
UNIT 4 STRATIFICATION: IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER AND ETHNICITY

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will be able to :

- define the relationship between gender and ethnicity;
- understand the meaning of gender and ethnicity in a plural society;
- describe the relationship between hierarchy and difference;
- define the relationship between ethnicity and stratification; and
- analyse the relationship between gender and stratification.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit seeks to address the new issues of gender and ethnicity in the context of stratification. Terming them as new is in a sense right and in a sense wrong. It is right in the sense that these issues have emerged as salient concerns in contemporary times. They have interrogated existing principles of stratification in manner quite differently from any time before. But it is wrong in the sense that ethnicity and gender always existed, were embedded in the stratification system everywhere but yet went unnoticed. This is an important point. Sociology is periodically forced to seek a review of its concepts and categories when social movements beg the question.

Before I dwell on questions that gender and ethnicity have raised I would therefore very briefly look at some points that are pertinent in discussing both in relation to stratification.

4.2 GENDER AND ETHNICITY

In this section we take up three issues that could be seen as common between gender and ethnicity.

4.2.1 Who Are Minorities?

The United Nations Report (1980) declares:

Women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two thirds of its work hours, receive one tenth of the world's income, and own less than one hundredth of the world's property.

The same perhaps could have been said about the Blacks in South Africa. They are minorities in a very substantive sense. I find it useful therefore to agree with Helen Mayer Hacker's adoption of Louis Wirth's definition of a minority group which reads: A minority group is any group of people who because of their physical and cultural characteristics, are singled out from others in the society which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.

By comparing the situations of American Blacks and women, Hacker indicates some of the advantages of classifying women as a minority group. Firstly, both groups have 'high social visibility', Blacks in terms of their 'racial' characteristics and to some extent their styles of dress, women in terms of their sexual characteristics and feminine clothes.

Other scholars however disagree with this formulation. Anthony Giddens for example contends that it seems a little contradictory to term what could consist the majority of the population a minority group. He opines:

Some have suggested that, since the notion is sociological rather than numerical, a minority group might in certain circumstances consist of the majority of the population. In South Africa, for example, a relatively small proportion of whites dominate a much larger number of blacks. However, to use the term 'minority' in such circumstances seems more than a little contradictory. The fact that blacks are in such a majority makes a difference to the overall make-up of the society. Similarly, we sometimes hear the phrase 'women and other minorities' in discussion of inequalities in the Western world, although women form over half the population. It seems least likely to confuse us if we use the term 'minority group' only where the people discriminated against do not make up the bulk of the populace.

4.2.2 Ethnic Minorities

Giddens however emphasised that the notion of ethnic minorities or minority groups so widely used in Sociology involves more than mere numbers. But feels that the three features that define minority groups in sociology would not hold water so far as women are a numerically majority group like the Blacks of South Africa are concerned. The three features of a minority group would be:

- i) Its members are disadvantaged, as a result of discrimination against them by others. Discrimination exists when rights and opportunities open to one set of people are denied to another group.
- ii) Members of the minority have some sense of group solidarity, of 'belonging together'. Experience of being the subject of prejudice and discrimination usually heightens feelings of common loyalty and interests. Members of minority groups often tend to see themselves as 'a people apart' from the majority.
- iii) Minority groups are usually to some degree physically and socially isolated from the larger community, They tend to be concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, cities or regions of a country. There is little intermarriage between those in the majority and members of the minority group. People in the minority group might actively promote endogamy (marriage within the group) in order to keep alive their cultural distinctiveness.

Activity 1

Discuss with various people and students at the study centre the notion of minorities including the ethnic minorities. Note down your results in your notebook.

Significantly Giddens emphasises the fact that minorities in sociological terms is not a matter of numbers. If we take the first point of 'discrimination' or 'disadvantaged', yes, this holds true for women as a group, however sharp the differences within the group are concerned. While the form and intensity of discrimination varies widely, it would not be wrong to state that in all societies women are disadvantaged in relation to men.

