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Patterns of Social Inequality and Exclusion

Social inequality and exclusion are persistent features of society that affect groups rather than individuals. These phenomena are systematic and structured, not merely economic, though economic factors are often linked. Social inequality refers to unequal access to social resources such as money, property, education, health, and power. It is expressed through three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social.

What is social inequality?

Social inequality means unequal access to social resources among different groups in society.

Exam Question: What are the three forms of capital that explain social inequality?

Answer: Economic capital (material assets and income), cultural capital (educational qualifications and status), and social capital (networks of contacts and social associations).

Social Stratification

Social stratification is a system that ranks categories of people in a hierarchy based on characteristics such as ethnicity, language, caste, and disability. It is a societal characteristic that persists over generations and is supported by ideology. Social exclusion and discrimination extend beyond economic differences and include factors like gender, religion, and caste.

What are the key principles of social stratification?

It is a characteristic of society, persists over generations, and is supported by ideology.

Exam Question: How does social stratification differ from individual differences?

Answer: Social stratification is a system embedded in society ranking groups, whereas individual differences are personal traits not related to social hierarchy.

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion refers to the ways individuals or groups are cut off from full participation in society. It is involuntary and results in lack of access to essential goods and services like education, health, and security. Groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, women, differently abled, and third gender people often face social exclusion.

What factors contribute to social exclusion?

Factors include lack of access to essential services, prolonged discrimination, and social stigma.

Exam Question: Name some groups that have suffered from social exclusion in India.

Answer: Dalits, Adivasis, women, differently abled persons, and third gender individuals.

The Caste System as a Discriminatory System

The caste system in India classifies people into a hierarchy based on birth and occupation, legitimizing discrimination against certain castes. Although the correlation between caste and economic status is weakening, caste continues to influence life opportunities.

How does the caste system enforce discrimination?

By ranking people by birth and occupation, it legitimizes unequal treatment and restricts opportunities for lower castes.

Exam Question: What is the relationship between caste and economic status?

Answer: There is a close correlation between caste and economic status, though it is becoming weaker over time.

Untouchability

Untouchability is a social practice that excludes certain castes from the caste hierarchy, subjecting them to exclusion, humiliation, and exploitation. It is a pan-Indian phenomenon with regional variations. Terms like 'Harijan' and 'Dalit' have been used to refer to these groups.

What are the three dimensions of untouchability?

Exclusion, humiliation-subordination, and exploitation.

Exam Question: What terms are used to refer to the so-called 'untouchables'?

Answer: 'Harijan' coined by Mahatma Gandhi meaning 'children of God' and 'Dalit' coined by ex-untouchables and their leaders.

State and Non-state Initiatives Addressing Caste and Tribe Discrimination

Various state initiatives like reservations in legislatures, government services, and educational institutions aim to improve the status of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled

Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Laws such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and Article 17 of the Constitution abolish untouchability. Political organizations also play a role in addressing caste discrimination.

What is the purpose of reservations in India?

To set aside seats for SCs, STs, and OBCs in public life proportional to their population to ensure representation and opportunities.

Exam Question: Name two laws that protect Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Answer: Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 and Article 17 of the Constitution.

Other Backward Classes

OBCs are socially and educationally backward groups, often service and artisan castes, not part of forward castes or Dalits. The Mandal Commission report in 1990 highlighted their need for affirmative action. OBCs are diverse and face disparities in landholding, political representation, and urban conditions.

Who are the Other Backward Classes?

Groups of castes that are socially and educationally backward but not Dalits or forward castes.

Exam Question: What was the significance of the Mandal Commission?

Answer: It identified OBCs and recommended reservations to improve their social and educational status.

Adivasi Struggles

Adivasis or Scheduled Tribes are recognized as socially and economically disadvantaged. They have faced ecological isolation, loss of forest rights due to British policies, displacement from land for development projects, and economic challenges. The term 'Adivasi' means original inhabitants and reflects their shared experiences.

What challenges do Adivasis face?

Loss of forest rights, displacement due to development projects, poverty, and social stigma.

Exam Question: What does the term 'Adivasi' mean?

