

PATTERNS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND EXCLUSION

Navigating Structure, Power, and Opportunity in Society

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SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Social Inequality
Unequal access to social resources



Economic capital
(money, property)



Cultural capital
(education, skills)



Social capital
(networks, connections)

What is Social About Inequality and Exclusion?

Not about individual differences
Mainly social, not just economic
It is systematic and structured

Social Stratification

Definition: A system in
which categories of
people are ranked in a
hierarchy.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

1

1. Characteristics of Society

Social stratification is a characteristic of society, not simply a function of individual differences. It is a society-wide system that unequally distributes social resources among categories of people.

Example: In a society, some social groups may have greater access to education, wealth and power than others.

It exists because society itself creates patterns of unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

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2. Persists Over Generations

Social stratification persists over generations. It is closely linked to the family and the inheritance of social resources from one generation to the next. A person's social position is often ascribed, meaning children may assume the social positions of their parents.

Example: Within the caste system, birth can influence a person's occupational opportunities. Endogamy, or marriage within the same caste, further reinforces these patterns across generations.

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3. Supported by Patterns of Beliefs and Ideologies

Social stratification is supported by patterns of belief, or ideology. A system of inequality is likely to continue when people see it as fair, natural or inevitable.

Example: The caste system has historically been justified through ideas of purity and pollution. People who enjoy greater social privileges are often more likely to support existing systems of stratification, while those at the bottom are more likely to challenge them.

BARRIERS TO SOCIAL EQUALITY

1. Prejudice

Prejudice is preconceived opinions or attitudes.

It means forming an opinion about a person or group before knowing them or considering evidence. Such attitudes are often based on ideas about caste, class, gender, religion or other social groups.

2. Stereotypes

Fixed and inflexible ideas.

Stereotypes involve generalised ideas about members of a particular social group. They can create and reinforce negative perceptions about particular groups.

3. Discrimination

Refers to actual behaviour towards another individual or group.

Discrimination occurs when prejudiced attitudes are expressed through behaviour or unequal treatment. It can restrict people's access to opportunities, resources and participation in society.

2. SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Social Exclusion is a process in which individuals are cut off from full involvement in wider society. They do not get access to education, health, insurance, social security, banking, etc.

Social exclusion is systematic rather than accidental.

Certain groups have faced long-term exclusion, such as:

Caste

Tribes

Gender

People with physical disabilities

3. CASTE AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

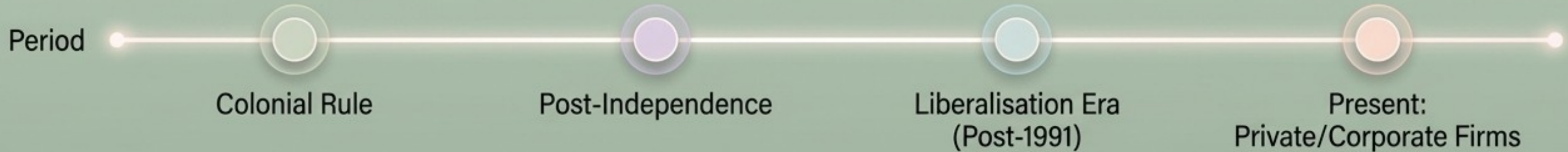
Untouchability

- ◆ Worst form of caste-based exclusion.
- ◆ Denied access to public places like temples, wells, and schools.
- ◆ Forced into degrading, inhuman occupations.
- ◆ Faced extreme humiliation and lived on society's margins.
- ◆ Seen as impure by upper castes and treated as social outcasts.
- ◆ Legal protection: **Article 17 (abolition)**, SC/ST Atrocities Act.
- ◆ Reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Ambedkar, and movements like Dalit Panthers fought against this system.

Other Backward Classes (OBCs)

- ◆ Economically and socially backward, but not untouchables.
- ◆ Faced caste discrimination and lack of access to education & jobs.
- ◆ Often landless, poor, and dependent on upper castes.
- ◆ Politically mobilized post-independence.
- ◆ Identified by Kelelkar and Mandal Commissions.
- ◆ Mandal Commission led to reservations in jobs & education (27%).
- ◆ Important votebank, often used by political parties for caste-based politics.

4. STRUGGLES OF ADIVASIS



Adivasis and Social Exclusion

Scheduled Tribes are recognised by the Indian Constitution as groups marked by poverty, powerlessness and social stigma.

Adivasis traditionally had a close relationship with forests and land, which formed the basis of their economic and social life.

During colonial rule, forest policies restricted their traditional rights over forests and forest produce.

After Independence, mining, dams, industries and other development projects led to large-scale displacement from their lands.

Loss of forests and land resulted in insecurity, poverty and migration for wage labour.