Matrilineal societies like the Khasis are often cited to rebuff the idea that women in all societies are discriminated. Recent writings have shown how even among a matrilineal society like the Khasis, control of property and decision making within the family (the private domain) often resides with the male head-the brother instead of the husband. And significantly in the public domain women are woefully represented in the political structures and processes. The second point is of some interest for with the womens' movement the sense of solidarity and 'belonging together' has become a social fact of some consequence. Perhaps writing this unit itself is a fall out of this development. Governments, law making bodies, international organisations have responded in some measure or the other to the 'solidarity' of the womens' movements. Universities have realised that new perspectives that have emerged as a fall out of the women's movement should be incorporated within the syllabus. The third point about physical and social isolation, this matter has been of crucial significance for the women's' movements.

Box 4.01

Activists and theorists have been acutely aware of the fact unlike some 'minorities' women are not segregated from men. Indeed often women and men in families are involved in deep emotional relationships which are at once oppressive and sometimes violent. Giddens is right when he contends that women do not live in segregated parts of a town or city or village. Many minorities do but many do not. It need not be the defining characteristic of a minority.

The point being made is that despite important differences in a very important sense ethnic groups and women are marginal in decision making, less powerful, less visible, and more often than not prejudiced against. Therefore perceiving them as a minority is a step in recognition of their disadvantageous position.

4.2.3 Inequality and Difference

There has been a tendency to assume in stratification studies that stratification implies heirarchy and inequality. Dipankar Gupta has sought to clarify that the common textbook analogy of stratas to geological layers within the earth's crust is misleading. It is misleading because in Guptas' words:

It might figuratively persuade one to believe that stratification always implies layers that are vertically or hierarchically arranged. For a true understanding of stratification we should be able to conceptually isolate it from hierarchy, as the latter is but one of the manifestations of the former. (Gupta 1991: 6)

Gupta argues not all systems of stratification are hierarchical. Some are, but many are not.

Differences rather than hierarchy are dominant in some stratificatory systems. In other words, the constitutive elements of these differences are such that any attempt to see them hierarchially would do offence to the logical property of these very elements. The layers in this case are not arranged vertically or hierarcically, but horizontally or even separately. (Gupta 1991: 7)

As an illustration of such a form of stratification where differences hold supreme Gupta writes:

Such an arrangement can be easily illustrated in the case of language, religion or nationalities. It would be futile, and indeed capricious, if any attempt was made to hierarchize languages or religions or nationalities... India again is an appropriate place to demonstrate this variety of social stratification. The various languages that are spoken in India speak eloquently of an horizontal system of social stratification where differences are paramount. Secular India again provides an example of religious stratification where religions are not hierarchized or unequally privileged in law, but have the freedom to exist separately in full knowledge of their intrinsic difference. (ibid)

The point being made is that there is no logical reason to hierarchise difference such as linguistic, religious, ethnic or gender for that matter. But as Gupta himself acknowledges, "In the eyes of most people religions, languages, sexes, nationalities are all hierarchized—though it would be difficult to get an unambiguous statement of the criteria on the basis of which these hierarchies are constructed. In fact, a worthwhile question for a sociologist is to ask: Why is it that people tend to hierarchize horizontal differentiations whose logical property is equality? (Gupta: 1991:9)

4.2.4 Hierarchy and Difference

The importance of logical distinctions notwithstanding, differences are hierarchised. Both ethnic minorities and women face a great deal of antagonism, prejudices and discrimination. Prejudice operates mainly through the use of stereotypical thinking. All thought involves categories by means of which we classify experience. Sometimes, however, these categories are both ill-informed and rigid. And where stereotypes are associated with fear and anxiety, the situation is difficult. A white person may feel that all blacks are lazy and stupid. A man may believe all women are foolish and hysterical. An uppercaste Hindu, may feel that the minority is pampered. Sociologists have used the concept of displacement for such exercises of scapegoating.

