUALITY

The main question is: Is equality opposite of inequality? The other questions are: Is equality illusory? Is there equality only before the law? Is there an inherent contradiction between individual rights and social equality? Is equality a consequence of violent or radical action on the part of subordinate/subaltern groups? There is a view that “all men are created equal”, at least at the time of birth, despite different backgrounds of their parents and cultural heritage. Another view is that democratic societies pronounce equalities of opportunity, outcome, conditions of work, etc. However, it is necessary to understand the varying meanings and definitions of the concept of “equality”. The concepts of “equality” and “inequality” are basic to modern social sciences and the capitalist system. Politically speaking, equality may be a genuine expression, but economically, differential access to societal resources seems to be a stark reality. Such an inequality is rationalized and justified as an essential and inevitable phenomenon. Dichotomy between equality and inequality is quite obvious in almost all walks of life; however, the two are not absolute. Equality and inequality are relative phenomena, and undergo perceptible change over a period of time due to both structural and cultural factors of social change. There is always a striving for equality, and in this process, at times, new forms of inequality may also emerge, along with disappearance/weakening of the persisting inequalities. When privileges based on status and birth decline, equality and citizenship flourish. However, genuine equality can be achieved only if capitalistic institutions such as the market, private property, family inheritance and class system are mitigated. Revival of individualism, competition and achievement as dominant values should normally encourage equality in life, but in effect, it does not happen. No society can achieve equality among its citizens

without the state support and welfare measures for the weak and poor. Equality as a system of egalitarian relations disturbs stability or status quo in a given society. According to Bryan S. Turner, equality can be ensured only if there is political stability and egalitarian ideology. The nature of equality, the conditions of social stability, ideology and social movements bring about greater equality and coherence.

2. INEQUALITY

“What is the origin of inequality among men and whether it is authorized by natural law”? Rousseau, a maladjusted rebel, thought that the question of inequality was a basic one. He seriously pondered over the twin problems of man’s “original nature” and the origin of society. He believed in the cause of the corrupting influence of civilization. “The social structure itself perverted human nature, our way of life, our search for happiness.” “To ask how inequality came to be is to inquire how society came to be, since inequality is a social relationship.” According to Rousseau, society “came to be”, as an act of human will, and that it is possible to conceive of a “natural man” living in isolation (at least theoretically). However, Rousseau’s Discourse on Inequality tells us: “Historical or social man, because of the very conditions of social living, is inevitably evil – that is, he is impelled to selfish actions that will hurt others. The more civilized, the society, the more evil he will be.” Further, Rousseau’s “natural man” is happy and unchanged. “The imposition of society on this natural man created a situation of conflict, inequality, distorted values, and misery.” Such an origin seems to be logically sound, philosophically convincing, but unrealistic in actual social life. Income, wealth, occupation, education, power, style of life, etc., determine the nature and process of distributive justice or injustice, as the case may be. Based on differentiation emanating from these considerations, social relations are shaped among people in a society. Thus, there could be several modes of status determination, including birth, ethnicity, race, and the above mentioned criteria. A given pattern of stratification would determine the nature and functioning of a society.

EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they

are both (a) reasonably expected to be everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices upon to all. In fact, these are two principles of justice as put forward by Rawls. He further observes: "All social values – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage To ensure equality in the true sense, basic structural conditions on the social system may be imposed. For example, free market arrangements can exist within a framework of political and legal institutions. The framework regulates excessive accumulations of property and wealth and equal opportunities of education for all. Rawls writes: "Chances to acquire cultural knowledge and skills should not depend upon one's class position, and so the school system, whether public or private, should be designed to even out class barriers." Rawls deals mainly with the "democratic equality". Natural aristocracy implies that social contingencies are not regulated beyond what is required by formal equality of opportunity, for the good of the poor sections of society. According to Rawls, democratic equality and the principle of difference are coterminous and coexistent. The principle of difference removes indeterminacy of the principle of efficacy by judging the social and economic inequalities of the basic structure. Equality implies improving the expectations of the least advantaged members of society, rather than higher expectations of the better situated members. Distribution of income and access to resources of society can explain the principles of difference and efficacy keeping in view the better off and the disadvantaged members and their expectations.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Characteristics of social stratification: Socially Constructed: Stratification is a social phenomenon rather than a biological one. While

1. Factors like intelligence, age, or strength can influence status, societal recognition and institutional structures ultimately determine power, prestige, and resource distribution.
2. 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.

3. Universal but Variable: Social stratification is present in all societies, but its form and intensity vary.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Life chances refer to opportunities such as access to healthcare, education, and employment, influencing mortality rates, well-being, and social mobility. o Lifestyle encompasses housing, recreation, education, and even family dynamics, shaping individual experiences and aspirations.
7. Persistent across Generations: Social status is often inherited, with advantages and disadvantages passed down through family lineage, making upward mobility challenging for lower strata.
8. 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.
9. 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

CONCLUSION

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.

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