

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT AND EXTENSION AGE 311-RURAL SOCIOLOGY

NATURE AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION SOCIAL STRATIFICATION- 3.1

3.0 Introduction

Everywhere in the World, individuals and societies differ. These differences are most prevalent among human beings for no two individuals are similar. In societies, diversity and inequality are inherent. No society is un-stratified. All societies arrange their members with respect to superiority, inferiority and equality the placement of individuals in strata or layer. This process of ranking is called stratification and is omni-present. People on the top stratum have more power, prestige and privileges in comparisons with those who are under placed. Historical examples of social stratification include **slavery, caste systems (termed one of “the world's oldest forms of surviving social stratification”), and estate including apartheid.**

These notes explain caste, class and estates, as some of those which represents typical forms of social stratification still existing in some form today. Social stratification refers to the way people are ranked and ordered in society.

3.1 Definitions of Social Stratification

- Structured inequalities between different groupings of people (Anthony Giddens, 1989, 1993)
- **Is the ranking of individuals or categories of people on the basis of unequal access to scarce resources and social rewards(Hagedorn, 1993)**
- Refers to the idea that society is divided into a patterned structure of unequal groups and usually implies that this structure tends to persist across generations

All definitions imply **social inequality** in sharing of resources and social rewards

In bureaucracy i.e. a ranked authority structure that operates according to specific rules and procedures for example, positions are ranked according to the degree of authority. As workers move up the bureaucratic ladder, their salaries and prestige levels increase. Those at the top enjoy greater social and monetary rewards compared to those below them. This is also the case at the societal level. Access to social rewards can be based on any characteristic or set of characteristics a society chooses to enjoy. These characteristics may vary from society to society and between historical periods.

Among the most common characteristics are such ascribed statuses as ancestry, race, age, physical appearance and whether man or woman. Achieved statuses such as educational attainment and occupation. Other determinants to social reward include talents and effort. Access to rewards also varies depending on the degree to which the stratification system is open or closed. In a closed system, movement between the status levels or strata, is impossible. A person is assigned a status at birth and remains at that level throughout life. In an open system on the other hand, movement between the strata is possible and the ease of movement depends on the degree of openness in the system.

3.2 Types of Stratification Systems

There are three commonly known types of stratification namely caste, class, and estate. However, caste and class systems constitute two basic types of stratification systems that can be placed along a continuum from closed (far left) to open (far right).

3.2.1 Caste Stratification System

In a caste stratification system, a person's status is assigned at birth and in all but rare cases, the individual remains in the status throughout life. Class systems, on the other hand range along the continuum from slightly open to very open, depending on the society under consideration. The caste system is classified as the most clearly graded and rigid system of social stratification. It consists of closed categories across which intimate interaction, mobility and intermarriages are forbidden. Ranks are arranged in a hierarchy from the highest to the lowest, and is justified and sanctioned by religion and its mores for example, the Hindu belief in rebirth. In a caste system, scarce resources and rewards are distributed on the basis of ascribed statuses with a new child's lifelong status – or caste being determined by the status of his or her parents. While effort and talent may affect an individual's position within a caste, they cannot help the person move to a higher status.

Ascribed status make it necessary for a caste system to have elaborate norms governing interaction between members of different castes or example marriages between members of different castes, would make it difficult to assign a status to children -(which parents status would be used?). To avoid this, caste systems traditionally have forbidden exogamy i.e. marriage outside of one's own social category, instead endogamy i.e. marriage within own social categories is generally practiced. Caste (literally translated as the pure stock or race) systems once were a very common form of organization, the most extreme example of a caste system is the 19th century India. By law, individuals were assigned to one of the four castes, ranked according to social honor:

- Brahmans (i.e. the priests and teachers of the sacred lore);
- Kshatriyas (i.e. The warriors);

- Vaishyas (i.e. the peasants, craftsmen and merchants); and
- The Sundras (i.e. the manual laborers and servants).

