



Value Addition NOTES

Unit 2.2 Anthropology

The Nature of Society: Concept of Society; Society and Culture; Social Institution; Social groups; and Social stratification



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What is Society?

Society is the system of relationships, the pattern of the norms of interaction by which the members of the society maintain themselves.

Some anthropologists argue that society exists only when its members know each other and share common interests or values.

Meaning of Society:

The roots of the term “society” can be traced to the Latin word “socius,” which means companionship or friendship.

Definition of Society:

Auguste Comte: “Society as a social organism possessing a harmony of structure and function.”

Talcott Parsons: “Society is a total complex of human relationships in so far as they grow out of the action in terms of means-end relationships intrinsic or symbolic.”

G.H. Mead: “Society as an exchange of gestures which involves the use of symbols.”

Morris Ginsberg: “Society as a collection of individuals united by certain relations or mode of behaviour which mark them off from others who do not enter into these relations or who differ from them in behaviour.”

Cole: “Society is the complex of organized associations and institutions within a community.”

MacIver and Page: “Society is a system of usages and procedures of authority and mutual aid of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and liberties; a web of social relationships.”

We can sum up the definitions of society into two types – the functional definition and the structural definition.

- ❖ From the **functional point of view**, society is defined as a complex of groups in reciprocal relationships, interacting upon one another, enabling human organisms to carry on their life activities and helping each person to fulfill their wishes and accomplish their interests in association with their fellows.
- ❖ From the **structural point of view**, society is the total social heritage of folkways, mores, and institutions; of habits, sentiments, and ideals.
- ❖ Thinkers like Ginsberg, Giddings, Cole, and Cuber take a structural view of society, while McIver, Parsons, Lapiere, Cooley, and Leacock have given a functional definition of society.

Characteristics of Society: (by McIver)

1. **Society is a web of social relationships:** The family alone is said to have as many relationships based on age, sex, gender, and generation. Outside the family, there is no limit to the number of possible relationships.
2. **Society means likeness:** likeness is an essential prerequisite of society. The sense of likeness was focused in early society on kinship, that is, real or supposed blood relationships. In modern societies, the conditions of social likeness have broadened out in the principle of nationality of one world.
3. **Society also implies difference:** All our social systems involve relationships in which differences complement one another, e.g., family rests upon the biological difference between sexes. Besides the sex difference, there are other natural differences of aptitude, of interest, of capacity. While difference is necessary to society, difference by itself does not create society; difference is subordinate to likeness. Interdependence is another essential element to constitute society.
4. **Society implies interdependence:** In addition to likeness, interdependence is another essential element to constitute society. Family, one of the important units of society with which we are all closely associated, is based on the biological interdependence of the sexes.
5. **Cooperation is also essential to constitute society:** Cooperation is also essential to constitute society. Without cooperation, no society can exist. Unless people cooperate, they cannot live a happy life. All social institutions rest on cooperation.
6. **It is a system of usages and procedures, authority and mutual aid**

7. Means of Social Control: Social control refers to the mechanisms a society uses to regulate the behavior of its members, ensuring they conform to societal norms and values. It's the process by which societies maintain order and stability through various means, including formal and informal sanctions

Gerhard Lenski, based on the level of technology, communication, and economy, had differentiated societies into:

- (a) hunters and gatherers,
- (b) simple agricultural,
- (c) advanced agricultural,
- (d) industrial, and
- (e) special (e.g., fishing societies or maritime societies).

