

India Society and Social Stratification

Introduction-:

Indian society is profoundly stratified, historically structured by a rigid, birth-based caste system (varna and jati) and deeply embedded patriarchy. This hierarchy, based on notions of purity and pollution, dictates social status, occupation, and marriage. Modern India increasingly features class-based stratification (income, education) that intersects with, rather than replaces, caste.

Key Components of Indian Social Stratification:

- **Caste System (Varna & Jati):** A rigid system assigning status by birth, dividing society into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, and the traditionally marginalized "Untouchables" (Dalits). It operates through endogamy (marrying within the caste) and defines occupational roles.
- **Intersection of Caste and Class:** While caste is ascribed (birth-based), class is achieved (wealth-based). However, in India, these systems intersect: higher castes often hold higher economic status, while lower castes are overrepresented in lower economic classes.
- **Gender-Based Stratification:** Patriarchy restricts women's access to resources, education, and power, placing them at a disadvantage within the household and in public life.
- **Regional & Cultural Factors:** Stratification is also shaped by tribal communities (adivasis), religious minorities, and rural-urban divides, leading to diverse forms of marginalization.

Modern Changes and Challenges:

- **Social Mobility:** Urbanization and education have introduced some fluidity, allowing lower-caste individuals to gain economic mobility and reduce caste rigidity.
- **Legal Protections:** The Constitution, particularly Article 17, abolishes "untouchability" and provides for affirmative action (reservation policies) for SCs, STs, and OBCs, as discussed in.
- **Persistence:** Despite reforms, discrimination persists, with lower castes often facing social exclusion or "caste shadows" in employment and housing.