UNIT 1 PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

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Structure

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Understanding social structure helps us look beyond ‘individuals’, ‘issues’ and ‘events’ into the patterns of relationships between social groups and social classes. It will enable us to understand the factors behind individual and collective actions of human beings. An engagement with social structure guides us as we explore human behaviour and actions. Are these driven by individual will or by social structure, relations culture and their inter-relationship? Theoretical frameworks and perspectives on social structure and systems equip us to analyse societies and to examine why and how hierarchies and inequalities are replicated and perpetuated.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

At the end of the unit you will be able to:

- Explain what is meant by social structure and social processes;
- Define the concepts of structure, agency, culture and stratification, and differentiate between them;
• Explain the linkages and fissures between structure and social process;

and

• Discuss gender as structure and explain the gendering of social processes.

1.3 WHAT IS SOCIAL STRUCTURE?

While the structure of buildings and the skeletal structure of animals can be identified easily, the structure of a society is more difficult to recognise. We can begin our explorations into social structure by looking at organisations. Organisational structures are real as each layer in the organization is operating within a set of rules. The distribution of power, responsibility, authority and accountability is consciously planned and designed. The fact that there are vertical/hierarchical layers and horizontal platforms is graphically illustrated by organograms which depict departments and designations. This structure is also experienced by all in the organisation in the form of rules and norms, opportunities and constraints, rights and responsibilities, power and powerlessness. More importantly, these gridlines and their impact can be empirically verified by indicators even though the structure is abstract and invisible.

Social structures are similar in many ways - they are socially constructed and evolve over time (and even become timeless). Social structure has been defined in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* as “a pattern, i.e. an observable uniformity, in terms of which action (or operations) takes place...which are abstractions from concrete empirical phenomena...”. The importance of social structure lies in the power of the structures to constrain and limit actions and behaviour of individuals and groups and thus can shape enduring patterns of social relations.

In society there are multiple differences and commonalities between its structures. For instance, differences and commonalities among people can be of class, language, occupation, religion, caste/race, gender and these constitute categories or social groups. The manner in which groups/categories are delineated is the axis or basis of differentiation.

To unravel social structure, we need to understand the process of stratification which in a simplistic way refers to the ordering and/or layering of a society. Which categories and groups are placed where and why in the ‘social order’ is the essence of stratification. It is often assumed that stratification is the same as ‘hierarchy’, even though hierarchical arrangements are only one kind of stratification. Categories can be arranged horizontally as well as vertically (like in petals of a flower). For example, those who speak different languages need not necessarily be in a vertical hierarchy. Ordering of their social difference can also be horizontal.
If one thinks about this deeply we come to a point where we ask whether behaviour and actions lead to structure or whether structure shapes actions and behaviour. That brings us to the concept of agency- the capacity of individuals to make informed choices and act on their own volition. Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998) help us understand the various dimensions of agency and the ways in which human beings interpret past experiences, challenge, experiment and debate their actions and shape ‘agentic orientations’.

While some sociologists believe that human beings act on their own free will, and shape society, others have argued that choices and alternatives and their interpretations, are shaped and determined by social structures. Durkheim and many other sociological thinkers have spoken about structure and action. Durkheim argued, society is beyond the sum of individuals and it has firmness and solidity like structures in the physical environment. Social structure is external to us and it posses the power to constraint the individual’s action (Giddens, 2006, p. 106-107). Anthony Giddens (1989) highlighted the idea of duality of structure as doing both. He describes structure as ‘emerging from’ and ‘determining’ actions and relations between individuals, groups and within groups. The workers inability to bargain with the employer makes him/her more vulnerable and locks them into a pattern where one is repeatedly privileged and the other disadvantaged in a recursive pattern.