Liberalisation made it easier for corporate firms to acquire large areas of land, further increasing the threat of displacement.

Adivasi Identity and Struggles

The term Adivasi literally means 'original inhabitants'.

The term also represents political awareness and assertion of rights.

Adivasi struggles have focused on forests, land, displacement, resources and cultural identity.

Many tribal groups have struggled against outsiders, called 'dikus', and against the state.

Major Achievements of Adivasis

Creation of separate states (e.g., Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh)

Constitutional provisions (Fifth & Sixth Schedule)

Forest Rights Act, 2006

Increased political participation

Cultural revival & assertion of identity

5. WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY AND RIGHTS

Basic Idea:

Women are considered biologically weaker, but not socially or economically. Their oppression is due to patriarchal mindset and social customs.

Major Social Reformers for Women's Upliftment

M. G. Ranade
Jyotiba Phule
Syed Ahmed Khan
Raja Rammohun Roy

Tarabai Shinde Stree Purush Tulana (1882)

Written by Tarabai Shinde, a Maharashtrian housewife.

It was a protest against the double standards of a male-dominated society.

The immediate context was the case of a young Brahmin widow who was sentenced to death after giving birth to an illegitimate child. No effort was made to identify or punish the man who had fathered the child.

Through her writing, Tarabai Shinde questioned the unequal standards applied to women and men.

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain Sultana's Dream (1905)

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain wrote Sultana's Dream in 1905. It is a short story and an early example of science fiction writing in India.

Sultana dreams of a magical country where gender roles are reversed. Men are confined to the home and observe 'purdah'. Women are scientists and are involved in inventions and scientific developments. They develop devices to control clouds and regulate rain and even machines that fly, or 'air-cars'.

Through this imagined world, the story questions conventional gender roles and presents an alternative social order.

6. DIFFERENTLY ABLED (Physically & Mentally Challenged)

Key Features

- Biological or accidental causes.
- Often blamed on karma or fate.
- Seen as victims, but many are socially independent.
- Society shows pity instead of support.
- Stereotyped in psychological manners as negative characters.
- Everything they do is linked to their disability.
- Society assumes they always need help.

Disability as a Social Issue

Differently abled people are not disabled only because of physical or mental impairment.

Society itself can create disability when buildings, institutions and social arrangements do not cater to their needs.

Lack of accessibility affects education, employment, social life and participation in society.

Disability and Poverty

There is a close relationship between disability and poverty.

Poverty can increase the incidence of disability through factors such as malnutrition, inadequate healthcare and unsafe living conditions.

At the same time, disability can create and deepen poverty by increasing isolation and economic strain.

The economic burden may affect not only the individual but also the entire family.

Thus, disability and poverty can reinforce each other.

Recent Changes & Demands

- Awareness is growing.
- Facilities: ramps, lifts, parking, bathrooms in public places.
- Special schools for differently abled, but they want integration.
- Skill, many places like hospitals etc., but they want integration.
- Parents and users have pushed for change, but efforts are insufficient.

MCQs — Competitive/Concept-Based (Part 1)

1. Consider the following statements about social stratification:

It involves a hierarchical arrangement of social categories.

It is entirely based on individual differences in ability and effort.

It tends to persist across generations.

It is supported by social beliefs and ideologies.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

A. 1, 3 and 4 only B. 1 and 2 only C. 2, 3 and 4 only D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

2. A child born into a socially disadvantaged caste may experience limited access to education and employment opportunities despite having the same individual capabilities as others. This situation best illustrates:

A. Individual inequality alone B. Socially structured inequality D. Temporary economic inequality

3. Which one of the following best distinguishes prejudice, stereotype and discrimination?

A. Prejudice is behaviour, stereotype is inequality, and discrimination is belief.

B. Prejudice is a preconceived attitude, stereotype is a fixed idea, and discrimination is actual behaviour.

C. Prejudice and discrimination are identical, while stereotypes are always positive.

D. Stereotypes are legal practices, whereas prejudice is always economic.

MCQs — Competitive/Concept-Based (Part 2)

4. Consider the following situations:

A community is denied entry into certain public spaces because of its caste.

A person believes that members of a particular group are naturally inferior.

A society repeatedly associates a particular group with a fixed set of characteristics.

Which sequence correctly identifies these situations?