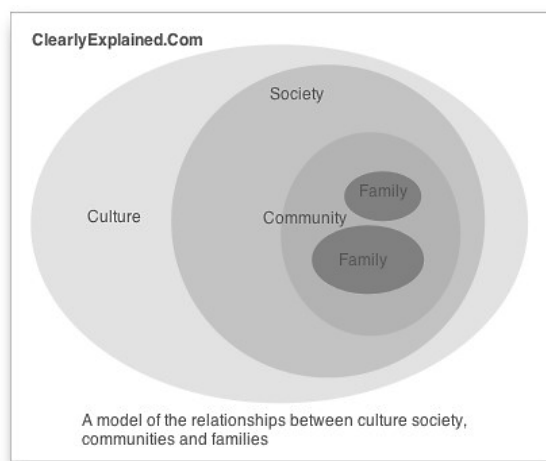
Society and Culture

Edward Burnett Tylor defines **Culture** as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

Culture and society have a COMPLEMENTARY RELATIONSHIP:

- ❖ According to **Nadel (2006)**, society is composed of people; the way they behave is their culture.
- ❖ According to **Pertierra (2004)**, Society expresses itself through culture.
- ❖ According to **Talcott Parsons**, Culture is a basic element behind social relationships.
- ❖ Culture is manifested in the socio-economic structures

10 key differences between **society** and **culture**:



Aspect	Society	Culture
1. Definition	A group of people living together in a community or organized group.	The shared beliefs, values, customs, and practices of a group of people.
2. Focus	Focuses on people and their relationships.	Focuses on ideas, traditions, and expressions.
3. Nature	Structural – concerned with institutions and social order.	Symbolic – concerned with meaning and expression.
4. Formation	Formed through organized interaction and governance.	Developed through historical, artistic, and spiritual evolution.
5. Components	Includes institutions like family, government, and economy.	Includes language, religion, art, music, and norms.
6. Change	Changes more slowly through law, policy, or population shifts.	Can change rapidly with new ideas, trends, or innovations.
7. Transmission	Passed through rules, regulations, and institutions.	Passed through communication, storytelling, and socialization.
8. Measurement	Can be analyzed statistically (e.g., population, income).	Difficult to quantify – more qualitative (e.g., beliefs, practices).
9. Dependency	Cannot exist without culture – relies on shared norms.	Can exist independently in thought and heritage, even without a formal society.
10. Examples	Indian society, tribal societies, and urban society.	Indian culture, Western culture, and Punjabi culture.

GROUP:

Anderson and Parker (1966: 102) give a comprehensive definition of group, “Groups are units of two or more people meeting in the same environment, or overcoming distance by some means of communication, who are influencing each other psychologically. The distinctive bond of the group is reciprocal interaction. Friends in conversation, a committee in action, and children playing together are examples.”

Characteristics of a Group:

1. **Social Interaction** – Members of a group interact regularly and maintain social relationships.
2. **Common Identity** – Group members share a sense of belonging and identity.
3. **Shared Culture** – A group often shares language, customs, values, and traditions.
4. **Defined Roles and Statuses** – Individuals have specific roles, responsibilities, and social positions within the group.
5. **Norms and Rules** – Established norms, rules, or codes of behavior guide group conduct.
6. **Continuity and Stability** – Groups tend to exist over time, showing continuity and structural stability.
7. **Goal-Oriented** – Groups usually form for a purpose, whether survival, religion, kinship, economy, or defense.
8. **Territoriality** – Many groups associate with a specific territory or place.
9. **Group Solidarity** – A sense of unity or cohesion binds members, often through rituals, kinship, or shared experiences.
10. **Social Control** – Mechanisms like customs, traditions, or sanctions maintain order and discipline within the group.

These characteristics help anthropologists analyze how human groups function, evolve, and interact within cultures and societies.

PRIMARY GROUP

Primary groups, for the very first time, were recognised by C.H. Cooley (1909) in his very famous book ‘*Social Organisation: Nature and Social Order*’.

He has observed intimate and close social relations among the members of certain small groups and termed those groups "primary groups."

Cooley considers family, playmates of children, neighbourhood, and community groups and groups of elders as primary groups.