Activity:

Think about people around you - their dreams and their aspirations. Can a worker really bargain with his/her employer? Can a black woman in south Africa have a white maid? Can a woman order her husband to cook dinner? Can a poor girl insist that her parents send her to college? Do you see social structures constraining behaviour and actions/options in these examples? Identity which groups/categories are privileged and which disadvantaged?
1.4 SOCIAL STRUCTURE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND CONCEPTS

The term social structure was first used by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 while studying the emergence of democracy in America. Understanding society and social structure has come a long way since then. From seeing society as an evolving organism, efforts to engage with society’s form, nature, structure and functioning and social change have all been conceptualized through distinct phases. Sociological thinkers associated with different schools of thought such as: functionalism, structuralism, and post-structuralism have highlighted different ways of looking at society and social structure. Let us discuss these major theoretical frameworks in the following section.

Functionalism addressed society as a whole in terms of the function, role and necessity of its constituent elements; namely its norms, customs, traditions and institutions. It asks the following questions: how society has an order, how does it distribute members in social positions and how it induces them to perform duties prescribed to that position. Functionalist theorists provided important insights into social structure and some believed that social practices could be directly explained by their ability to satisfy basic biological needs. However, fallacies of functionalism were pointed out by Robert K. Merton (1957) while drawing attention to dysfunction, change in socio-cultural systems, manifest and latent functions of groups (Giddens, 2006).

Structuralism as a school of thought focused on the social form that produces and reproduces meaning within a culture. Karl Marx, who highlighted social class, historical materialism and the theory of social conflict, argued that society consisted of a base and a superstructure. According to Marx, the base is the forces and relations of productions, work conditions, division of labour and property/production relations. In his thesis, these material relations determine and govern the superstructure which includes its culture, institutions, political power structures, roles, rituals, art, philosophy and the state protects, supports and reinforces the base structure.

A little later in 1893, Émile Durkheim studying social cohesion in an era of new social, political and cultural institutions wrote about the Division of Labour in Society. According to him, the division of labour determines how different parts of society maintain social equilibrium through a mechanical and organic solidarity.

Radcliffe-Brown (1952), the anthropologist, who developed the theory of structural functionalism distinguished between culture and structure, forms and effects of a society and defined structure as the sum total of all social
relationships, and culture of a society due to its standardised mode of behaviour, thinking and feeling. He approached social structure as an empirical reality existing at a single moment of time. Fortes, Evans Pritchard, Firth and Nadel also followed this tradition and acknowledge the inseparability of culture and social structure.

In the 20th century, much writing on social structure was influenced by Marx as well as by work of social anthropologist Levi-Strauss (1969) who studied structures in relation to Kinship and Myth. Max Weber (1976) for instance, argued that society comprised of four classes the upper class, white collar workers, petit bourgeoisie and manual working class. He distinguished between ‘social class’ based on material wealth and ‘status class’ based on power and prestige and drew attention to three key components of social stratification- class, status and power.

Gradually structure came to be seen in categories other than ‘class’. Within women’s studies, the interrelations between gender, race and ethnicity have been debated in the light of social structures. At the same time, structuralism itself came under attack in the 1980s as some argued that empirical verification of theory was lacking and others highlighted the reductionist and deterministic focus on structure, rather than on people’s capacity to act. Post-structuralists like Foucault and Derrida have argued that constructing knowledge either on pure experience (phenomenology) or systematic structures (structuralism) is neither liberating nor possible and suggested for the use of multiple perspectives and the possibility of multifaceted interpretations depending on the reader’s social positioning. Moving away from common binaries used to analyse structure like male/female, black/white and dominant/subordinate, they have used deconstruction theory to show how these categories are continuously formed and how they relate to each other.

In an age of new social movements based on identity, ‘structural identity’ is a concept that has been elaborated by Iris Marion Young (2005) who distinguishes between identities and affiliations /interest groups, argues that identity is much more complex subject. Social structures position individuals “in relations of labor and productivity, power and subordination, desire and sexuality, prestige and status” (2005, p. 20).