Stereotyping is often closely linked to the psychological mechanism of displacement. In displacement, feelings of hostility or anger become directed against objects that are not the real origin of these anxieties. In other words what it means is that in times of acute unemployment, other ethnic groups or women may be blamed, scapegoated, for taking up jobs that should have been otherwise theirs.

To return to our moot point, even though differences are not necessarily unequal or hierarchical, in practice both gender and ethnicity are attributed with features of both hierarchy and inequality.

4.2.5 Gender and Ethnic Differences

Both women and ethnic groups have high visibility. They 'look' different. While a minority ethnic group in the United States of America may look different by colour, hair and facial features, a woman ought to look different. Not only is she supposed to be shorter than 'her' men folks, be weaker, weigh less but also dress, walk, speak, gesticulate differently. Both the ethnic minority and women are also attributed with other qualities which are not selfevidently obvious. All of you, I am sure will know of some proverb or the other in your languages/dialects where women are described as unreliable, loose mouthed, frivolous, cunning, manipulative, weak. The list can go on. The point being made is that the lines between natural differences and socially acquired differences are blurred. And once the differences are seen as natural, it also implies that they cannot be changed.

Feminist scholarship has emphasised the importance of differentiating sex from gender. Giddens writes:

The word 'sex' as used in ordinary language, is ambiguous, referring both to a category of person and to acts which people engage—that is, when we use the word in phrases like 'having sex'. For the sake of clarity, we must separate these two senses. We can distinguish 'sex' meaning biological or anatomical differences between women and men from sexual activity. We

need also to make a further important distinction between sex and gender. While sex refers to physical differences of the body, gender concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. This distinction between sex and gender is fundamental, since many differences between males and females are not biological in origin.

While western social science is very sensitive to the race/ethnic question, it is still not an entirely uncommon practice to conflate cultural and natural differences. Giddens writes:

Ethnicity refers to cultural practices and outlooks that distinguishes a given community of people. Members of ethnic groups see themselves as culturally distinct from other groupings in a society, and are seen by those others to be so. Many different characteristics may serve to distinguish ethnic groups from one another, but the most usual are language, history or ancestry (real or imagined), religion, and styles of dress or adornment. Ethnic differences are wholly learned, a point which seems self evident until we remember how often such groups have been regarded as 'born to rule' or, alternatively, have been seen as 'unintelligent, 'innately lazy and so forth. (Giddens 1989: 244)

The important point to notice that in both the case of women and ethnic minority, the tendency of the dominant sections of society is to attribute qualities as naturally given, biologically endowed. It is also important to state that the ethnic group in question or women are compliant in accepting a self definition that has been endowed socially on them. This would explain a Black girls' preference for white dolls in America where notions of beauty are deeply ingrained. Or an Indian woman would be empowered with the birth of a son and look down on other women who in her eyes were not so fortunate.

Apart from the important distinction between 'gender' and 'sex', other feminist scholars have argued that gender is a set of performances. From the time we are born a baby learns how to perform in the right gendered manner. They have also argued that the gendered differences are arbitrary and often what is considered 'male' and what is considered 'female' behaviour vary widely both across cultures and in time. The basic point is that gender is a social construct not a natural given. The same is true for ethnic group. Black is different from white. It seems a natural and self evident fact. But the meaning which we given 'black' and 'white' are social. And what is social is often power loaded. Hence since the dominant groups in the world perceive white to be good and fair, even the black tends to think so just as the woman learns to be the 'weaker' sex.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write a brief note on ethnic minorities. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- 2) Briefly outline gender and ethnic differences. Use about five lines for your answer.

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4.3 ETHNICITY AND STRATIFICATION

Most modern societies include numerous different ethnic groups. In Britain, Irish, Asian (many within Asian), West Indian, Italian and Greek immigrants live. The question that arises however is when we refer to a society, are we necessarily referring to a state? Most often yes, we do. Hence we refer to an Indian society, A Pakistani society, an American society and so on. What we are essentially referring to are plural entities with many 'societies and cultures' and one state. Many argue that the different cultural groups are 'nations'. Others call them 'ethnic groups'. Are they the same?

