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Weekly Question Discussion (Sociology)

(Chapter -5, Paper - 1)

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1. How are Hierarchy and Exclusion the major impediments in the transformation of society? Discuss.

Answer

- Try to answer this question using the following framework:
 - ✓ What is Social Transformation?
 - ✓ Obstacles in Social Transformation
 - ✓ What is Hierarchy?
 - ✓ What is Exclusion?
 - ✓ How do they act as the major impediments in transforming society?
 - ✓ Conclusion

What is Social Transformation?

- Social transformation implies a fundamental change in society, which can be contrasted with social change viewed as gradual or incremental changes over a period of time.
- Social transformation is a broad concept which incorporates the meaning of evolution, progress, change, on the one hand, and development, modernisation and revolution on the other.
- In the process of transformation, society moves from the one social structure to another rapidly and holistically, for instance the transformation of a society from having a traditional social structure to modern social structure.
- Social transformation and social problems are closely linked with each other. Society is not static but the dominant groups in society sometimes want to perpetuate their hold over society and protect their interests by repressive methods. Thus, in a negative manner, if the process of social transformation is suppressed, it generates new social problems.
- On the other hand, if the process of social transformation is taking a natural course, the society faces the problems of adjustment during the transitional phase of the decline of the old system and the emergence of a new system.
- The major impediments that a society faces in the process of its transformation include:
 - ✓ Social- lack of community support, social norms and group conformity
 - ✓ Cultural- tradition, culture, customs, religion
 - ✓ Economic- lack of property rights, corruption, fiscal infrastructure
 - ✓ Political- ideology, values
- Marx is perhaps the most famous proponent of the notion that forms of social organisation are largely determined by economic factors, and in particular the impact of industrial capitalism.
- Among political influences, the state – government – now plays a very large role in social life and change in industrial societies.

- Giddens believes that Cultural influences clearly play an important part in social change. For example, secularization and the development of science have had major effects on the way in which we think, attitudes to legitimacy and authority, and have thus also influenced social structures, systems and values.
- In this regards, two of the major impediments in the transformation of society are namely, Hierarchy and Exclusion.
- These are in some way or the other linked to all the four points mentioned above.

What is Hierarchy?

- Hierarchy refers to the ranking of members in social groups based on the power, influence, or dominance they exhibit, whereby some members are superior or subordinate to others.
- When inequalities are arranged in an order, hierarchy is formed. Hierarchy denotes presence of multiple strata in society placed one above the other.
- Functionalists suggest that Hierarchy is also a symbol of rising specialization and differentiation in the society.
- Hierarchies can be present in many forms like caste hierarchy, class hierarchy, gender hierarchy and political hierarchy.
- India is a hierarchical society. Societal hierarchy is evident in caste groups, amongst individuals, and in family and kinship groups.

What is Exclusion?

- “Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process.
- Ruth Levitas writes that it involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas.
- It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.
- Social exclusion describes a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live.
- Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household.

Exclusionary processes can have various dimensions

- Political exclusion can include the denial of citizenship rights such as political participation and the right to organise, and also of personal security, the rule of law, freedom of expression and equality of opportunity.
- Bhalla and Lapeyre argue that political exclusion also involves the notion that the state, which grants basic rights and civil liberties, is not a neutral agency but a vehicle of a society’s dominant classes, and may thus discriminate between social groups.
- Economic exclusion includes lack of access to labour markets, credit and other forms of ‘capital assets’.

- Social exclusion may take the form of discrimination along a number of dimensions including gender, ethnicity and age, which reduce the opportunity for such groups to gain access to social services and limits their participation in the labour market, decision making institutions.
- Cultural exclusion refers to the extent to which diverse values, norms and ways of living are accepted and respected.

How do they act as the major impediments in transforming society?

Hierarchy

- Promotes conflict
- Merton writes that presence of sub-cultures limits the possibility of effective communication while also increasing chances of deviance
- Favours higher or dominant classes
- Disapproves of the 'equality of opportunity' status of most democratic societies.
- Causes centralization of power- Hierarchical structures centralize power and authority at the highest levels possible.
- Presence of closed groups on higher strata of hierarchy also limits the possibility of learning the ways of reference groups.

Exclusion

- Causes poverty- Socially excluded people are often denied the opportunities available to others to increase their income and escape from poverty by their own efforts. So, even though the economy may grow and general income levels may rise, excluded people are likely to be left behind, and make up an increasing proportion of those who remain in poverty.
- Social exclusion leads to conflict and insecurity- Social exclusion is a leading cause of conflict and insecurity in
- many parts of the world. Excluded groups that suffer from multiple disadvantages may come together when they have unequal rights, are denied a voice in political processes and feel marginalised from the mainstream of their society.
- Peaceful mobilisation may be the first step, such as marches, strikes and demonstrations. But if this has no effect, or if governments react violently to such protests, then groups are more likely to resort to violent conflict if they feel there is no alternative.
- Social exclusion makes it harder to achieve the Development Goals- Social exclusion explains why some groups of people remain poorer than others, have less food, die younger, are less economically or politically involved, and are less likely to benefit from services. This makes it difficult to achieve the SDGs in some countries without particular strategies that directly tackle exclusion
- It causes social stigma and, thus, marginalization.

Conclusion

- Society is not a static element. It is a complex system of movements and counter movements pulling it in different directions.

- When this tussle is finally in favor of the movement, it becomes part of the social structure. Hierarchy and Exclusion, as seen above, are some of the major obstacles in transforming a society.
- For the transformation of a society, measures need to be taken to overcome such impediments and problems attached with them.

A Little More

Sociology of Social Transformation

- In developing the theories of social change and modernization, sociologists (and social scientists in general) draw upon the contributions of classical sociologists such as the works of those who were grappling with the rise of the capitalist industrial society in the nineteenth century. Their focus was on different aspects of this social transformation.
- While Marx was preoccupied with the new social relations of exploitation, and predicting a path towards an end of exploitation, Weber was concerned with the paradoxical consequences of modernization and cultural transformations, and Tocqueville was examining the social circumstances that gave rise to the democratic social order. Durkheim, the first systematic sociologist, examined the social and cultural consequences of the growing division of labour and specialization in society brought in by industrialization.