All these ideas and concepts are crucial to understanding social structure today. Increasing rate of crime and deviance, continuous poverty and inequalities, emerging pattern of social relations are all related to social structure which continues to be studied and theorized. In the present day, engagement with the structure is focused on subordination of women and their marginalization. Alienation of specific ethnic groups, races, religious communities, occupations, sexual minorities and the discussion on disablism are the new areas of enquiry in relation to social structure.
1.5 INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN CASTE, CLASS, ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

The study of Indian social structure has been guided by sociologists from different schools of thought. From Indologists to structural functionalists to Marxist Sociologists and finally, post-structuralists, the study of Indian society through its social institutions and the link between Indian structure and culture have drawn much attention. Indological approach played a vital role by drawing attention of scholars to the uniqueness of the Indian society. Initially, Western scholars studied rituals, customs and traditions and appreciated Indian Civilization in the 18th and 19th centuries. The tendency of some Indologists to over emphasise spiritualism and undervalue material achievements came as criticism when Sociology as a discipline was established in India in the early 20th century. A culturological approach emerged and focussed not just on symbols and meaning, but on ideas. Yet the influence and use of Indology continued in the process of social enquiry. G.S. Ghurye, T.N. Madan and R.K. Mukherjee combined the two disciplines in their work.

In spite of different methods or theoretical positions, it was well established that caste is a key element of Indian structure and culture. Ghurye’s (1969) analysis of caste and class emphasised the “small and complete worlds of each caste”, the hierarchy of these groups and the struggles for social precedence. Further, caste based restrictions on social intercourse and marriage, and the disabilities and privileges of different caste groups and the lack of occupational choice combined to create a system where groups were rigorously subordinated to each other. He argued that to get a true picture of Indian social and economic structure, sub-castes need to be recognised and studied.

M.N. Srinivas a structural functionalist, who used Indological data to supplement his fieldwork studied the dynamism and fluidity of caste, the changing vertical and horizontal solidarities and in 1952 highlighted ‘sanskritization’ as process of imitation of higher castes by lower castes in their attempt for cultural upward mobility. Louis Dumont’s work on Homo Heirarchicus (1988) discussed the purity vs pollution principles as the key to understand the structure of the caste system. He argued for the need to go beyond seeing caste as merely a system of social stratification. He described caste as an ideology of hierarchy that tied with the notion of purity. M.N Srinivas later re- emphasised the distinction between the four Varnas and Jatis and introduced the concept of ‘dominant castes’ through the use of numbers, landholding, status as well as educational attainment to assert dominance in a region.
A.R. Desai introduced rural sociology by undertaking systematic and comprehensive study of our rural organisation, structure and tendencies and internal laws. He used a Marxist perspective to study Indian society. Thorner (1973) and D.N. Dhanangare (1983) drawing on Marxist models studied the structure of agrarian society, the primacy of land-holding and described agrarian classes of landlords, large land owners, peasants and landless labourers (See Pathak, 1998). Studies on agrarian structure have also focussed on the relationship between land, power and status. While members of caste groups were found to belong to various class groups, it was discerned that certain castes occupy certain class positions. For instance, upper castes are predominant in the category of upper classes in the agrarian society, the middle and poor peasants come from the traditional castes of cultivators and landless labourers belong mostly to lower castes. Andre Betielle (1967) in his book Caste, Class and Power highlighted that power comes also from numerical support and political contacts. Ascribing mere social prestige due to caste ranking is not always enough to gain political power.

Recognising the impact of systemic historical, social and economic discrimination based on caste, the Constitution of India provides caste based reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The Mandal Commission Report (1980) analysed the social, educational and economic status of different caste groups and recommended reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBC). Despite these measures, the upper castes continue to enjoy more economic power and have close access to political power. At the same time violent agitations for and against reservations continue to demonstrate the fact that caste and hierarchy in Indian society persist both in ideology and praxis.

Let us look at some of the data to analyse social inequalities across caste, religion and tribal groups. Is Indian social structure only about caste or beyond that? The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) survey (2005) states that while 20.8% of all Indians are below the poverty line, 31% of Mulsims and 32% of dalits and 50% of adivasis are below the poverty line. Literacy levels of Muslims at 59% and of dalits at 54% continue to be below the Indian average of 65%. (Sachar Report, 2006). Health, social and economic status, occupational mobility, educational attainment, political power of particular groups reflect systemic denial of opportunities and inability to access fundamental rights. The over representation of women, dalit, muslims and adivasis among the poorest, again empirically establishes that Indian social structure is deeply influenced by the interplay between caste, class, gender ethnicity and religious community. With the new processes like liberalization and globalization, there have been increasing social disparities amongst groups that shows how does the social structure...
shape these processes as well. Mather Mc Cartney (2004) and Vamsi Vakulabharanam, Wei Zhon, Xue Jinjun (2010) have attempted to look at the ways in which liberalization has accentuated income disparities and structural inequalities in India.

