**Social Control**

**Definition and Necessity**

In any human society, there are deviations from the accepted norms of a society or group. This movement away from the accepted social standards is called social deviance. Each society or group expects and attempts to ensure **conformity** of its members to its norms. Those members of a society or a group who abide by the rules and norms of the society (or the group) are called conformists, while those who don't are called **non-conformists**. A society or a group applies some formal and informal mechanisms to achieve conformity. Individuals may not act according to the defined values and norms of the group. Therefore violation of values and norms and deviating from the standard values and norms are often common.

**Social control**

is thus simply defined as all the mechanisms and processes employed by a society to ensure conformity. In other words, social control is any cultural or social means by which restraints are imposed upon individual behavior and by which people are initiated to follow the traditions and patterns of behavior accepted by society. It is, simply, a means by which conformists are rewarded and non-conformists are punished.

**Types of Social Control**

There are two major types of social control mechanisms. These are: negative and positive social control mechanisms.

**Negative Social Control:** This involves punishment or regulating behavior of deviants. A deviant is a person whose views and actions are different in moral or social standards from what is considered normal or acceptable in the context of a certain social group. This social control may be at micro/ informal level and macro/ formal levels. Micro/ informal level social control occurs at the level of small groups such as peer groups, family, and interpersonal relationships. Examples of negative social control at micro levels include: simple gossip or backbiting, a simple frowning, reprimanding, pinching, beating, ridiculing, scolding, ostracizing, etc. The punishments can be in the psychological, social or physical/ material forms. Punishments at macro or formal level include: fining, firing, demotion, imprisonment, banishment or excommunication, capital punishment and so on.

**Positive Social Control:** These mechanisms involve rewarding and encouraging those who abide by the norms. It involves rewarding the model behavior. The informal psychosocial reward mechanisms include simple smiles, saying encouraging word, shaking hands, thanking, showing appreciation, etc. Formal positive social control mechanism may include giving awards, promoting to a higher level of status, etc.

**Social Process**

**The Concept of Social Processes**

As members of a society or different societies interact with each other, different social processes take place. As there are processes in the natural world, social processes are bound to take place in the organized life of society. In the social system, these social processes are necessary for the very life, existence and smooth functioning of the system. Sociologists are interested in studying and analyzing these repetitive forms or patterns of behaviors, actions, and reactions.

**Social processes are certain repetitive**, continuous forms of patterns in the social systems that occur as individuals, groups, societies, or countries interact with each other. They are interaction patterns or modes, among members (individual) within a society or a group involving particular repetitive features, occurring both at micro and macro levels. They help us interpret and understand our social behavior.

**Modes of Social Processes**

Social processes may be manifested in a number of ways. There are generally five modes of social processes. These are competition, conflict, cooperation, accommodation and assimilation. These are universal modes; they take place at micro and macro levels. One mode of social process may balance another; e.g., competition by cooperation. One may also yield another- they take place in an unending cycle. For example, competition may yield conflict.

**Competition**

Competition as a social process seems to be more pronounced than others. It is real in our day-to-day interpersonal encounters, as well as in the global situations. Competition is the process where by individuals, groups, societies, and countries make active efforts to win towards getting their share of the limited resources. It is an impersonal attempt to gain scarce and valued resources of wealth, land, health care services, etc. As a result of competition, stratification, physical separation and so on may happen in a given society. Competition involves struggle, efforts, decisions, actions, etc., to survive. Competition is balanced by cooperation.

**Cooperation**

Cooperation is a social process whereby people join hands towards achieving common goals. Competition is more likely to occur in advanced, modern, industrialized societies than in traditional, homogenous societies where cooperation appears to be more important. .

**Conflict**

In the process of competition for power (which could be economic, social, and political) and resources, conflict is bound to take place. Conflict involves disagreement and disharmony, which results due to differences in ideology, living standard, and other social factors. It is a universal phenomenon, an ever- present reality, taking place both at micro and macro levels. Conflict involves clash of interest between individuals in a social group like in a family or between groups or societies. It results due to power imbalance, due to unfair distribution of resources. Here, it produces social class and stratification. Conflict may be between males and females, youngster and older generation; between different religious, ethnic and, political groups.

**Accommodation**

People may decide to consciously avoid the source of conflict thereby arriving at an agreement to live accepting one another, co-exist at relative peace, avoiding overt conflict. Accommodation is a social process whereby people try to accept one another, avoiding the sources of conflict to live in peaceful coexistence. It is a conscious adjustment and compromise among conflicting groups so that they can live with one another without overt conflict.

**Assimilation**

Assimilation is a social process whereby a group of individuals learns and accepts the values, norms, etc., of another group and becomes sometimes virtually identical with the dominant groups. Assimilation involves the acceptance or the internalizing of the larger or dominant group's culture, values and life styles by the smaller or minority group. Assimilation could imposed or voluntary. In this age of globalization there are westernization processes, whereby peoples of the Third World are taking up the values, notions and practices of the Industrialized West.