Three essential conditions have been identified for a primary group formation:

- ❖ Close face-to-face proximity
- ❖ Smallness of the group
- ❖ Durability of the bond

Characteristics of Primary Group

Characteristics of primary groups can be divided into two broad categories, i.e., external characters and internal characters:

External characters include the following aspects:

- ❖ Physical proximity among group members
- ❖ Small size of the group
- ❖ Stability and durability
- ❖ Continuity in the relations

Internal characters include:

- ❖ Common objectives of the group
- ❖ The relations are ends in themselves
- ❖ Relationships are spontaneous
- ❖ Personal relationships

- ❖ Inclusive relations among members
- ❖ Control over the members

2.2.2 Importance of a Primary Group

At the level of the individual, a primary group

- ❖ Helps in the development of personality
- ❖ Increases the efficiency of an individual
- ❖ Fulfills the psychological needs.

At the level of society, a primary group

- ❖ Transfers the culture from one generation to another
- ❖ Carries cultural norms of the society within the society
- ❖ Provides means of social control and helps maintaining the social order
- ❖ Ensures the performance of social roles in accordance with society norms.

Typical examples of a primary group

- ❖ **The Army Group:** Soldiers form primary groups with their commandants and form informal relationships within formal settings in order to defend their members against the arbitrary authority of officers.
- ❖ **The Peer Group:** Boys and girls of the same age group and approximately the same social background, as in a class, form a primary group and have personal social interaction, which also helps in their personality development.

SECONDARY GROUP:

Cooley did not provide any terminology for the groups other than primary groups, and many writers came to speak of 'secondary groups' the tendency has been to consider secondary groups as those which depend for communication on indirect media, such as newspapers (Faris, 1937).

MacIver and Page (1952) consider the secondary group a characteristic of industrialised and urbanised complex societies. In these societies, due to complexity in the nature of work, more complicated relations develop, which provide a very limited scope for intimate relations.

Ogburn and Nimkoff (1966) say that the "groups which provide experience lacking in intimacy, can be called secondary groups."

2.3.1 Characteristics of Secondary Group

- ❖ **Dominance of secondary relations:** Secondary group relations can be seen about primary relations. Secondary group relations are impersonal, indirect, non-inclusive, and utilitarian. Members are connected through contractual obligations or interests. Due to self-interest, individuality develops among the members.
- ❖ **Voluntary membership:** Individuals are free to join or leave the group at any point in time i.e., membership in these groups is predominantly voluntary.

But in the case of secondary groups like 'state', membership becomes compulsory.

- ❖ **Large in Size:** Unlike a primary group, physical proximity is not the condition for a secondary group, and so the size of a secondary group becomes large. They might spread all over the world. For example, members of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) are scattered all over the world.
- ❖ **Goal Oriented:** Secondary groups are formed to fulfill the needs of the individuals. They serve special functions in society. Every secondary group emerges in response to a specific purpose and joins the people having the same type of need.
- ❖ **Indirect communication:** The Mode of communication among the members of a secondary group is indirect. In many of the cases, group members seldom or rarely or never come into direct contact with each other. They rely on different forms of mass media communication, which include radio, telephone, television, newspaper, movies, magazines, post and telegraph, etc.

- ❖ **Role decides a person's position:** In secondary groups, the position of a person depends upon their role. Socially achieved status and its corresponding role remain the key factors behind the position of a person in the secondary group. His position is not being decided by his ascribed status neither he is treated based on his birth.

Typical examples of secondary groups

- ❖ **A group of co-workers:** A group of people working together in the same organisation forms a secondary group as they have impersonal relations but spend most of the time together in the organisation.
- ❖ **Clubs:** Clubs are formed to fulfill some of the requirements of social life as fun clubs or sport clubs for entertainment, charity clubs for contributions or donations, hobby clubs for leisure pursuits, and many more. These clubs are utilitarian and form a secondary group, as members of the group are less intimate.
- ❖ **University or college:** Universities or colleges also form a secondary group as they are segmental in nature. People are dependent on colleges for educational requirements, but it reflects just a part of their personality, and people form formal contacts.