Activity:

*Comment on the linkages between Indian social structure and increasing inequalities in India since Liberalisation of the Economy.*

### 1.6 GENDER AS SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The recognition of gender as structure has emerged gradually over the last four decades. In 1973, Joan Acker’s work on women and social stratification attempted to expose the ‘intellectual sexism’ that was embedded in the denial of gender as a category of social stratification. She argued for the need to go beyond the ‘family’ and its male head to individuals within and to go beyond ‘class’ to see the status of those within the same class. Acker saw women as a sort of ‘caste within class’ and even stressed the need to recognise the differential values accorded to house work and housewives across classes. More importantly, she drew attention to the unequal relationship between the man who confers status and deference entitlements on to the wife/ daughter. In an age when occupational mobility studies focused only on men, Acker called for intergenerational studies of women’s occupational mobility and called for attention to the complex and multifaceted issues of women’s status as individuals and as members of families.

Maria Mies, in her paper “The Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour” (1981) draws attention to the sexual division of labour as a structural problem of a whole society. She argues, gender is an integral part of
dominant production relations, class relations as well as national and international divisions of labour upheld by the family and the state and by the powerful ideological systems.

Delving deep into the social construction of gender and gendered behaviour, **Barbara Risman** (2004) focused on the ways that social interactions and individual roles, expectations and accountabilities reproduced inequalities by ‘doing gender’. Her analysis of sex differences, structure and interactions, which were earlier perceived as oppositional, have been integrated together to recognise gender as a socially constructed stratification system. She also elaborates on how gender as structure is recursive as it contains elements that ensures its repetition and replication. At the same time, Risman cautions that gender as structure does not explain the non reflexive actions i.e. the cultural component of structure. Though our actions may be intended to challenge structure, structure cannot be escaped as it is deeply embedded in our institutions, rules, norms and even in our personalities.

The changing demography of the United States of America from a white dominated to racially and culturally diverse population posed new challenges to feminism. Feminist scholars and activists began to engage with multiple identities and the ways in which multiple structures of inequality intersect. Multiple advantages/disadvantages based on social location were analysed to highlight the interplay of race, class, ethnicity and gender. Women of colour gave voice to Black Feminism and stressed their unique predicament of being poor, female, working class and culturally subjugated / alienated. Similarly, dalit women in India spoke for their subaltern position in the Dalit Feminist Standpoint. Inter-sectionality became an important discourse and today it is no longer assumed that all women face similar constraints or that all people of colour have similar experiences, irrespective of class and gender.

Awareness of gender as ideology and structure has helped to look at women’s health not just in medical terms, but in the light of social structures, women’s roles, constraints and behaviours (Wuest, Ford-Gilboe, Merritt-Gray and Berman, 2002). The predicaments of women as care-givers, women as victims of abuse, as single parents and women in alternative sexual identities were scrutinized through a gender lens and grounded theory helped link women’s health issues and experiences with underyling social processes.

Gender as structure has also enabled an examination of relations between men and women and between masculinities and feminities. By recognising gender as a social structure, constructions of masculinity and constraints as well as privileges of men have been analysed using a structural lens.
1.7 UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL PROCESS

Human beings as social animals constantly interact with each other as individuals and as groups. These interactions are not just individual processes, but are societal because they are shaped by and also shape society. Ginsberg describes social processes as ‘the various modes of interaction between individuals or groups including co-operation and conflict, social differentiation and integration, development, arrest and decay’ (refer Introduction to Sociology, 2011). Social process therefore refer to interactions, their sequences and patterns, relationships between events, continuity of events and their special results. Processes which create harmony are cooperation, assimilation, inclusion and accommodation whereas conflict, competition, discrimination and alienation contribute disharmony.