A. Stereotype – Prejudice – Discrimination

B. Discrimination – Prejudice – Stereotype

C. Prejudice – Discrimination – Stereotype

D. Discrimination – Stereotype – Prejudice

5. The long-term exclusion experienced by Adivasis cannot be understood merely as an issue of poverty because:

A. Adivasis have never experienced economic disadvantages.

B. Their exclusion is also connected with land, forests, resources, identity and political marginalisation.

C. Their problems are exclusively cultural. D. Their social position is determined only by individual choices.

6. Tarabai Shinde's Stri Purush Tulana and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's Sultana's Dream can both be understood as challenges to:

A. The idea of universal adult franchise B. Patriarchal assumptions about women's social position

C. The reservation system for disadvantaged groups D. The process of industrialisation

7. Consider the following statement: “Disability may increase the likelihood of poverty, while poverty may simultaneously increase the disadvantages associated with disability.” Which concept does this most clearly demonstrate?

- A. A purely biological explanation of disability
- B. The interaction between social disadvantage and disability
- C. The disappearance of social inequality
- D. Individual responsibility for social exclusion

ANSWERS

1. A — Statements 1, 3 and 4 are correct. Social stratification is hierarchical, persists over generations and is supported by social beliefs/ideologies.	4. B — Denial of access is discrimination; belief in inferiority is prejudice; fixed association with characteristics is a stereotype.
2. B — The example demonstrates socially structured inequality, because opportunities are shaped by social position rather than individual ability alone.	5. B — Adivasi exclusion involves broader issues such as control over land and forests, displacement, resources, identity and political marginalisation.
3. B — Prejudice = preconceived attitude; stereotype = fixed/generalised idea; discrimination = actual behaviour or unequal treatment.	6. B — Both works challenged prevailing patriarchal assumptions and questioned the subordinate position assigned to women.
4. B — Denial of access is discrimination; belief in inferiority is prejudice; fixed association with characteristics is a stereotype.	7. B — Disability and poverty can reinforce one another, producing a cycle of social disadvantage and exclusion.

QUESTION-ANSWERS (Analytical / Exam-Oriented) – Part 1

Q1. Why is social inequality considered a structural phenomenon rather than merely a result of individual differences?

Answer: Social inequality is structural because unequal access to resources and opportunities is built into social institutions and patterns. Factors such as caste, class, gender and social background can influence access to education, employment, property, healthcare and other resources. Therefore, inequality cannot always be explained by individual ability or effort alone.

Q2. Explain how social stratification can persist across generations.

Answer: Social stratification persists across generations because social advantages and disadvantages are often transmitted from parents to children. Families may pass on property, education, cultural knowledge, social networks and occupational opportunities. Similarly, disadvantaged social positions can also be inherited through social practices and institutional barriers. Thus, inequality may reproduce itself over generations.

QUESTION-ANSWERS (Analytical / Exam-Oriented) – Part 2

Q3. How are prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination related to one another?

Answer: These three concepts represent different dimensions of social inequality and exclusion. Prejudice refers to preconceived opinions or attitudes towards a person or group. Stereotypes are fixed and generalised ideas about a particular group. Discrimination occurs when such attitudes or beliefs are expressed through actual behaviour or unequal treatment. They can reinforce one another and contribute to the continuation of social exclusion.

Q4. Why has caste-based untouchability been regarded as an extreme form of social exclusion?

Answer: Untouchability historically involved the exclusion of certain caste groups from public places and social interaction. People subjected to untouchability were denied access to resources and institutions such as temples, wells and schools and were often forced into degrading occupations. The Indian Constitution abolished untouchability through Article 17, while various laws and social movements have sought to eliminate caste-based discrimination.

QUESTION-ANSWERS (Analytical / Exam-Oriented) – Part 3

Q5. How did women reformers and writers challenge patriarchal ideas?

Answer: Women reformers and writers challenged the assumption that women's subordinate position was natural or biologically determined.

Tarabai Shinde, through *Stri Purush Tulana* (1882), questioned prevailing gender norms and criticised the unequal moral standards applied to women and men.

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, through *Sultana's Dream* (1905), imagined a society in which women exercised greater freedom and men were confined to the domestic sphere. Her work also highlighted the importance of women's education.

Both challenged the social and cultural foundations of women's inequality.

QUESTION-ANSWERS (Analytical / Exam-Oriented) – Part 4

Q6. Why should disability be understood in relation to social conditions such as poverty?

Answer: Disability is not experienced only as an individual or physical condition. Social and economic conditions can determine the opportunities available to differently-abled people. Poverty may restrict access to education, healthcare, assistive devices, transportation and suitable employment. At the same time, disability can reduce employment opportunities and increase economic dependence. Thus, poverty and disability can reinforce each other and deepen social exclusion.

Q7. Why is social exclusion different from simply having fewer economic resources?

Answer: Social exclusion is broader than economic deprivation. It refers to a process through which individuals or groups are prevented from participating fully in wider society and from accessing institutions and resources such as education, healthcare, banking, social security and public spaces. A group may therefore experience exclusion through social, cultural, political and institutional barriers, even when the issue cannot be reduced to income alone.