COMMUNITY

The word 'Community' is comprised of two Latin words, namely 'com' and 'munis'. In English, 'com' means together, and 'munis' means to serve. Thus, community means to serve together. It implies that the purpose of a community is to serve.

According to MacIver and Page (1952) "Community is a group of people who live together, who belong together, so that they share, not ties or that particular interest, but as a whole set of interests, wide enough and complete enough to include their lives."

Kingsley Davis (1957) has defined community as the smallest territorial group that can embrace all the aspects of social life.

Characteristics of a Community

- ❖ **Definitive geographical area:** Community is a spatial entity. A community is always considered in relation to a physical geographical area or territory. It is a compulsory condition for a community. But it should not be confused with those groups who live together without any separate physical boundary.

Four friends living in a room do not form a community. Community is a broader term.

- ❖ **We feel or community feeling:** It is a home instinct which lays the foundation of people's attachment to their house, community, or nation. It's the 'we' feeling through which people recognise their community and themselves. Community sentiments develop during a period of time within the community.
- ❖ **Common culture and common life:** The Life of the people in a community is more or less the same. Due to their common ecological conditions, they develop the same type of culture, habits, and behavioural patterns. Cultural uniformity and uniformity in their mode of life can be observed.
- ❖ **Close relationships:** As a person mostly lives in a community, proximate relations develop. Collective participation becomes a common affair, which brings people together and gives a chance to primary relations to develop.

Thus, the psychological feelings of a community become more important.

- ❖ **Completeness of life:** Community covers all the aspects of life. Community helps in socialisation and also helps in developing the community sentiments in a person as well.
- ❖ **Permanent nature:** Communities are never formed with any particular aim or objective. It grows spontaneously, and so it is durable.
- ❖ **Not a legal body:** A community is not a legal body i.e., it cannot sue, nor can it be sued. In the eyes of the law, the community has no rights and duties.

MacIver and Page (1952) have considered village and tribal societies as the best examples of community. Apart from it, they have also kept asylum and prison in the category of the community.

ASSOCIATION

In anthropology, association represents a group created for the fulfillment of common needs.

As MacIver and Page (1952: 209) say that “an association is an organisation deliberately formed for the collective pursuit of the same interest or set of interests, which its members share.”

Precondition:

Firstly, there must be a group of people;

Secondly, the group of people should be organised, i.e., there must be certain rules for conduct;

Thirdly, there must be a common purpose of a specific nature to follow.

Characteristics of association

- ❖ Association requires at least two individuals. It is considered a concrete form of a group.
- ❖ Association has its aims and objectives. No association can be formed without any aim. An aim can be broad or particular.
- ❖ Association is always a result of deliberate action. Like communities, they do not grow spontaneously. They are deliberately created by men to fulfill certain aims.
- ❖ In an association, membership remains voluntary. Members can join the association or establish an association as per their needs.
- ❖ There are certain rules to get membership in an association. Every association is established on the ground of certain rules and regulations. It also contains a code of conduct for the members. For any contradictory action or disobedience of the regulations, a member may be expelled from the membership.
- ❖ Associations are subjected to be terminated. The life of an association is upto the achievement of the aim for which it has been created. The existence of the association after the achievement of the objectives becomes meaningless and immaterial.

ORGANISATIONS: FORMAL AND INFORMAL

Organisations are those associations of individuals through which certain value-oriented interests are satisfied. They are systematically arranged units of individuals in which each person has a formal status and role (Anderson and Parker, 1966).

Comparison between formal and informal organizations:

Aspect	Formal Organization	Informal Organization
Definition	A structured and officially planned system of roles and responsibilities.	A network of personal and social relationships not defined by official rules.
Formation	Deliberately created by management or authority.	Spontaneously formed by individuals based on friendship or common interests.
Structure	Clearly defined hierarchy and chain of command.	No defined structure; flexible and dynamic.
Purpose	To achieve organizational goals and tasks.	To satisfy the social and emotional needs of members.
Rules and Regulations	Governed by formal rules, policies, and procedures.	Operates on mutual understanding, trust, and unwritten norms.
Communication	Follows official lines (vertical or horizontal).	Informal communication (grapevine) spreads quickly.
Authority	Based on position and designated responsibility.	Based on personal influence, respect, or popularity.
Accountability	Clearly defined and enforced through official channels.	No formal accountability mechanisms.

