UNIT 11: EDUCATION AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

UNIT STRUCTURE

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11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- know the meaning of social stratification
- understand how the system of social stratification perpetuates inequality

11.2 INTRODUCTION

Before we begin to understand the process of stratification in terms of education, we must first understand what the concept social stratification means. Stratification in general means division of people into different groups or categories. Social stratification thus means how different groups of people are categorized or placed within the society. However in this process the differentiation amidst different sections of people is done in a hierarchical order based on certain demarcation such as economic wealth, political power, gender and social status. This indicates that the different groups of people are divided hierarchically based on these criterion, would get differential treatments from the society based on their status in the society.

11.3 UNDERSTANDING STRATIFICATION IN EDUCATION SYSTEM:

The myth of education as equal for all persists still in public and academic discourse and the policies, research and actions are shaped keeping this myth in mind. There is a huge gap between what the state sponsored education promises to give and what it actually delivers. Because there exist huge inequalities that prevail in access, retention, performance and outcome of education to the oppressed sections and the rest of the society. The distribution of educational opportunities has followed emergent patterns of social differentiation and social inequalities in the country. This pattern which is indeterminate and fluid, represents the complex interaction and interweaving of the traditional as well as the newly evolving conceptions of status that comes out of the structures of caste, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity and so on. The state though focuses on mass education through democratization, yet it is to be mentioned that it has still to be properly implemented in the remote, interior regions mostly populated by the sections of the society who are historically underprivileged.

Only when one looks at the role of education in the society, historically, contextually and relationally, only then can one understand the stratification process going in it in its truest sense. It must be looked at as how a society selects, classifies evaluates and transmits educational knowledge, by looking at both the distribution of power and principles of social control. The structures and the ideologies of domination and power, of politics and economy must be looked at to see how the education system works in an unequal and hierarchical society.

However it must be mentioned that even those who see the failings of the system and critique it, yet seek the solution for these existing inequalities, through policy change and reforms within the existing sociopolitical framework. Education is not a platform that is dominated by consensus, but instead is filled with ideological conflicts. Furthermore the government has been successful partially in disseminating education only up to the primary and middle school level. Higher education is still not so

much a part of the government system and in this field the private agencies gain predominance. This spread of private education also dwells upon and serves vested interests.

- **Stratification practiced within the school:**

School is the entry point, where a child first learns the formal ways of life and knows how to fit into the whole wide world through the process of socialisation. It equips them with guidelines as to how to be in their life as an adult. Through rigorous and continuous training through school curriculum, daily interactions and practices, and other forms of schooling the child learns the ways of life and develops the attitude needed to grow up as expected. Though education received in the informal settings, like through the family, peer-group interactions plays a role in imbibing certain virtues, yet it is the school that plays the greatest role in shaping ones mindset as it is where the child goes with the specific purpose of learning. It is in school that the child gets to know and learn about the role it has to play in the society and often to play multiple roles. For instance, here one is taught how to be a good son/daughter, a good father/mother, a good citizen. One learns the rules and regulations of the society and the idea to conform to it. One is taught the dos and don'ts of the society and the rewards and punishments when one follows it or goes against it. The role of education thus lays in maintaining and renewal of the social structure, retaining a few and eliminating a few in the course of time and span.



LET US KNOW

Socialisation is the process by which an individual learns to internalise the norms and ideologies of the society and learns to behave accordingly.

There has also been the tendency to understand differences in school attainment by concentrating on the process of socialisation within the homes, to the virtual exclusion of what goes on in the schools. To understand the differences, the school curriculum itself and the internal

processes of schooling has to be scrutinized. Schools as institutions embody collective traditions and human intentions that are the products of identifiable social and economic ideologies. The curriculum in school responds to and represents ideological and cultural resources that come from somewhere. However it must also be remembered and we must retrospect that not all groups' meanings are responded to or represented. Historically certain social meanings accepted by majority over the years become school meanings and thus possess the weights of acceptance behind them. This formation of meaning, of the school curriculum has its roots in the social control.Knowledge thus imparted is a conscious decision of what should be taught as to shape the minds of the children, and the form of knowledge to be thus imparted has to be sanctioned by the interests of the dominant section of the society.