It will be of interest to review some of the formulations. Giddens writes:

Many societies in the world today, in the industrialised and non-industrialised world alike, are plural societies. Plural societies are those in which there are several large ethnic groupings, involved in the same political and economic order but otherwise largely distinct from one another. (Giddens 1989: 244)

Anthony Smith thinks nationalism emerged from common bonds of religion, language, customs, shared history and common myths of origin; '...in a later work he refers to modern ethnic revivals taking the form of nationalism and defines "...ethnic" or ethnic community as a social group whose members share a sense of common origin, claim a common and distinctive history and destiny, possess one or more distinctive characteristics and feel a sense of collective uniqueness and solidarity'

Does this mean there is no distinction between nation and ethnic and hence ethnicity and nationality? Not quite says Smith. Ethnic is a passive notion and nationality is active ethnicity because ethnic revival is '...the transformation of passive, often isolated and politically excluded communities into potential and actual nations, active, participant and self-conscious in their historic identities'. Despite this overlap Oomen feels that there is a crucial difference between them which can be located in the territorial dimension.

4.3.1 Nationalism and Ethnicity

Nationalism is also a form of ethnicity but it is a special form. It is the institutionalisation of one particular ethnic identity by attaching it to the state. Ethnic groups do not necessarily act together except when they have a special interest to secure. When those interests are to obtain a state of its own (or part of a state) the group is a nationality.

Where does stratification fit in?

Worsley's clarification helps answer this to a certain extent. The salient feature Worsley mentions are deprivations emanating out of inequality, material deprivation and denial of cultural identity. His argument is that if there is no common language and territory ethnicity cannot constitute itself into a nation. This aspect is not of immediate concern to us here. What is of importance that groups are disadvantaged not just because of class or caste. But also because of ethnicity.

In India therefore studies of stratification have to address not just issues of caste, class but tribes and communities-religious/linguistic/regional. The last decade or more has witnessed a surge of ethnic/national revivals. One may identify several situations where 'ethnicity' or outsider identity becomes salient vis-à-vis 'nationality' or insider identity.

- i) The demand for a distinct homeland based on religion (e.g. the demand for a sovereign state by a section of the Sikhs) or language (e.g. the Tamil demand for an independent state).
- ii) The demand for a political-administrative unit within the Indian state (e.g. Gorkhaland for Nepalis, Jharkhand state for the tribes of Central India).
- iii) The demand for expulsion of 'outsiders' when the entire state is engulfed by migrants

from other states or neighbouring countries (e.g. in Assam and Tripura).

- iv) The demand for the expulsion of vides his (foreigners) belonging to other folk regions within the state (e.g. the Chotanagpur tribal demand to expel fellow Biharis of the plains) or from other state (Bengalis or Marwaris).
- v) The demand to expel those who do not belong to the same cultural region although they are from the same state (e.g. the demand for the expulsion of Andhras from the Telangana region).
- vi) The demand to expel migrants from other linguistic states who come to work and reside in metropolitan centres (e.g. mobilization against Tamils in Bombay and Bangalore).

4.3.2 The Nature of Ethnic Groups

The examples that have been drawn from the Indian context and the international context makes one thing clear. Ethnic groups, however one defines them tend to be disadvantaged in some way to both the state and the dominant group. As suggested by some, ethnicity has assumed many diverse meanings. In the Middle East, the more substantive research on ethnicity has shown that this term has replaced the notion of minorities employed. It has been suggested that there exists a core Arab identity whose hallmarks are on the ethnic dimension, Arab language and culture and on the religious dimension Islam. The others are minorities in the sense that they are disadvantaged to the core Arab. Interestingly, The Oxford English Dictionary (1961) defines the adjective 'ethnic' as 'pertaining to nations not Christians or Jewish; Gentile, heathen, pagan.