There is also an increasing body of research that refers to gender as social process, gender as social practice and ‘doing gender’ is a process through which individuals acquire gender identities through social practices that shaped by the social structure. Using ethno-methodological and interactionist approaches, some sociologists have described “doing gender” is the accomplishment of everyday social practices and have shown how gender is created and re-created in routine activities. Judith Butler (1990) has explored why gender is considered something stable even though it has to be acted out in different situations. She also looks at gender as ‘being’ (identity) and gender as ‘doing’ (process) which you have read in courses MWG-001 and MWG-004.

In the next sub-section, we will learn about socialization, co-option, acculturation, discrimination, marginalization, exclusion and alienation as these are key process that can help us understand gender and women’s situation.

1.7.1 Socialisation and Its Types

Socialization is an unconscious process of learning values, attitudes, behaviour, shared norms, customs, social roles, symbols and languages. Such learning takes place not by going to a school or college, but just by being a member of a society and internalising social norms and practices. Socialization ensures social and cultural continuity by passing on such learning from generation to generation. Sociologists use the term socialization to refer to the lifelong social experience through which people develop their human potential to learn culture.

John A. Clausen (1968) in the book Socialization and Society, claims that theories of socialization are to be found in Plato, Montaigne and Rousseau and he identifies a dictionary entry from 1828 that defines ‘socialize’ as ‘to render social, to make fit for living in society’ (1968: 20-1). However, it was after a paper by Georg Simmel (1968) that the concept was incorporated into various branches of psychology and anthropology (1968 p. 31-52).
a) **Primary Socialization**: Primary socialization occurs during the early years of the human beings (up to 6) and is called natural socialization. It would be appropriate to say that it starts at birth. It’s when the child learns attitudes, values, norms, actions appropriate to individuals as members of a particular culture and so on through close proximity and intimacy. The child is influenced by immediate family and friends. The children also imitate adults.

b) **Secondary socialization**: Secondary socialization occurs in later childhood and adolescence when individuals come in contact with non-family members. Secondary socialization is the reinforcement of what one learns at the early ages from the immediate family members. It is also a process of learning what is appropriate and unseemly behaviours as a member of a smaller group within the larger society.

c) **Developmental socialization**: Developmental Socialization is the process of learning behaviour in the social system and social institution or developing one's social skills. It helps in adding and blending new learning with old in a smooth and continuous process of development.

d) **Anticipatory socialization**: Anticipatory socialization refers to the processes facilitated by social interactions to learn the values of the groups in which they aspire to be. It also refers to someone rehearsing for future positions, occupations, and social relationships. Examples could be the older people getting ready for the retirement, the teacher training students preparing to be a teacher. The Sanskritization process described by M.N. Srinivas (1951) also could be a good example whereby a disadvantaged group imitates ideology, customs, ritual and way of life of the socially advantaged groups, to be a part of “that Group” over a generation or two.

e) **Re-socialization**: Re-socialization is a process referring to discarding old behavior and adopting and accepting the new ones as part of a beginning of a new life. This occurs throughout the human life cycle (Schaefer & Lamm, 1992, p. 113) when an individual experiences a sharp break with their life and is exposed to radically new ideas, values, norms and societal situations. Re-socialisation could also happen when someone’s roles are changed in society: a lecturer becoming the college principal, a boy from an all boy’s college joining a co-education college, a girl becoming a wife and mother. In all these situations the individual sheds their socially recognized roles and acquires a new ‘avatar’.

f) **Organizational socialization**: Organizational socialization could occur when the organization demands that employees learn the knowledge and skills necessary to fit into organizational roles by understanding the organization, its history, values, jargon, culture and procedures.
They learn about their work culture, work group, their roles and so on as there is an organizational demand that one should learn, internalize and follow organizational values and practices.

### 1.7.2 Agents of Socialization

The agents of socialization include the family, community and friends, school, the mass media, religion and culture and even the law.

