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Q7(a)

Critically evaluate different types of social stratifications with suitable examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 1 · 20 marks · The Nature of Society

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

Core demand of the question

- Describe the types of social stratifications with examples
- Write about 250 words for 20 marks

Revision summary

Stratification is durable structured inequality.

Egalitarian bands limit surplus; ranked chiefdoms give hereditary honour.

Class is relation to production (**Marx**) plus status and party (**Weber**).

Caste ranks endogamous groups by purity and occupation; estates are legal orders.

Slavery, social race, and gender are further axes; types mix in living societies.

Introduction

Social stratification is structured inequality that lasts beyond one lifetime. Types differ by how rank is inherited, justified, and closed. Simple societies are not all equal, but they are not all caste.

Body

Egalitarian and ranked

- **Egalitarian** bands, as among many foragers including parts of **Andaman** life, limit accumulation by sharing and ridicule. Age and sex still differentiate.
- **Ranked** societies give hereditary prestige without sharp economic classes. Trobriand chiefs and **Kachin** gumsa nobles sit above commoners. **Sahlins** contrasted this with Melanesian big-men who earn followings.

Class

- **Marx** defined class by relation to the means of production: owners and labourers. Peasant and landlord, factory owner and worker, are class types.
- **Weber** added status honour and party power. A poor Brahmin may have status without class wealth. Class is not only income.

Caste and estate

- **Caste** in India, as **Dumont** read in *Homo Hierarchicus*, ranks groups by purity and occupation, with endogamy and hereditary status. **Srinivas** stressed mobility through Sanskritisation and dominant caste, against a frozen book-view.

- **Estates** of feudal Europe (clergy, nobility, commoners) were legal ranks. They are a closed, law-written type, not the same as Indian jati.

Slavery, race, and gender

- Slavery and serfdom are extreme closed strata. **Race** as a social hierarchy, in colonial and American colour lines, stratifies without being a biological caste of genes.
- Gender and age stratify inside every type. **Yanomami** village rank and **Nuer** age-sets show that inequality need not be a state class system.

How types mix

- Modern India shows caste, class, and party together. A type is an analytic pole, not a people with only one inequality.

Flow diagram

Stratification -> Egalitarian band
Stratification -> Rank chiefdom
Stratification -> Class Marx Weber
Stratification -> Caste Dumont
Stratification -> Slavery race gender

Conclusion

Stratification runs from sharing bands to rank, class, caste, estate, and slave systems. Examples from Trobriand, Kachin, Nuer, India, and industrial class show the range. **Weber** and **Dumont** name different axes of the same fact of rank.

Facts & figures

Dumont

Treated Indian caste as a hierarchical whole centred on purity, not as a mere class error.

Marx

Class as position in production and as a potential for conflict.

Weber

Class, status, and party as three dimensions of power.

Srinivas

Dominant caste and Sanskritisation showed movement inside a ranked system.