Stability	More stable and consistent.	Less stable; may change with group dynamics.
Examples	Corporate departments, government agencies.	Friend circles at work, informal peer groups.

SOCIAL INSTITUTION:

MacIver and Page: have defined Institutions "as the established forms or conditions of procedure characteristic of group activity".

H.E. Barnes defined "Institutions as the social structure and the machinery through which human society organizes, directs, and executes the multifarious activities required to satisfy human needs

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SOCIAL INSTITUTION:

1. **Structured** – Organized patterns of behaviour with defined roles and responsibilities.
2. **Normative** – Governed by social norms, values, and rules.
3. **Functional** – Serve essential societal functions like education, governance, or reproduction.
4. **Cultural Universality** – Found in every society, though forms may vary.
5. **Stability** – Tend to be long-lasting and provide continuity over time.
6. **Value-Oriented** – Uphold and transmit core societal values.
7. **Socializing Agent** – Plays a key role in teaching individuals societal norms and roles.
8. **Interdependent** – Institutions influence and interact with each other.
9. **Change-Resistant** – Resist change but adapt slowly over time.
10. **Symbolic** – Use rituals, symbols, and traditions to express meaning and unity.

FUNCTIONS OF A SOCIAL INSTITUTION:

1. **Socialization** – Teaches individuals societal norms, values, and roles.
2. **Regulation of Behavior** – Provides rules and laws to maintain order.
3. **Social Integration** – Unites individuals into a cohesive society.
4. **Cultural Transmission** – Preserves and passes on cultural traditions and values.
5. **Fulfillment of Needs** – Satisfies basic human needs (e.g., food, shelter, education).
6. **Role Allocation** – Assigns and defines social roles and responsibilities.
7. **Social Control** – Maintains conformity and discourages deviant behavior.
8. **Conflict Management** – Offers mechanisms for resolving disputes and maintaining justice.
9. **Stability and Continuity** – Ensures social order and persistence over time.
10. **Economic Support** – Organizes the production, distribution, and consumption of resources.

Primary and Secondary Social Institutions in a tabular form:

Aspect	Primary Social Institutions	Secondary Social Institutions
Definition	Institutions that directly satisfy basic, biological, and emotional needs.	Institutions that manage more complex, specialized societal functions.
Examples	Family, Kinship, Religion	Education, Economy, Government, Law
Nature of Relationships	Personal, intimate, face-to-face	Impersonal, indirect, formal
Emotional Bond	Strong emotional attachment	Limited or no emotional attachment
Role in Socialization	Fundamental in early and lifelong socialization	Focused on role-specific, skill-based, and professional socialization
Size and Composition	Small, informal groups	Large, formal, structured organizations

Social Control Mechanism	Informal (customs, traditions, peer pressure)	Formal (laws, rules, official regulations)
Permanence of Relationships	Lifelong or long-term (e.g., parent-child)	Short-term or role-based (e.g., student-teacher, employer-employee)
Goal Orientation	Oriented toward emotional fulfillment, care, and identity	Oriented toward achieving specific, institutional goals
Structure	Informal, less bureaucratic	Formal, hierarchical, rule-governed

SOCIAL STATIFICATION:

Social stratification refers to the division of society into layers or strata based on access to resources, power, and prestige. It reflects how inequality is embedded in social institutions and cultural norms.

George Dalton:

"Social stratification is the patterned inequality in the distribution of goods, rights, and obligations, power, prestige, and privileges among people in a society."

Melvin Tumin:

"Social stratification refers to arrangements of any social group or society into a hierarchy of positions that are unequal with regard to power, property, social evaluation, and psychic gratification."