**The Family:** is the primary agent of socialization, the family plays the role of teaching children cultural values, attitudes about themselves and others and grooms them for their gender and class roles. Boys and girls are trained and reared differently and get messages about what is the appropriate behavior, aspirations, appearance etc for their sex. While working class children are brought up with continuous messages to admire hard work, loyalty and obedience to authority. Middle class children are bombarded with messages about security, status, the need to study hard and compete. Affluent children are taught to value ‘out of the box thinking’ and to be in positions of authority and are even made to believe that they are intellectually and morally superior to others.

**The education system** which again is unequal and differentiated according to class and gender, reinforces these values. Different classes of schools pass on the dominant ideology of society to their students through the composition of the school, the interpretation of texts, teacher student interactions and school rules and norms.

**Religion and culture** too are powerful socializing agents as they are often used to tell us what is right and wrong and what to conform. Notions like the concept of sin and the fear of God’s anger also communicated to the society. Religion works as a social control and constructs the thinking pattern of individuals by shaping values, ethics and way of life. The interconnection between religion and gender is discussed in Block 6 of this course. Cultural conditioning, cultural symbols, practices and rituals contribute towards the socialization process, therefore its resilience/defiance are portrayed as unquestionable.

In the modern world, the **media** has become an important agent of socialization, reinforcing these messages so very subtly. The media usage of imagery and symbols shapes not just our self image, but also manufactures our world views with messages about other cultures, nations, peoples, religions and life styles. **Chomsky and Herman** (1988) in their book *Manufacturing Consent* highlights the dangerous distortions in worldviews caused by the media’s propaganda model. Let us look at some of the other social processes in brief to understand its significance in constructing social institutions and practices.
Box 1.1: Other Social Processes in brief

**Co-option:** Co-option refers to a process of absorbing or assimilating a person, a group or a culture. It is often about ‘neutralizing’ or ‘winning over’ a weaker/smaller group or through assimilating them into an established group or culture. Rebels are sometimes co-opted and thus silenced by giving them positions of authority, power and influence. Philip Selznick (1949) in his study of the Tennessee Valley Authority, defined cooptation as ‘absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence’. (p. 13 C.F. Dewhardt, 2008) Gatade (2009) and Chaturvedi (2011) examine the role of marginalized communities in the Hindutva project, their fascination towards the hindutva ideology and institutions and the process of their cooption. Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia (1995) have explored the role of women in right wing movements, which you will read about in the last block of this course.

**Acculturation:** While socialization is about how we are engineered as individuals to conform to societal norms, we also need to look at what happens when societies and cultures meet. Foreign and alien cultures once used to be considered frightening, but today we talk of cultural exchanges, multiculturalism and hybrid cultures. With time, conquests, commerce, colonialism, travel and migrations, the spread of Christianity and other religions, multi-cultural and multi ethnic nations have emerged and cultural changes and adaptations and assimilations have happened in different ways in various historical contexts. Acculturation is defined as a social process that entails contact between two cultural groups, which results in cultural learning, changes, adjustments, exchanges, imitations and adaptations that are reflected in customs, language, food, clothing, music, technologies and social institutions in both parties. There are different types and degrees of acculturation. Integration is said to have happened when individuals in a multicultural society balance aspects of their home /native culture with features of the new culture. Assimilation is used to describe the process where home/original culture is forgotten and people embrace and absorb the new culture. In the contemporary India, the process of *Mc Donaldisation of society* exhibits the principles of Acculturation. George Ritzer’s (1993) *Mc Donaldization of Society* goes beyond national boundaries to examine the transnational processes of homogenization, the irrationality of extreme rationalization and the de-humanization. The breaking down of tasks into the simplest and smallest actions and standardizing them to ensure efficiency, predictability, control and calculability have been critiqued and Ritzer proposed us to think about the irrational and inefficient, wasteful direction in which we are heading.
1.7.3 Discrimination, Exclusion and Alienation