These castes are subdivided into thousands of sub castes based on specific occupations and below the four castes are a class of Harijans (i.e. outcasts or untouchables) shunned due to their low status

Mobility within such a system was impossible as neither individuals nor groups were allowed to change their status. A person had two status, the ritual (ascribed caste) and secular (economic and political status). The latter was comparatively easy to change and the untouchable could become wealthy, be elected or appointed to public office but still was subject to ritual taboos against intimate social intercourse nor could he presume to adopt the customs of Hindu caste.

3.2.1.1 Ways to evading Restrictions

Some of the ways through which one could evade caste restrictions include: dropping out of the caste entirely by becoming a 'Holy man'; an ascetic who no longer is regarded as a threat to the status of others; move to the city and work in secular enterprises where the caste of a stranger is less evident. Entire caste group may aspire to higher ritual status and decide to abandon some of their old customs and take on those of a higher caste. This was common where group had already made some secular advances.

The 1950 Constitution abolished the caste system as a legal basis for determining access to public facilities, legal protection and economic resources, endogamy also was removed as a true requirement for a true marriage. In urban areas, where the mixing of castes is unavoidable, distinctions between the castes now are blurring. Traditionally, the only kind of mobility sanctioned by Hindu religion is that from one life (incarnation) to the next. A person who fulfils the duties of his status faithfully enters the next higher caste status when he is reborn. This operates as a powerful sanction to uphold the system. In rural areas, however, caste system still plays an important role in organizing daily life. Nonetheless, most observers believe that the forces of industrialization slowly are moving India away from a caste system toward a system based on economic classes. Although, the notion of castes connotes, to most of us, unfair privilege and discrimination. The caste system has some positive consequences for the individual and group in a stable community. The caste has some positive consequences for individual and group in a stable community. Within each caste group there tended to be economic and social cooperation, the caste system was seen as powerful means of social control giving pattern and predictability to interaction and justification for each persons in life.

3.2.2 Class Stratification System

Class is characteristic of modern, urban and industrial societies. The distribution of scarce resources and rewards is determined on the basis of achieved statuses. Compared to caste and estate systems, class systems are based on neither law nor religion but on many informal judgments and evaluations. Class systems are open systems that emphasize achievement rather than ascription and allow a greater deal of mobility compared to both estate and caste systems. While, it is true that ascribed status such as kinship and racial or ethnic background may play a role in class system, however, criteria such as occupation, education, income style (including place of residence) and circle of associates –which are to a large extent achieved status determine class status. The description of a class system in this way cannot depend on legal or moral prescription about what a person may or may not do but more on what a person does and how that is evaluated by others. The basing of social class on achieved status means that individuals have some control over their place in the stratification system. Given the talent, effort and opportunity, individuals can move up the social class ladder and the reverse also is true where circumstances can reduce an individual's standing in the stratification system.

Social Class is defined in various ways. Sociologists who base their work on the theories of **Karl Marx** define social class in terms of who owns the means of production i.e. tools, buildings and materials needed to produce goods and services. Owners of means of production are the bourgeoisie (boor-ZHWAH-zee) while workers who sell their labor in exchange for wages are called the proletariat. As a recall, Marx was writing in the 1800s at the height of the Industrial revolution when working and living conditions were horrible for much of the proletariat. The social divisions between owners and workers were clearly drawn and striking. Thus according to Marx, all class systems are economic and exploitative. However, the same cannot be said of modern industrial society for growth in the professions, the managerial classes, the number of self-employed, and the rise of the service industry have all altered the nature of work.

In addition, large corporations have changed the relationship between ownership and control. In corporations, ownership rests with the stakeholders, who literally may number in thousands and daily control of the corporation is in the hands of the middle and upper management-individuals who are themselves employees. As a result, most American Sociologists find the Marxist definition of social class to be too narrow and thus, define social class as a “grouping of people with similar levels of wealth, power and prestige” **Hagedorn, 1993**. This definition builds on the work of Max Weber who believed that society is stratified on the basis of economic class (wealth), social status as expressed by lifestyles (prestige) and party (political power).