Paul Bohannan:

"Stratification systems are arrangements by which societies distribute their members into categories that are unequal in regard to wealth, power, and status."

Organizing Principles OF Social Stratification:

These are Status, Wealth, and Power.

1. Status:

The earliest principle of social stratification is that of status. Status in the language of social stratification means the ranking of groups in a society based on their relative position in terms of honour or respect. In our country, caste is a very appropriate example of status groups.

The qualities that go to make a status group are related more to values and beliefs, to legends and myths perpetuated in societies over time, than to 6 principles which are achievable through efforts, whether economic, political, or cultural

2. Wealth:

The second organizing principle of social stratification is wealth. Wealth is generated in societies only when technologies advancement takes place and there is a change in the mode of production. Examples are: change from hunting and food gathering economy to settled agriculture, change from agriculture-based economy to one based predominantly upon manufacturing and industry.

The social stratification based on class is its prime example.

3. Power:

The third organizing principle of social stratification is power. Unlike status and wealth, which can be linked with group characteristics of ranking high societies, the principle of power is a relatively diffused attribute because it is not exclusive.

The concept of power, as Max Weber has discussed in his treatment of social stratification, rests on the fact that it endows the persons or groups that have power to impose their will on other groups by legitimate use of coercive methods.

Max Weber (1947) distinguishes class, power, and status. According to Weber, class is an economic category & a product of the market situation. The status group, on the other hand, constitutes the social order based on prestige or honour. Status is determined by the social prestige one enjoys. Social prestige is expressed through termed as economic differentiation. Power refers to differential access to power in society. It includes political, social, and other types of power. different styles of life.

TYPES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Summary:

Tabular representation of the various forms of social stratification systems.

System	Basis of Stratification	Mobility	Example Societies / Regions	Key Features
Age-set System	Age or age groups	Low to moderate	East African tribes (e.g., Maasai, Kikuyu)	Individuals move through stages with age, often linked to duties and status.
Slave System	Ownership of people as property	None (highly restricted)	Ancient Rome, pre-Civil War U.S., ancient Greece	Slaves have no rights; status is ascribed and inherited or forced.
Estate System	Legal and hereditary status	Very limited	Feudal Europe, Tokugawa Japan	Rights and duties assigned by birth; rigid legal distinctions.
Caste System	Birth-based, hereditary, and religious	None (closed system)	Traditional India (Hindu Varna-Jati system)	Fixed social roles; marriage and occupation endogamous; sanctioned by religion.
Class System	Economic status and achievement	High (open system)	Modern industrial societies	Based on income, occupation, education; allows for upward or downward mobility.
Racial-Ethnic System	Perceived race or ethnicity	Low (varies by context)	Colonial Latin America, apartheid South Africa	Based on physical traits or ancestry; often institutionalized through law or custom.

Explanation:

1. AGE-SET SYSTEM:

Societies, which have been described as a stateless type by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940), lack centralised government. They have no office of chief, or if they have such an office, it holds more ritual than secular power.

Still, such societies are found to be stratified based on age. This type of stratification is a characteristic of certain East African societies. **The principle of age is most prominent among the Masai and Nandi in East Africa**, where **ranking based on age** is put together with the exercise of authority, based on seniority.

The ranks determined based on age are called age-sets. All the persons (basically men) born within a range or number of years belong to one set.

In most cases, usually around adolescence, the membership of the first age set closes, and recruitment to the next set takes place. At this stage, entry to the new age-set generally involves an initiation rite, such as circumcision or other body marks. Thus, after going through the ritual, each member comes out of childhood and takes on full membership of his tribe. Each person, thus, belongs to an age-set, to which he remains attached throughout his life.

In most cases, where age-sets operate, a member of an age-set also belongs to a particular age-grade. These grades are marked out from one another, so that a person belongs to only one grade at a time. Generally, a person after childhood would move & from junior warriorhood to senior warriorhood. Then he would move from junior elderhood to senior elderhood. The warriors fight and defend their tribe from attack, while the elders make decisions and settle disputes. They also communicate with the ancestral spirits. Thus, the age-sets go through the different grades in complete units.