Answer: It means 'original inhabitants' and refers to tribal groups in India.

The Struggle for Women's Equality and Rights

Gender inequality is a social construct with specific features. Women's rights movements in India began in the 19th century with social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotiba Phule. Key reforms included anti-sati campaigns and widow remarriage movements. Women's issues resurfaced in the 1970s and 1980s with legal reforms addressing violence and discrimination. New challenges continue in the 21st century.

Who were some early social reformers advocating women's rights?

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, M.G. Ranade, Jyotiba Phule, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan.

Exam Question: What were some key women's rights issues addressed in the 1980s?

Answer: Custodial rape, dowry, murder, media representation, and unequal development.

The Struggles of the Differently Abled

Society often does not accommodate the needs of differently abled persons. Disability is commonly viewed as a biological deficit, leading to victimization and stigma. There is a close link between disability and poverty, and recognition of disability issues in education and public discourse has been limited.

How is disability commonly perceived in society?

As a biological deficit and a characteristic of the individual, often leading to victimization and stigma.

Exam Question: What is the relationship between disability and poverty?

Answer: There is a close relationship; poverty can exacerbate the challenges faced by disabled persons.

Glossary

- **Social Stratification:** A system ranking people in a hierarchy.
- **Prejudices:** Preconceived opinions about groups.
- **Stereotype:** Fixed characterizations of groups.
- **Discrimination:** Practices that exclude groups from opportunities.
- **Social Exclusion:** Being cut off from full societal participation.
- **Apartheid:** Racial segregation policy in South Africa.
- **Gender:** Socially constructed differences between men, women, and non-binary people.
- **Third Gender:** Social category for persons neither male nor female.

Quick Reference

- Social inequality involves unequal access to resources.
- Social stratification ranks groups hierarchically.
- Social exclusion prevents full participation in society.
- Caste system enforces discrimination based on birth.
- Untouchability is a form of social exclusion.
- Reservations and laws aim to reduce caste discrimination.
- OBCs are socially and educationally backward groups.
- Adivasis face displacement and poverty.
- Women's rights movements have a long history in India.
- Differently abled persons face social stigma and exclusion.

Solved Examples

Example 1:

Question: Explain the three forms of capital related to social inequality.

Answer: Economic capital refers to material assets and income; cultural capital includes educational qualifications and social status; social capital involves networks of contacts and social associations.

Example 2:

Question: What are the main features of the caste system as a discriminatory system?

Answer: The caste system ranks people by birth and occupation, legitimizes discrimination, correlates with economic status, and affects life chances despite efforts to suppress it.

Practice Set

Easy

- Define social exclusion.
- What is untouchability?
- Name two social reformers who worked for women's rights.

Moderate

- Explain the significance of the Mandal Commission.
- Describe the challenges faced by Adivasis in India.
- What are the three dimensions of untouchability?

Challenging

- Discuss how social stratification persists over generations.
- Analyze the impact of state initiatives on caste discrimination.
- Explain the social construction of gender and its implications for inequality.

Answer Key

- **Social exclusion:** Ways individuals or groups are cut off from full participation in society.
- **Untouchability:** Social sanctions against certain castes considered impure.
- **Social reformers:** Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule.
- **Mandal Commission:** Identified OBCs and recommended reservations.
- **Adivasi challenges:** Loss of land, displacement, poverty.
- **Dimensions of untouchability:** Exclusion, humiliation, exploitation.
- **Social stratification persistence:** Ascribed status and ideology support it.
- **State initiatives:** Reservations, laws, and political movements.
- **Gender social construction:** Differences created by society, leading to inequality.

Time Period / Year	Event / Change	Importance
1828	Formation of Brahmo Samaj	Early social reform movement addressing women's rights
1850	Caste Disabilities Removal Act	Legal step against caste discrimination
1935	Listing of Scheduled Castes and Tribes	Official recognition of disadvantaged groups
1953	Kalelkar Commission report on Backward Classes	First official report on OBCs
1989	Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act	Legal protection against atrocities
1990	Implementation of Mandal Commission report	Reservation for OBCs in public employment and education