Most Sociologists today define social class in relation to wealth, prestige and power. To make it possible to rank individuals on these dimensions, Sociologists often calculate people's economic status (SES). Socio Economic Status (SES) defined is “a rating that combines social factor such as education level, occupation, prestige and place of residence with the economic factor of

income". A community is also thought of as comprising several class system. If thought in terms of several "**distributive systems**" as **Gerhard Leski** would have us do, then we see a series of class hierarchies based on different criteria of rank with every member being rated according to their statuses within the occupational, property, racial-ethnic, educational, age, and sex class systems. The advantage of Leski's point of view is that it permits one see "that the struggle for power and privileges involves not only struggles between individuals and classes, it also involves struggles between class systems and thus, between different principles of distribution".

Note that all social movements aiming to raise the status of certain groups for example, to increase the importance of the educational and occupational accomplishment and diminish the importance of aristocracy or sex or race are all, in this sense, class struggles. These combined factors then are used to determine an individual's relative position in the stratification. In other types of stratification systems, inequalities are expressed primarily in personal relationships of duty or obligation between serf and lord, slave and master, or lower and higher-caste individuals. Class systems by contrast operate mainly through large scale connections of an impersonal kind. For instance, one major basis of class differences is to be found in inequalities of pay and working conditions: these affect all the people in specific occupational categories as a result of economic circumstances pertaining in the economy as a whole. **Social mobility which is movement upwards or downwards in the class structure is much more common than in the other types -estate and caste systems.**

3.2.3 Estate Stratification Systems

Estates were part of the European feudalism and were also established in many other traditional civilizations. **An Estate system of stratification is based on hereditary relationships to land. Thus, it is most compatible with an agrarian society and minimal division of labor.** **Each estate forms a clear stratum with spelled rights and obligations to its members towards each other with some (i.e. obligations and rights) being defined and sanctioned by law.** The best known example is that of the Medieval Europe. Historically, after the Roman Empire crumbled and commercial towns declined, Europe primarily become an agricultural economy made up of thousands of tiny local societies with merchants and craftsmen of the cities not being an integral part of the feudal manorial system. Estates tended to develop in the past wherever there was a Traditional Feudal aristocracy based on noble birth headed by a king who had all land divine rights. Various grades of aristocracy include for example Duke, Marquises, Counts and Barons down to simple knight positions. Estates were bound to local manorial communities rather than to a national system of stratification. **Mobility was possible while tenure of land and all other rights were conditional on loyalty and service to the lord whom the vassal has shown recognition.** The lords in turn owed protection and loyalty to the vassal.

An estate system is incompatible with industrialization, which requires a labour force that is not bound by occupational inheritance and that can learn new skills and move freely to new places.

As Industrial Revolution transformed Europe, class systems replaced caste systems of which only a few vestiges, remain. The change was accompanied of course with revolutionary movements which stressed legal equality. In this case, the French constituted the “death knell” of the feudal system known worldwide i.e. the absence of this kind of stratification system based on hereditary relationships

3.2.4 Dimensions of Social Stratification

Theoretically, anything of value can be used as a social reward. Some rewards are more valued than others. However, the most common rewards on which stratification is determined are wealth, power and prestige

i) Wealth

Wealth is the most obvious dimension of social stratification. An individual’s wealth is made up of his/her assets-i.e. the value of everything the person owns and the income- i.e. money earned through salaries and wages. In most societies, wealth is concentrated overwhelmingly in the hands of the minority of the population. In the USA for instance, approx.76% of the nation’s assets is controlled by 20% (i.e. one-fifth) of the richest of the population. Likewise, income is also unequally distributed, although not as striking as in the case of asset, approximately 43% of the nation total income is earned by the top one-fifth of the population.