Whatever may be scholarly differences between how we ought to define ethnicity, the moot point is that generally ethnic groups are those groups in a society which are located at a disadvantage either to the state or the dominant group of society or more often to both. In a plural country like ours we have to take ethnicity as a principle of stratification. Some people may belong to an economically affluent class and yet be culturally disadvantaged for not belonging to the dominant group which is often perceived as the norm. The Japanese American of three generations may be still asked if he is an American. An English American of one year migration will be accepted as American because he is white, Christian and English speaking. As a Manipuri student expressed it on TV that while in Manipur nobody asked him whether he was or not an Indian, in Delhi people did.

Box 4.02

Studies on ethnic groups whether in a developed society like the United States of America or whether in India raise issues linked to the basic question of relations with the majority culture, of assimilation versus accomodation, and of poverty, inequality, isolation and discrimination. The relevance of the discussions on these issues need not be overemphasised for the contemporary Indian society where the cliched phrase, most often used for a recalcitrant ethnic group, like 'drawing them into the mainstream', has been increasingly questioned. The American experience does not seem to have been too different for there is a prevailing American ethos that members of ethnic groups should assimilate into the mainstream culture. Members of diverse ethnic groups who operate in the mainstream are expected to become bicultural, while few whites feel that need.

4.3.3 Ethnicity and Family

Ethnicity cannot be separated from our families for the diverse process of socializing children in ethnically diverse families has far reaching consequence. This in part explains the the concept "ethclass" which explains the role that social class membership plays in defining the basic condition of life influenced by ethnicity at the same time that it accounts for differences between groups at the same social class level.

Studies of Stratification-Unequal access to resources which are both material and non-

material have to therefore take account of ethnicity. As Sharma says “an ethnic groups may be considered as a stratum in a given system of social stratification. It is possible because ethnicity is accompanied with class and power”.

4.4 GENDER AND STRATIFICATION

Studies of stratification were for many years ‘gender blind’ – they were written as though women did not exist, or as though for purposes of analysing divisions of power, wealth and prestige, women were unimportant and uninteresting. Yet gender itself is one of the most profound examples of stratification. There are no societies in the world in which men do not in some aspects of social life, have more wealth, status and influence than women.

There are many reasons for this matter of gender to be ignored. To return to our discussing the similarities in the gender and ethnicity issues, women for the very large part are considered to be naturally inferior. The phenomenon of women being marginal and the weaker sex was taken so literally that a womens’ movement was needed to challenge the assumption. That is to question inequality of gender and ask why women are unequally placed. Studies on stratification have for the most part assumed that the position of women can be derived from the position of her husband, father, brother or whosoever happens to be the male head of the household. That the head of the household would be a male went unquestioned. Actually it is not such a taken for granted matter. Recent studies have found many women headed household. Credit organisations have found it more productive to lend out money to women rather than to men. Success stories of women-not just big entrepreneurs but poor village women (fisherwoman, agriculturalist, weaver) have increasingly come to be known. The mistaken assumptions of the inequalities being naturally derived from biological facts and of men being natural and universal head of households have led studies of stratification to ignore gender as a principle of stratification.

As this lesson shows, academics now realise that gender has to be taken serious note of as a principle of stratification. Sharma has introduced the new issue of gender and ethnicity in his recent work on stratification. Debates have sought to sort out whether inequalities in modern times revolve around class. Or does gender play a critical role.

4.4.1 Inequalities of Gender

Inequalities of gender are more deep-rooted historically than class systems; men have superior standing to women even in hunting and gathering societies, where there are no classes. In modern societies however so fundamental are class divisions, they tend to overlap substantially with gender differences. The material position of women tends to reflect that of their fathers or husbands. Hence some scholars argue that gender equalities can be explained mainly in class terms. Frank Parkin has expressed this aspect very well.