Just as there is social distribution of cultural capital in society, in a similar way, there is a social distribution of knowledge within classrooms. Since the school is the only major institution that stands between the family and the labour market, thus it is not unexpected that historically and currently, certain social meanings that have got differential benefits are distributed in schools. The main function of schooling thus stands as the reproduction of dominant ideologies and their forms of knowledge, and the distribution of knowledge and skills in a manner that will reproduce social inequality.

The question of inequality in research is an important one going on for some time, yet research related to it takes into account inequalities only in terms of access and achievement depending on the socio-cultural background of the learners. The question that the education system itself might be responsible for bringing about as well as maintaining the inequality is not being looked at. It must also be looked that apart from sustaining and consolidating the existing historical educational advantages and disadvantages, the education policies on its part also create new divisions and hierarchies leading to new difficulties.

- **Types of stratification in education :**

If we look in terms of reproduction of inequality through educational process, three strands are worth mentioning. The first developed mostly by Bowles and Gintis is the economic-reproductive model that says how schooling functions to inculcate in students attitudes and dispositions that are required to legitimise the dominant-subordinate relationships in the economic sphere. The second one, cultural-reproductive, propounded and developed mainly by Bourdieu states the role of culture in the creation of class societies and attempts to show how schools plays a critical role in legitimizing and reproducing the cultural capital of the dominant strata. The third strand is the one formulated by Gramsci, the hegemonic-state reproductive model that states the role of state in a capitalist society, which seeks to analyse and understand the role of state intervention in shaping the reproductive functions of education.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- A

1. What are the major ways through which inequality is practiced in educational institutions?

In recent years, research on the social, economic and the ideological role that the educational apparatus plays has led to the formation of three key functions that schools are considered to be engaged in. These are- A) Accumulation- Schools assist in the process of capital accumulation by providing some of the necessary conditions for re-creating an unequally responsive economy. This is done by sorting and categorizing students on the basis of 'talent' and achievement. Students thus ordered on the basis of this division are taught different skills, values, knowledge, norms and dispositions according to their considered capacity. This leads to their growing up as being prepared to be what they are supposed to be. B) Legitimacy- Schools acts as a source of legitimation, in the sense that it forms a part of the complex structure where certain social-groups are given legitimacy and through which social and cultural ideologies are re-created,

maintained and carried forward. However the role of school in terms of providing legitimation does not end here by making our socio-economic system seem natural. It must also legitimise itself from those who are being governed. C) Production- Finally our education apparatus as a whole constitutes all important sets of agencies for production.

As a result of the political rhetoric and social propaganda of spreading education amidst the masses, the space of education remain as a neutral one in the general public eye, as one not composed of any injustice or inequalities. The myth of merit and achievement upheld as the factor to judge one and supposedly neutral for all, holds its own ascription based foundation and practices and are basically reserved for those who have a good cultural as well as economic capital. The notion of merit becomes the tool to remove protective discrimination policies and its beneficiaries. However it is the dominant ideology that goes into the shaping of this merit, the attribute that is considered as true knowledge, which is easily achievable by those dominant sections. For instance, focus will be on 'pure' language, elite subjects, etc. to which the children belonging to the dominant strata are already familiar with. The concern should be not merely with the knowledge that is being imparted but with the 'hidden curriculum'- normative and dispositional elements that maintain the ideological hegemony of the powerful elements in terms of serving their economic and other interests. Thus it must be looked at how and why some social meanings are considered as knowledge as opposed to others in the organization of school life.