In terms of a system of social stratification, **the age-set system provides for an open society** in which no one is allocated a particular position for life. Everybody in their time does become old, and therefore gets a chance to hold decisive authority.

2. SLAVE SYSTEM

The **slave system of stratification** does not exist anymore. **Slavery was abolished in 1833 by Britain and in 1865 by the USA.** This was characterised by a high degree of institutionalisation, i.e., there was a solid legal framework to the system. The main emphasis in this system was on economic inequality, which rendered certain groups phenomena, but in reality, the two overlap with each other.

Slavery is **one of the lowest levels in any stratification system**, as they possess virtually no power or wealth of their own.

As in other social stratification systems, the status of one's parents often defines whether or not someone will be put into slavery. However, on a historic level, **slavery has also been used as a punishment for crimes and as a way of controlling those in invaded or enemy territories.**

Modern slaves include those taken as prisoners of war in ethnic conflicts, girls and women captured and kidnapped and used as prostitutes or sex slaves, children sold by their parents to be child labourers, and workers paying off debts who are abused, or even tortured, to the extent that they are unable to leave (**Bales, 2007**).

Even in societies that have **officially outlawed slavery**, the practice continues to have wide-ranging repercussions on socioeconomic standing. For example, some observers believe that a caste system existed in the southern part of the United States until the civil rights movement ended legal racial segregation. Rights, such as the right to vote and to a fair trial, were denied in practice, and lynchings were common for many decades (Litwack, 2009).

The article "**slavery**' in the **Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences (1968)** makes a distinction between primitive, ancient, medieval, and modern slavery. Here we mention only two main types of slavery-ancient slavery and New World slavery. Ancient slavery was prevalent in ancient Rome and Greece. Here, slaves were usually foreign prisoners of war.

In the New World slavery, the basis of the development of slavery was colonial expansion and racist ideology. In this system, the slave was designated as the master's property. The slave had no political or social rights. He or she was compelled to work. Living upon slave labour, the masters formed an aristocracy. It is said that the decline of slavery was primarily brought about by the inefficiency of slave labour

3. CASTE SYSTEM

Caste systems are **closed stratification systems**, meaning that people can do **very little to change the social standing of their birth**. Caste systems determine all aspects of an individual's life, such as appropriate occupations, marriage partners, and housing.

The typical characteristics of the caste system are –

- (i) The membership is hereditary and fixed for life,
- (ii) Each caste is an endogamous group,
- (iii) Social distance is encouraged by the restrictions of contracts and commensality with members of other castes,
- (iv) Caste consciousness is stressed by caste names as well as by conformity to the particular customs of the particular caste, and
- (v) occupational specialization.

Caste operates at two levels:

Firstly in terms of an abstract classification into **four types of 'vama': brahmin** (priests), **Kshatriya** (lunks), **vaishya** (merchants) and **sudra** (workers).

Secondly, at the **operational village level**, there is a division of local communities into groupings called **jati**.

The **rigidity** of this system is unchangeable.

Marginal upward social mobility is possible by a process called **Sanskritization**.

In this process, members of a lower caste adopt the manners and customs of a higher caste, and sever their ties with their original caste.

4. CLASS SYSTEM

The class system of social stratification implies a social hierarchy based primarily upon differences in wealth and income. These differences are expressed in different lifestyles and hence different consumption patterns. As a general type, **class systems are characterised by social mobility** - upward and downward, both intergenerational and intra-generational.

According to **Max Weber**, the dimensions of wealth, power, and lifestyle are crucial in determining class.

It is generally agreed that the **issue of class consciousness** should not be introduced as a definition of the class itself.

Daniel Thorner has identified three classes in the rural countryside in India. These he called the class of 'malik', 'kisan', and 'mazdur', i.e., the proprietors who owned land, the working peasants who owned a small amount of land, and the labour class or mazdurs who did not own any land but worked on other people.