Female status certainly carries with it many disadvantages compared with that of males in various areas of social life including employment opportunities, property ownership, income and so on. However, these inequalities associated with sex differences are not usefully thought of as components of stratification. This is because for the great majority of women the allocation of social and economic rewards is determined primarily by the position of their families and, in particular, that of the male head. Although women today share certain status attributes in common, simply by virtue of their sex, their claims over resources are not primarily determined by their occupation but, more commonly, by that of their father or husbands. And if the wives and daughters of wealthy landowners, there can be no doubt that the differences in their overall situation are far more striking and significant. Only if the disabilities attaching to female status were felt to be so great as to override differences of a class kind would it be realistic to regard sex as an important dimension of stratification.

Activity 2

Why are there gender inequalities? Talk to various people including students in the study centre regarding this topic. Note down your findings in your notebook.

At face value there seems no error in the above formulation. Indeed most women know that their everyday lives are defined in terms of fathers and husbands. A senior government officer's wife who may be employed will tend to be known by her husband's position, rather than her own public position. The status of the family would be derived from that of the male head. The matter does not rest here however if we pursue the point more closely.

4.4.2 Patriarchy and Gender

- i) The ideas which we have about families are drawn mostly from our immediate experience. And if we happen to belong to the middle class or the lower and upper middle class urban dweller the male headed nuclear family is a normative fact. By normative I mean that not only will this pattern be empirically true for many, but that the other kind of families will be seen as an anomaly. A woman headed household would be seen as an aberration.
- ii) Following from this normative aspect, the state will have various laws derived from a model of male headed nuclear family as the norm. Many women who are heads of households, thereby had to face a situation where they were not entitled to be a beneficiary under an anti-poverty scheme on the grounds that since she was a woman she could not be the head of household. Here is an instance where the normative reality edges out the empirical reality.
- iii) The formulation that since the earnings of the male head is the most significant factor, the status of the women, even if she is earning, would not alter the situation can be criticised in several ways.
- iv) In a substantial proportion of the households the income of the women is essential to maintaining the family's economic position and mode of life. In these circumstances women's paid employment in some parts determine the class position of the households.
- v) A wife's employment may affect the status of the husband, not simply the other way around. Although women rarely earn more than their husbands, the working situation of a wife might still be the 'lead' factor in influencing the class of her husband. This could be the case, for instance if the husband was a semi skilled blue-collar worker and the wife employed in a garment factory. The wife's occupation may set the standard of the position of the family as a whole.
- vi) Many 'cross-class' households exist, in which the work of the husband is in a higher class category than that of the wife or (less commonly) the other way around. Since few studies have been carried out looking at the consequences of this, we cannot know if it is always appropriate to take the occupation of the male as the determining influence.
- vii) The proportion of families in which women are the sole breadwinners is increasing.

It is worthwhile to explore the implications for this emerging trend. There are many dimensions to this phenomenon. Often it is stated that in the west because of the changing sexual norms and women's independence there are more single parent, women headed households. Indeed this is true. But not fully. Even in earlier decades both our and their society had plenty of cases of deserted women, abducted and then stranded. 'Fallen women' very often were heads of households too. Stratification theories were not equipped to analyse this occurrence because they did not use gender as an analytical category to understand how patriarchy was reproduced through both class and family and ethnicity.

The male headed normative family could retain its purity and authenticity by affording a space for the men to have liaisons outside both class. Women from the middle class, uppercaste on the other hand would fall outside the class and family if she had liaisons outside marriage. The caste system in India with its rule of hypergamy meant that a woman could only marry within the caste or a caste above. The reverse could not take place. Gender as a principle of stratification therefore has to take into account not only if women members in a family have a status derived from the male head but also

how patriarchy operated differentially to men and women. Issues of control of sexuality, norms of chastity, social sanction against women seen as violators of family, class, ethnic norms, double standards to male and female sexual practices should all be taken account of when discussing stratification and gender.