**Social Stratification**

**Definition**

Social stratification is one of the outcomes of the continuous occurring of social processes. Every society is segmented in to different hierarchies. In virtually all societies, some people are regarded as more important than others (more worthy of respect than others), either within the society as a whole or in a certain situations.

Social stratification is the segmentation of society into different hierarchical arrangement or strata. It refers to the differences and inequalities in the socioeconomic life of people in a given society. It represents the ranking of individuals or social positions and statuses in the social structure. The term is borrowed from geology where it is used to explain the hierarchical arrangement of rocks and mineral in the earth’s surface. When applied to the world of people, it refers to hierarchical arrangement of people into different classes or strata which is the division of a population into two or more layers, each of which is relatively homogenous, between which there are differences in privileges, restrictions, rewards and obligations (Macionis, 1997; Henslin and Nelson, 1995; Calhoun et al 1994).

**The Importance of Studying Social Stratification**

The study of social stratification is particularly important for sociologists. Some of the reasons for this may include (Giddens, 1995):

• To investigate the class membership of individuals in society with the aim of understanding the type of life people live. That is, knowing what type of life individuals in a given social group or stratum live is very important for sociological analysis.

• To explore the bases for the assignment of individuals into various hierarchies of the social structure. What are the bases for stratifying individuals into a specific stratum?

• To understand the relationship between individuals assigned into different hierarchies. What kind of interaction and relationship exist between individuals located into different strata?

• To investigate the relationship between individuals or groups belonging to the same.

**Theories of Social Stratification**

There are various theories of social stratification concerning its importance, origin and value, of which two important theories are the following.

1. The functionalist theory of social stratification

2. The conflict theory of social stratification

According to the proponents of the functionalist theory, segments or hierarchies and social inequalities exist in all societies. Moreover, their main argument is that social stratification is functional and purposeful and also essential in any society. They contend that no society is classless or unstratified, and social stratification is universally necessary. Social stratification in short is universal, functional, inevitable, and beneficial and something which can't be avoided.

The proponents of the conflict theory of social stratification also accept the fact that social inequality exists in every society. But they do not believe that social stratification is functional. According to conflict theorists, it is the way of oppressing one group of people by another.

**Forms of Social Stratification**

**Social Class**

Social classes are groups of people who are stratified into different categories. In a more general sense, social class can be defined as a category or level of people found in similar positions in the social hierarchy. The criteria or the bases for dividing people in a given society into different social classes may include wealth, occupation, education, sex, family background, religion, income, among others. The societies in modern world have been divided usually into three; low class, middle class and upper class. Each of these three classes is usually divided in to sub-classes.

Social class is often characterized as an open and flexible system. Thus, we have societies which can be characterized as open system, as opposed to societies having closed system. This form of social class is common in industrialized, modern, heterogeneous and literate societies. Such system generally works in most contemporary societies of the world (Stockard, 1997).

**Caste**

Another well-known form of social stratification is the caste system. The system is based on religious and other strongly rooted traditional belief that cannot be changed or are very difficult to change. This is the form of social stratification whereby classification of people into different strata is made on the basis of usually religious and other very strong conventions/ traditions that are difficult to change. Some of the features of caste system include:

• It is a very rigid and closed system.

• People belonging to the same stratum practice endogamy.

• Intermarriage between strata is not permitted.

• There are occupational differences between strata; i.e., each stratum is usually assigned a particular type of occupation.

• Food sharing, social drinking, friendships, etc., are permitted only within a stratum, not between strata.

This form of social stratification characterizes most traditional, agricultural societies. However, the best example of caste is the Hindu caste system of India. This has existed for some 3000 years and was only officially nullified in 1947. Hindu caste system divides the society into five major strata.

In ancient Roman and Hebrew societies and other ancient and medieval civilizations, slaves, woman and children were often given lower and stigmatized positions in society. They were not, for example, considered when the population census was conducted.

In rural Ethiopian society, this form of stratification has existed for centuries and it still persists. Individuals in such traditional occupations as pottery, blacksmith, tannery, weaving, carpentry, and others such as so called slaves have been given lower places and are often denied free membership and social participation in various social affairs. Among the Wolayta, for example, such kinds of people are called by various names such as the chinasha (potters), degella (tanners), wogachia (blacksmiths), shimagnia (weavers) and aylia (slaves). These groups of people are not allowed to create marital and other important social bonds with the gokka (meaning the decent groups). Similar types of stratification may also be found among the Sidama, Kambata, Guraghe in the southern region of Ethiopia, and elsewhere in other regions throughout the country.