Another social process that we need to understand is ‘discrimination’. During the American civil war, the term discrimination evolved in American English as an understanding of prejudicial treatment of an individual based solely on their race. Today we know that discrimination and prejudicial treatment can take place in many forms and could be on the basis of a person’s race, colour, caste, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age etc. Discrimination occurs when someone is denied equal protection by the law, equality of status under the law, equal treatment in the administration of justice, and equality of opportunity and access to employment, education, housing and other public services and facilities. Though we all speak of equality as an ideal, the reality tells us there is discrimination and unequal treatment of people all around us. We may have experienced discrimination or may have practiced it knowingly or unconsciously. The existing forms of discrimination are on the basis of:

a) **Race and Ethnicity:** Treating a person/group with difference, victimizing or harassing or denying them rights and privileges because of their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality is considered as discrimination. Discrimination stems from racism- the ideology of the racial supremacy of whites over people of colour and a belief that human potentials and capacities are dependent on their racial origins. You must have read about the intersection of gender and race in your first year course MWG 004: Gender Bodies and Sexualities which discusses how do women of colour experience double forms of discrimination. This belief has been responsible not only for thousands of individuals acts of discrimination/ hate, but has been at the root of slavery, colonization, the holocaust and apartheid.

With the emergence of civil rights movements and struggles against slavery, there has been an increasing consciousness of racism. Race relations in multi racial societies have drawn attention and led to passage of laws against racial discrimination. You must have read the interconnection between race and gender in your first year course MWG-004. The United Nations General Assembly declared 2001 as the International Year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia (fear of those who are different) and Related Intolerance. The World Conference against Racism was held in Durban, South Africa and highlighted the fact that despite progress in the realm of law, the ideology of racism is still alive today in different forms and in different parts of the world.

b) **Nationality:** One could be also discriminated against on the basis of Citizenship. Discrimination on the basis of nationality normally gets included in employment laws as governments try to protect their citizens from unemployment and discourage recruitment of foreign nationals.
c) **Sexual Orientation**: This is a relatively new term which refers to a person’s sexual emotions, identity and behavior. You must be familiar with the debates on sexuality and the nature of sexual discrimination against LGBT communities in your first year courses, i.e. MWG-001 and MWG 004. Discriminating against people on the basis of their sexual orientation often stems from a belief that homosexuality is unnatural or evil and from an ideology of ‘homophobia’. This ideology has resulted in sexual minorities facing discrimination and violence at home, in the community, workplace and in society. Today, the silence about such discrimination has been broken and the community has come together to “come out” in the open about their orientation and to assert their rights to choose their sexual lives.

d) **Caste**: Caste discrimination is inscribed in the caste system which sanctifies discrimination on the basis of traditional or inherited status and origin. It is justified by the belief that some castes are impure while others are pure. Each caste looks at other castes as inferior or superior to them and this hierarchical paradigm rationalizes preferential and prejudicial treatment. Marriage outside the caste and with someone who is lower in the caste hierarchy is strongly disapproved. This has promoted caste-based identity and ensured that the caste system has survived. Caste groups at the bottom end of the caste pyramid (the scheduled castes or dalit) have been discriminated on the basis of caste purity and pollution. They have been physically segregated and prevented from accessing education, right to public space and even right to access water bodies. UNICEF and Human Rights Watch have declared that over 250 million people are discriminated on the basis of their caste in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Japan and Africa and their level of participation in the social, economical, cultural and political activities of their society is determined by their caste’s ranking. The intersection of gender and caste has exercised triple burden for women—suppression by patriarchy, suppression by caste identity and suppression by capitalist patriarchy.

e) **Religion**: Religious discrimination amounts to valuing or de-valuing someone for their religious beliefs. Since most religion claims to be the ‘only truth’ a feeling of superiority and intolerance towards other religions is built into the belief system, leading to discrimination. Nationalism with the help of religious identity perpetuates/structures discrimination and is based on a belief that all those who share a religion are a community and a political entity/identity. Religious nationalism is different from religion and we need to distinguish between Hinduism and Hindutva, Judaism and Zionism, Islam and Islamic Nationalism.
f) **Disability**: Perceiving people with disability as “abnormal” and underestimating their capacities, potentials, abilities and rights have been widespread, hence we fail to recognize the potentials or capabilities of people with disability. Discrimination starts within their families, in the community and amounts to differential treatment especially in accessing education, public spaces and employment opportunities.