4.4.3 Ethnicity and Cultural Deprivation

When discussing ethnicity and stratification we found that ethnicity was important in determining material and cultural deprivation just as much as class or caste was. This is true even in the case of gender. In India womens' movements have taken up the issue of access to and control of land. While women worked on the fields and in extended agricultural work in rural areas, law and custom denied them right to land. In the early years of communist China land rights to women were a major issue. With land reforms and the resultant issue of land deeds, policy makers realised that though the unit for the land deed was the family, it had to be explicitly taken into account that both men and women have equal rights to land.

This brings us to the important question about the family and gender related to basic issues of stratification like unequal access to resources — cultural and material. Many landed families in our country would educate their sons but not their daughter. Many landless family may take their sick son to the doctor, not their sick daughter. Many middle class families may educate their daughter enough to teach her children if required but not to earn a living. In other words even though men and women belong to the same family of the class, they are differently located in their access to material and non-material resources.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss nationalism and ethnicity. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- 2) Write a note on patriarchy and gender. Use about five lines for your answer.

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4.5 LET US SUM UP

Living in India , it is not easy to be unaware of differences in wealth and power, statuses and privileges. Distinctions are all around us. It is not therefore surprising that sociology of India has concerned itself so much with issues of stratification. India has long been reckoned as the most stratified of all known societies. Sociologists have observed that the

caste system with its many forms of superordination and subordination is perhaps most responsible for this. Anthropologists and sociologists have provided detailed studies of different castes and tribes. Policy makers and sociologists have engaged with questions of cultural diversity and economic inequality— central issues of social stratification. As Dipankar Gupta observes:

This is reflected in our Constitution which makes any discrimination based on caste, language, religion or creed illegal. Clearly the founders of independent India had pondered deeply over the cardinal features of social stratification in our society. (Gupta 1991: 1-2)

The Constitution has also clearly mentioned that discrimination based on sex is illegal. However unlike other principles of stratification, gender was given a short shrift. In a sense it retreated from the public discourse. As for studies on stratification, gender did not seriously feature as a principle at all. The last twenty years have seriously altered this. Feminists have interrogated the concepts of class and caste, household and family to explore how they operated on a gender blind principle. The Constitution has also decried discrimination based on caste and creed. The last twenty years have also seen an assertion of ethnic groups to make good the promise of the Constitution. Sociologists have recognised that assertions of ethnic identities are closely linked with unequal access to material and non-material resources. It is therefore the stuff of inequality and stratification.

4.6 KEY WORDS

Ethnicity : This refers to cultural practices and outlooks that distinguishes a given community of people.

Gender : This refers to the Cultural and Social ideas that go with the upbringing which themselves create the notions of male/female; man/woman.

Hierarchy : This is a ladder of command which indicates in itself the status of a group. The highest status group is often at the top of the hierarchy.

Patriarchy : A social group like the family with authority rested in a male head.

4.7 FURTHER READINGS

Giddens, Anthony 1989 *Sociology* (Polity Press: Cambridge)

Gupta Dipankar ed. 1991 *Social Stratification* (Oxford University Press: New Delhi)

4.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Ethnic minorities are minority groups which has several features which are:
 - 1) Its members are disadvantaged as a result of discrimination against them. ii) members of the minority have a sense of groups solidarity, iii) they are isolated socially from the majority community.
 - 2) Both women and ethnic groups have a high visibility. They look different and behave in a different way. Thus what happens is that natural and social differences get less distinct. Further natural differences seem to be viewed as ingrained. However it must be made clear that gender is not a natural condition (biological) but a cultural one.

- 1) We must point out that nationalism is itself a form of ethnicity. It is made so by institutionalization of one ethnic identity with the state. However the difference is which ethnic groups may not act together, unless required the state is expected to be one. On the other hand ethnic groups have often had movements for statehood.
- 2) Patriarchy always favours men and had men as authority figures. It follows the state ends up favouring males. Usually men earn more than women and this reinforces their authority. However in cases where the woman is earning substantially this reinforces the man's position and it is usually not the other way around finally in the case where the woman is the only learning member the whole structure of patriarchy is threatened.

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