In industrial societies, we find that social classes coexist with status groups.

5. ESTATE SYSTEM

The **estate system**, also known as the **Three Estates**, was a socio-political hierarchy used in many European societies during the **Middle Ages** and **early modern period**, particularly in **France** before the French Revolution. It divided society into three distinct social classes or "estates":

1. First Estate – The Clergy

- **Role:** Religious leaders (bishops, priests, monks).
- **Privileges:**
 - ✓ Owned a significant portion of land (about 10% in pre-revolutionary France).
 - ✓ Exempt from many taxes.
 - ✓ Collected tithes (a form of tax) from the common people.

2. Second Estate – The Nobility

- **Role:** Aristocrats and nobles.
- **Privileges:**
 - ✓ Held high positions in government, military, and the royal court.
 - ✓ Owned about 20–30% of land.
 - ✓ Exempt from most taxes.
 - ✓ Collected dues and rents from the peasantry.

3. Third Estate – The Commoners

- **Role:** Everyone else—peasants, artisans, merchants, and urban workers.
- **Burdened Group:**
 - ✓ Made up about **98%** of the population.
 - ✓ Paid nearly all the taxes.
 - ✓ Had little political power or influence.
 - ✓ Lived under the economic pressures imposed by the First and Second Estates.

Significance:

- ❖ This rigid class structure contributed to widespread inequality and resentment, particularly among the Third Estate.
- ❖ It played a **central role in the causes of the French Revolution (1789)**, when the Third Estate broke away to form the **National Assembly** and demanded more rights and representation.

6. Race and Ethnicity

Race, as a biological concept, refers to a large category of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics - colour of skin, type of hair, facial features, size of head, etc.

Looking at ethnicity, it can be said that whereas race is based on popularly perceived physical traits, ethnicity is based on cultural traits. An ethnic group is thus defined as a common group of people with a common cultural heritage (learned, not inherited).

This group may share a common language, history, national origin, or lifestyle.

STUDYING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION—FROM VARIOUS THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES:

1. Structural Functionalism (Functionalist Perspective)

Aspect	Description
Key Idea	Stratification is necessary and beneficial for society.
Purpose	Ensures that the most qualified people fill the most important roles.
Key Theorists	Kingsley Davis & Wilbert Moore
Criticism	Justifies inequality; overlooks power imbalances and social mobility limitations.

2. Conflict Theory

Aspect	Description
Key Idea	Stratification benefits the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor.
Focus	Class conflict and exploitation.
Key Theorists	Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels
Criticism	Overemphasizes economic factors; may neglect stability and consensus in society.

3. Weberian Approach (Max Weber)

Aspect	Description
Key Idea	Social stratification is multidimensional—not just about class.
Three Components	1. Class (economic) 2. Status (social prestige) 3. Party (power)
Contribution	More nuanced than Marx; highlights social honor and political power.
Criticism	Can be too complex or abstract in practice.

4. Symbolic Interactionism

Aspect	Description
Key Idea	Focuses on how social status is communicated and interpreted in everyday interactions.
Focus	Symbols of wealth, prestige (clothing, speech, behavior).
Key Theorists	Erving Goffman, George H. Mead
Criticism	Lacks analysis of large-scale power structures and economic inequality.

5. Feminist Perspective

Aspect	Description
Key Idea	Stratification must be understood in terms of gender inequalities.
Focus	Patriarchy, gender roles, and women's access to power and resources.
Key Theorists	Judith Butler, Sylvia Walby
Criticism	Sometimes seen as too focused on gender without integrating race or class adequately.

6. Postmodern Perspective

Aspect	Description
Key Idea	Stratification is more fluid and fragmented in the post-industrial world.
Focus	Identity, consumption patterns, and lifestyle choices.
Criticism	Can downplay enduring structural inequalities like class or race.

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