There is a dialectical relationship between access to power and the opportunity to legitimise certain dominant categories, and the process by which the availability of such categories to some groups enable them to assert power and control over others. The fact that certain traditions and normative content are constructed as school knowledge is prima facie evidence of their perceived legitimacy. Thus educational deprivation, failure and low achievements are inbuilt in the education system. From this we can know that low level of achievement or effective exclusion does not

reflect learning. The problem of educational knowledge, of what is taught in schools, has to be considered as a form of the larger distribution of good and services in the society. Scholars have mentioned that in any educational system, there are both manifest and latent "functions". These functions need to be understood not only in the educational term but in the politico-economic terms.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-B

What constitutes as knowledge in the school curriculum?

11.4 STRATIFICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM:

In its resolution on national policy in education, the Government of India concurs with the report of the education commission (1964-66) that states that "the destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms". By looking at this line, one can imagine the massive responsibility bestowed upon education to shape India, and the role that educational institutions play in this regard subsequently. Looking in the context of India, we can see how the dominant ideologies and interests that remain ingrain basically in the structures of caste, class and patriarchy in relation with the global capitalist economy of contemporary times, finds its expression through the state and shapes educational development, dynamics and expansion. With their influence coming into play, the structure, content and process of education now acts as the mediator of political and ideological ideas.

- **Stratification through a historical glance:**

In the Indian history of education, with the coming of the colonial model of education the other indigenous systems of education were done away with. The colonial rulers tried to maintain a religious neutral educational scheme and on its place introduced one based on the traditional social order, i.e. caste. The post- independence period marked by nationalism,

nation-building and national development found its expression to be manifested through education. There was a revolutionisation of education with special focus on industrialization and thus creating a scientific and rational temper. The architects of this new education system were again the section who had power in the colonial times- predominantly all upper caste. The form and structure of the educational system was thus controlled and designed by the interests and values of the dominant section those who had access to the state as well as educational policies. Efforts on education was an important agenda during the nationalist movement to uplift the downtrodden ones specially withered away.

The coming of the new liberal values too strengthened and propagated the old cultural system of domination of one group over the underprivileged ones, rather than generating, creating and nurturing talents from those historically oppressed. The global-capitalist economy also brought about a sea change in the educational ideas. Privatization has been in the demand for all sections of the society, its recipient quality level depends on one's capital. These gives opportunity to different interest groups to expand as well as legitimize their hegemony. Thus it must be observed that how in this age of economic liberalization, education contributes to the dominant social relations of society along sex, caste and class lines in the labour market.The global-capitalist economy also brought about a sea change in the educational ideas. Privatization has been in the demand for all sections of the society, its recipient quality level depends on one's capital. These gives opportunity to different interest groups to expand as well as legitimize their hegemony.



11.5 LETS SUM UP:

- Education thus helps in maintaining the hierarchical social system and also serves as its chief legitimizer.
- In the contemporary environment where educational needs and demands are increasingly dictated by international market forces

and imperialist designs, national goals and the constitution itself are under threat by reactionary forces, and there is growing state repression of any counter voice, the problems of the oppressed, both educational and others, seemed destined to intensify.

- Overall the school practices inequality through the following ways by denying the basic minimum facilities to those who are at a disadvantageous position and in turn protecting and promoting the interests of a few dominant minority.
- The school curriculum favours 'technocratic rationality' and 'high status' knowledge that serves the interests and needs of the capitalist economy.
- This support falls to the advantage of the upper strata or the dominant strata of the society as they are already at an advantageous position in terms of knowledge to cope with this form of curriculum.
- This form of curriculum also glorifies mental labour and looks down upon manual labour.
- The imposition of the knowledge, values, norms, linguistic style, world-views and meanings of the dominant sections of the society is being done in the school curriculum.
- This imposition of one particular form of knowledge makes that particular form superior and as the ideal type, while relegating the knowledge of other subordinated sections.
- Segregation among students takes place on the basis of caste, class and gender by providing one specific opportunities and experiences based on their position.
- For instance, boys from the lower strata are channeled to 'low status' knowledge streams and activities that will resonate with their anticipated future.
- Similarly the myth of female inferiority looms over and is legitimized by bifurcating between knowledge 'appropriate' to be studied by girls.
- This channeling actually takes place at the post-secondary level but schools function as preparatory space.