ii) Power

Power is defined as “the capacity of individuals or groups to achieve their goals, despite the actual or potential opposition of others”. Power maybe exercised through force or the threat of force or through voluntary compliance based upon others acceptance that those who hold power have the right to use it. Such voluntary compliance occurs when power is invested with authority, which is legitimate power attached to a position. People with considerable wealth, usually possess considerable power but the reverse of this can be true-wealth can be a product of power. In other words, power is the ability to control the behavior of others, with or without their consent. Power can be based on force, the possession of a special skill or type of knowledge, a particular social status, personal characteristics, or custom and or tradition

iii) Prestige

Just as individuals can be ranked on the amounts of wealth and power they posses, they also can be ranked according to prestige. Prestige “is the differential evaluation of individuals and groups by others”. Such evaluation includes: the respect, honor, recognition, or courtesy an individual receives from other members of the “society”. Prestige can be based on any characteristics a society or group considers important. Income, occupation, education, family background, area of

residence, possessions, mannerism, and club membership among some of the most common determinants of prestige

3.2.5 Theories of Stratification

The causes and consequences of social inequality are a subject of theoretical debate in Sociology. Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx's Structural-functionalism and conflict theories respectively, constitute the most influential theoretical approaches used to explain stratification

3.2.5.1 Structural – Functionalism Theory

This perspective emphasizes stratification as an expression of commonly held values and traditions. These values and traditions contribute to the integration and stability of society. Functionalists view stratification as a necessary feature of the social structure. This functionalist explanation of stratification, was first proposed

by Kingsley Davis and Wilber Moore in the 1940's and assumes that certain roles in society must be performed if the system is to be maintained. Society ensures that these roles will be fulfilled by providing higher rewards for their performance. The more important the role and the more skill needed to perform the role, the higher the reward. Functionalist claim that without varying rewards, many jobs would not be filled and society would not function smoothly. Why for instance, would someone take the time and expense to become a physician if the reward for being a garbage collector was the same?

3.2.5.2 Conflict theory

Conflict theorists, on the other hand, see competition over resources as the cause of social inequality. They regard stratification as an expression of divergent group interests and is thus, always of potential, if not actual, conflict. Conflict theorists base their work on Marxist theory and say that stratification comes from class exploitation where the owners of the means of production control the working class in order to raise own profits and maintain their in society. The existing distribution of power, privilege and power is regarded unjust, unnecessary and detrimental to both individuals and society. Karl Marx's work was concerned with stratification and above all with social class. Class system according to Marx is economic and exploitative. Marx's concept of class is reconstructed from the body of his writings that stopped at a question what constitutes a class and is defined as "a group of people who stand in a common relationship to the means of production – the means by which they gain a livelihood".

There since have been many disputes between scholars about the nature of class as defined by Marx and discern what he really meant. It has thus been observed that before modern industry, means of production indeed consisted primarily of land and instruments used to tend crops or pastoral animals. These resulted in the creation of two main classes in the pre-industry societies

those who owned the land (i.e. aristocrats, gentry, slave-holders) and those actively engaged in producing from it (i.e. serf, slaves and free). While, it became important in the modern industrial societies to develop factories, offices, machinery and the wealth or capital need. This far and surprisingly Marx's theory failed to provide a systematic analysis of the concept of class. With progression of mankind and distinguished modes of production, it became clear that classes are by far not statistical categories. Marx distinguished the primitive, communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism modes of production and concluded that each succeeding system is more productive than the other before and gave power and freedom to a wider class of people. Although in his earlier theory only two main classes existed in society - those who owned the means of production and those who did not. He recognized that actual class systems are much more complex than the earlier model seemed to suggest.

In addition to the two basic classes, there exist what Marx calls **transitional classes**- "these are class groups left over from an earlier type of production system, which persist long after that system has disappeared". For example, in France, Italy or Spain for much of the current century, substantial numbers of people remained peasants, working in much the same way as they did in the feudal system. Therefore, Marx's concept of class directs us towards objectively structured inequalities in society and that classes do not refer to the beliefs people hold about their position, but to objective conditions that allow some people to have greater access to material rewards than others

3.2.5.3 Symbolic Interaction

Although not often used to apply to social stratification, Max Weber's Symbolic Interaction perspective urges us to look at any stratification system as being invested by members of society with meanings that serve to define its characteristics and the reasons for its existences. Therefore, both the structure and the dynamics of stratification i.e. how it is organized and how it changes must be understood within the context of the meanings individuals ascribe to it, and the position they occupy. The experiences people have, and thus the content of their socialization, is partly determined by their positions in the stratification systems of society. As a result, the views of individuals are likely to be somehow similar if they are in the same strata, and somewhat different if social positions are different. In this manner, individual's meaning has a bearing on stratification, and vice versa

Weber is known authority on Symbolic Interaction perspective. His approach to stratification is built on the analysis developed by Marx but he modified and elaborated their differences. Weber firstly sees a greater variety of economic factors being more important in class formation than are recognized by Marx. According to Weber, class divisions derive not only from control of the means of production, but from economic differences which have nothing directly to do with property. Such resources include especially the skills and credentials or qualifications which affect the type of job people are able to obtain. A **social class** to Weber is multi-dimensional and

is determined by objective market forces and refers to: “a person’s position in terms of wealth or income, his money power. It is rational, impersonal and objective –measurable by fixed criteria and determined by competitive skill in labour or commodity markets”.

He further states that a social class is “any grouping or category of people in the same situation with respect to their life chances-their chance for a supply of goods, external living conditions and personal life experiences, in so far as this chance is determined by the amount and kind of power or lack of it to dispose or skills for the sake of income in a given economic order” Secondly, Weber distinguishes two other basic aspects of stratification besides class. One he calls **status**, defined as “a socially defined position in a group or in a society” and refers to differences between social groups in the social honor or prestige they are accorded by others. Status according to him is governed by the varying styles of life, groups follow such as positively privileged status groups and negatively privileged status groups. The other he calls **party**, defined as “a group of individuals who work together because they have common backgrounds, aims or interests”. Parties may appeal to concerns cutting across differences for example, parties based on religious affiliation or nationalist idea.

3.2.6 Social Structure

Human beings are social beings. We live and work in groups, and interact in predictable ways. As Anthropologist Lionel Tiger and Fox noted “we are none of us truly isolated; we are connected to one another by a web of regularities and by a host of shared, deep-seated certainties”. In other words, society has a structure that guides human interaction. This structure helps people know what is expected of them in most social situations and what they can expect from others. It also ensures that the general nature of society remains relatively stable from one generation to the next, even though the actual members of society change.

3.2.6.1 Social Structure: Meaning

The meaning of a social structure is -“the network of interrelated statuses and roles that guides human interaction” **Status** is “a socially defined position in a group or in a society”. Each status has attached to it one or more roles. A role is “the behavior, the rights and obligations expected of someone occupying a particular status”. The concept of status is central to understanding of social structure. Each individual in society occupies several statuses for example; an individual can be a teacher, a husband, a black, a church deacon all at the same time. People do not come to occupy all statuses in the same manner. Some statuses are assigned, while others are gained or achieved. A status that is assigned according to standards that are beyond a person’s control is called an **ascribed status**. Ascribed statuses are not based on an individual’s abilities, efforts, or accomplishments instead, ascribed statuses are based on person’s inherited traits or are assigned automatically when a person reaches a certain age. You hold the same status of a teenage or young adult, for instance, because of age. You did nothing to earn this status neither can you

change it. Other examples include gender (whether you are male or female), family heritage, and race.