Today disability-related discrimination is recognized and laws have been enacted in several countries to protect the people with disabilities. The disabled themselves have come together to advocate for their rights under the slogan ‘Nothing For Us, Without Us’. Such discrimination is historically built into the social structure and into the normal functioning of institutions, and therefore less visible/conscious.

**Marginalization**

Marginalization is a process of pushing an individual or group to the fringes or periphery of a society. It is often a result of discrimination by dominant groups that ends with denial of opportunities, consequently a reduced socio-economic status for a community and entrenched inequality in that society. A socially marginalized group faces stigma and reduced opportunities resulting in low self esteem and a lack of social capital. For example, the disabled, the homeless, sexual minorities, women and dalit communities have faced such marginalization and have suffered from lack of access to education, dignity, employment and social and political participation.

Economic marginalization refers more to lack of economic opportunity, of integration into market structures and mechanisms. Women as agricultural labourers for example have been pushed into the bottom rung of our society and with their gender differential wages they cannot afford basic health care or education. Their bondage and debt has resulted in their destitution, sexual violence and extreme impoverishment.

Political marginalization is the denial of opportunity to fully participate in decision making process so that their rights and their welfare become sidelined in the development agenda and in policy-making. Ethnic minorities the world over experience this as their numbers are small and they do not get adequate attention in the numbers game of parliamentary democracies.

Marginalization is not always about being small in number, a powerful and socially advantaged minority can marginalize even larger groups by continuous discrimination and dispossession. Women, though not being a numeric minority also experience political, economic and social forms of marginalization because of the belief that economy and politics are not the appropriate spheres for women to participate in.
Social Exclusion

Lynn Todman, director of the Institute on Social Exclusion at the Adler School of Professional Psychology, suggests that social exclusion refers to processes in which individuals and entire communities of people are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities and resources (e.g. housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation and due process) that are normally available to members of society and which are key to social integration.

Social Exclusion is today increasingly used across countries to refer to contemporary forms of social disadvantages and relates to the alienation, or disenfranchisement of certain people within a society. A person's social class, caste, living standards, language, culture, disability, gender, religion, minority status, sexual orientation and gender identities play a major role in being excluded from the mainstream. In the Indian context when a community is the target, the entire community goes into their shells and this could be called as self social exclusion.

Alienation

Karl Marx who defined alienation as social isolation and described the proletariat/workers being alienated from resources. According to Marx, though the labour class actively participated in the process of production, they were alienated from the produce and the fruits of their labour. In the discussion on class and gender, Silviya Walby (2002) argues that within the household economy, women are seen as the working class and thereby they are alienated from other productive resources. Until the 17th century, the term alienation was associated with property/material assets and later included alienation from rights, sovereignty, identity etc. Alienation is now used to refer to the process whereby people become isolated and foreign to the world they are living in.

There is also alienation created by the state when people are displaced to construct dams, highways, mines, airports and mega cities. Though the government claims that they are compensated and rehabilitated, it is becoming evident that they become alienated from their land, livelihood systems and their cultural context.

Activity:

How do women relate themselves in the household economy? Base your answer on any of the academic texts mentioned in the unit.
1.8 LET US SUM UP

Any study of societal inequalities requires a critical engagement with the ways in which differences of race, gender and ethnicity contribute to or are used to create the hierarchies that we see around us. For students of gender and development, examining social structure is essential if we want to comprehend the marginalization of women, the embedding of gender inequalities and efforts made to change gender relations. In this unit, we have attempted to look beneath the surface of social processes to perceive the underlying social structure and recognise its manifestations, even though the structure itself is intangible and invisible. It discussed various components of social structure in brief as to understand how is gender gets constructed and shaped by these structures.

1.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) What is social structure? Discuss the related theoretical debates on social structure.

2) Does gender a significant component of social structure? Discuss with the help of suitable examples.

3) Define social process and discuss the various forms of social process.

4) How does gender relate to the other structures of society? Explain.

1.10 REFERENCES


The Marx-Engels Reader: Tucker. 2nd Edition


Understanding a Diverse Society, Anderson and Taylor


### 1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS
