

Characteristics of Social Stratification

According to **M.M. Tumin** the main attributes of stratification are as follows:

1. It is Social

Stratification is social in the sense it does not represent biologically caused inequalities. It is true that such factors as strength, intelligence, age and sex can often serve as the basis of strata are distinguished. But such differences by themselves are not sufficient to explain why some statuses receive more power, property and prestige than others. Biological traits do not determine social superiority and inferiority until they are socially recognized and give importance. For example the manager of an industry attains a dominant position not by his strength nor by his age but by having the socially defined traits. His education, training skills, experiences, personality, character etc. are found to be more important than his biological qualities.

Further as Tumin has pointed out, the stratification system

- i. is governed by social norms and sanctions,
- ii. is likely to be unstable because it may be disturbed by different factors and
- iii. is intimately connected with the other system of society such as practical family, religious, economic, education and other institutions.

2. It is Ancient

The stratification system is quite old. According to historical and archaeological records, stratification was present even in the small wandering bands. Age and sex were the main criteria of stratification then, women and children last was probably the dominant rule of order. Difference between the rich and poor, powerful and humble, freemen and slaves was there in almost all the ancient civilizations. Ever since the time of Plato and Kautilya social philosophers have been deeply concerned with economic, social and political inequalities.

3. It is Universal

The stratification system is a worldwide phenomena. Difference between the rich and the poor or the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is evident everywhere. Even in the non-literate societies stratification is very much present. As Sorokin has said, all permanently organized groups are stratified.

4. It is in Diverse Forms

The stratification system has never been uniform in all the societies. The ancient Roman society was stratified into two strata-the patricians and the plebians. The ancient Aryan society into four Varnas the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Sudras, the ancient Greek society into freemen and slaves, the ancient Chinese society into the mandarins, merchants, farmers and the soldiers and so on. Class, caste and estate seem to be the general forms of stratification to be found in the modern world. But stratification system seems to be much more complex in the civilized societies.

5. It is Consequential

The stratification system has its own consequences. The most important, most desired, and often the scarcest things in human life are distributed unequally because of stratification. The system leads to main kinds of consequences.

i. Life chances and

ii. Life-style refers to such things as infant mortality, longevity, physical and mental illness, childlessness, marital conflict, separation and divorce. Life-styles include such matters as the mode of housing residential area, ones education means or recreation relationship between the parents and children, the kind of books, magazines and TV shows to which one is exposed ones mode of conveyance and so on. Life chances are involuntary while life-styles reflect differences in preferences tastes and values