Some statuses are acquired on the basis of a person's direct effort, often through competition. A status that is acquired by an individual on the basis of some special skill, knowledge, or ability is called an **achieved status**. If you are in a basket ball team, you are a member because you have the necessary skills. If you have the lead part in a school play, you hold the status because your acting skills are judged superior to those of other students who auditioned for the part. Unlike the case of ascribed statuses, people have some control over their achieved status. In complex societies such as US, the list of achieved statuses is almost endless. For example, all occupations are achieved statuses. Other achieved statuses include being a spouse, parent, high school or college graduate, or athlete. Each of us holds many statuses, but for most people one status is particularly important. The status that plays the greatest role in shaping a person's life and determines his or her social identity is called a **master status**. A master status can be either achieved or ascribed. Occupation, wealth, marital status, and parenthood can serve as a master status. It can also be based on a parent's family background, age, sex, or physical characteristics. These master statuses vary according to age in particular, as during teenage years, one's master status include being a student or an athlete. During much of adulthood, a person's master status is based on his or her occupation. In late adulthood, hobbies, grandparenthood or past accomplishments serve as a person's master status

People play many different roles in which they interact. At home one plays a role associated with the status of son or daughter. At school one performs the role associated with the status of the student. All the roles performed have **reciprocal roles** i.e. corresponding roles that define the patterns of interaction between related statuses. One cannot, for instance, fulfill the role associated with the status of the husband without having someone else perform the role that goes along with the status of wife. Other role statuses that require reciprocal roles include doctor-patient, athletic-coach, friend-friend, employee-employer, leader-follower, and sales clerk-customer. Even within a single status there are many roles to perform. Sociologists call the different roles attached to a single status a **role set**. Each of us because we hold more than one status, must deal with many role sets in our daily lives. The often contradictory expectations within and between our role sets can lead to role conflict and role strain. **Role conflict** occurs when fulfilling the role expectation of one status makes it difficult to fulfilling the role expectation of another status. In other words, role conflict occurs between many statuses. Being a good employee for example, sometimes interferes with being a good parent. **Role strain** occurs when a person has a difficulty meeting the role expectations of a single status. For example, the boss who must maintain the morale of the workers while getting them to work long hours of overtime is likely to experience role strain

3.2.7 Basic Propositions of Stratification

The study of social stratification is organized around five basic propositions or intentions all of which are derived from three (3) theoretical perspectives namely; the Structural-Functionalism, Conflict and Symbolic Interaction

i) The fundamental characteristics of stratification is **unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige**. Unequal distribution mentioned recognizes the presence of a social hierarchy based on any criterion for example, class, ethnicity, sex, age ranging from high to low strata. The existence of a social class represents hierarchically ordered categories of individuals who are similar in economic, occupational and educational characteristics (Jeffries, 1980). **Economic dimension** is the most important, since are probably the most important factor of the three in providing access to wealth, power and prestige. **Occupation** i.e. total economic assets or wealth based on an income derived from an occupation from stocks and bonds, or from property. The existence of a social class represents hierarchically ordered categories of individuals who are similar in economic, occupational and educational characteristics (Jeffries, 1980). Most people who receive income do so on the basis of their occupation, the second dimension of social class. **Education**, the third dimension, is one of the most important avenues of access to high-level occupational and economic positions.

ii) Individuals in the same stratum will have certain **common experiences**. Common experiences imply that people would tend to think, behave and view the World similarly. Those in different strata, think, behave and see things differently. This is not to say everyone in the same social class thinks and behaves in a similar manner though, important general differences do exist

iii) Stratification systems are supported by an **ideology**. **An ideology is “a complex of interrelated beliefs, norms, and values which gives legitimacy to the unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige”**. Supporting ideologies imply that even striking inequalities will be accepted if reasons are provided which make them appear to be fair and thus help to perpetuate stratification systems. For those in high positions, ideologies provide a justification for their advantages while for those in lower positions such ideologies make the disadvantages understandable and acceptable. These supporting ideologies are partially integrated systems of values, norms and beliefs.

Values are standards of desirability. They form the criteria by which excellence is defined and social honor is accorded in this regard, values serve as the ultimate justification for a system of differential ranking and for the system inequalities that result (Tuner and Starnes, 1976). **Norms are standards of conduct**. They include how we should or should not behave. The norms of supporting ideologies specify standards of conduct that serve to limit the opportunities, advantages and aspirations of these in the lower strata. **Beliefs are the convictions about what**

exists in reality. They include opinions, expectations and judgments about some aspect of reality that often, but not always, involve a positive or negative evaluation of the object or category about which belief is held. Beliefs that pertain to the presumed negative characteristics of the lower strata, for example, provide a rationale for the discriminatory policies. Other beliefs, such as the belief in equality of opportunity, justify the advantageous positions of members of higher strata and at the same time suggest the inferiority of those in lower strata.

These three elements of supporting ideologies i.e. values, norms and beliefs share some degree of consistency and interdependency for example, if women are believed to lack leadership and analytical abilities, then it would be expected that norms will exist to exclude them from high level positions. Similarly if a society values material wealth as a prime criteria of personal accomplishment, it is consistent with this value to view those without wealth as lazy or personally deficient in some manner.

Thus, the components of an ideology constitute a loose structure in which the acceptance of one component makes it likely that individuals will hold the others. In short, supporting ideologies are specific type of ideology, namely, those which provide a rationale and justification for social inequality.

iv) Stratification systems have the potential for the development of **stratum consciousness and action** directed towards either maintaining or changing the distribution of power, privilege and prestige. Those who occupy similar positions in a social hierarchy share the same life experiences and expectations. Hence, they have **similar interests and may develop a sense of shared consciousness regarding the positions in the distributive system.** Such awareness is referred to as *stratum consciousness*.

For disadvantaged groups, this awareness often leads to social and political activity directed towards changing the existing distribution of power, privilege and prestige. Those in high positions, by contrast, direct their efforts toward maintaining their positions. Such activity either to change or maintain the distribution of power, privilege and prestige is called *stratum action*.

v) **Social Mobility**

Social mobility be understood as the upward or downward movement of individuals or groups, within a stratification system? Social mobility is an attribute of all stratification systems, though the degree of mobility and the forms it may take vary from time to time and place to place. The two basic forms of social mobility are individual and group mobility. Though occupation is not identical with class position, it is closely associated with it and has been widely used as a measure of mobility. An example of *upward individual mobility* would be the rise to an executive position while *downward mobility* would be the demotion of an individual from a high to a low management position. These examples illustrate *intragenerational* mobility because the movement is from one stratum to another by a given individual, necessarily during his or her life

span. Individual mobility also may be *intergenerational*, if it occurs between the social positions of parents and children i.e. if it occurs between generations. For example, if a son of a corporation executive were to become an elementary school teacher. Their career choice would illustrate downward intergenerational mobility (Blau and Duncan, 1967).

Group mobility can take place through the elevation of a whole group or the elevation of major segments of that group. Downward group mobility can take place through the movement downward of an entire group or major segments of it, or through disintegration (Sorokin, 1959). Rapid group mobility take place more likely during periods of major political upheavals or revolutions.

3.3 Sociological importance of Social Stratification

There are four main reasons why the importance and interest in social stratification.

1. Social stratification is an explosive and controversial subject

It irritates many people and social cohesion depends upon whether they seek social change through peaceful or violent means. All types of revolutions and social movements therefore seek to erase inequality.

2. The system of stratification affects all the institutions of society

Because social stratification affects all the institutions of society, hence, it is the sociologist's role to investigate and demonstrate its impacts on other institutions. Like education, family life, religion, politics and the economy.

3. Social status serves as an excellent tool for predicting behaviour

Because members of a stratum interact more, and on more intimate terms, with one another than. With members of other strata, and because they are subject to similar influences opportunities and experiences, they share many attitudes, values and behaviour patterns

4. The system of stratification is the aspect of social organization

In that it gives us the best overall picture of the society. All individuals and subgroups fit somewhere in the hierarchical system of stratification.

Like all patterned relationships, those associated with the system of stratification serve as a guide to interaction (See table 1 below for nature of interaction). We also know what to expect of others in certain statuses, and how to behave toward them, even though the case of social status may be less obvious than the case given by age, sex, and race.

Table 1: Nature of Social Interaction

Interaction can indeed take many forms some of which help stabilize the social structure. Other forms help to promote change. Among the most common forms of social interaction are exchange, competition, conflict, cooperation, and accommodation.

i) Exchange

Whenever individuals, groups or societies interact in an effort to receive a reward or return for their actions, an exchange has taken place. Dating, friendship, family life and politics all involve exchanges. **Reciprocity** - i.e. the idea that if you do something for someone, they owe you something in return – is at the basis of exchange. Rewards can be both material and non-material. The importance of exchange in daily interactions has led the emergence of Exchange theorists believe that people are motivated by self –interests in their interactions with other people. In other words, people do things for rewards.

Behavior that is rewarded tends to be repeated. When the costs of an interaction outweigh the rewards, however, individuals are likely to end the relationship. According to exchange theorists, most of social life can be explained as the attempt to maximize rewards while minimizing costs

ii) Competition

Competition occurs when two or more persons or groups oppose each other to achieve a goal that only one can attain. Competition is the cornerstone of the capitalist economic system and the democratic form of government. Advancement in business, school and sports is achieved through competition. As long as it follows accepted rules of conduct, competition is viewed by most Sociologists as a positive means of motivating people to perform society's needed roles.

On the negative side however, competition also can lead to psychological stress, a lack of cooperation in social relationships, inequality and even hostility.

iii) Conflict

The main emphasis in competition is on achieving the goal. With conflict, on the other hand, the emphasis is on defeating the opponent. Conflict is the deliberate attempt to control by force, oppose, harm, or resist the will of another person or persons. Unlike competition, conflict has few rules of conduct and even these often are ignored. Conflict may range from the deliberate slighting of a classmate to the killing of an enemy. Sociologist Georg Simmel identified four sources of conflict: war, conflict within groups, legal disputes, and clashes over ideology such as religion or politics.

Sometimes conflicts begin as competition, for instance, ritual business organizations may first emerge in intense competition for customers. As competition increases, the emphasis shifts from attracting customers to harming the other business. One business, for example, may sell merchandise below cost to try to force the other business into bankruptcy.

Although, we tend to think of conflict as negative, some Sociologists have pointed out that conflict serves some useful purposes. For instance, conflict reinforces group boundaries and strengthens group loyalty by focusing attention away from internal problems. Conflict can also lead to social change by bringing problems to the forefront and forcing opposing sides to seek solutions.

iv) Cooperation

Teams of school band, pep club, student body and athlete teams work together to win a game. If, in the end, the team takes a trophy, it will be shared by the entire interested parties- or stakeholders. Similarly, the employees of a corporation work together to increase sales for the organization. If their efforts are successful, everyone benefits. In each case, the people involved are cooperating to achieve a desired goal. **Cooperation occurs when two or more persons or groups work together to achieve its goal that will benefit many people.**

Cooperation often is used along with other forms of interaction. Competition, for example, may be used along with cooperation to motivate members to work harder for the group. Individuals who go out for a team sport for instance, often compete with one another to make the 'varsity' team.

v) Accommodation

In many of our interactions we neither cooperate nor engage in conflict. We simply accommodate each other-we give a little and we take a little. Accommodation is a state of balance between cooperation and conflict. One way to remember this type of interaction is by thinking about a motel accommodation. The owner of the motel is accommodating us by letting us stay for the night in exchange for \$60. If the owner were to cooperate with us, we would be able to stay for free. On the other hand, if the owner refused to let us stay under any condition, we would be in a conflict situation.

Accommodation can take a number of different forms. One of these forms is compromise i.e. when two parties both give up something to come to a mutual agreement. Say for example, that you and a friend want to see different movies. To compromise, you might choose a third movie that you both would to watch.

In summary, we learn that "Social stratification is **the differentiation of a given population into hierarchically superposed classes**. It is manifested in the existence of upper and lower social layers.

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