



comprises different parts of the body. Each of these parts is separate but they form an integrated whole. Similarly, in society there are different parts that perform different roles. If we look at the total picture of society we will see that all these parts perform roles which contribute to the stability of the entire society. In other words they contribute to the integration of society. For example, we find that people have different types of occupations and people perform different types of activities. There are doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, workers, industrialists, farmers, weavers etc. Though all these activities are different they are all needed for the functioning of the society. Therefore they can be viewed as separate parts which work together in order to integrate the society.

Hence we can see that the functionalist approach maintains that every component of the social structure performs specific functions which are necessary for maintaining stability in that society. These functions are necessary for the survival of that society. Hence the system of stratification in a society is also necessary for its integration and its stability.

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## **5.2 FUNCTIONALIST APPROACHES**

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The functionalists accept the fact that all societies are stratified. In other words, all the functions carried out by the various members of society are functional for its survival but they are not equal in status. Some of the functions are superior to the others. They are ranked higher. The people who perform these functions are also regarded as superior to others, i.e. those below them. The functionalist theories of stratification attempt to explain how social inequalities occur and why they are necessary for society.

The functionalists presume that there are certain basic needs of the every society. These needs have to be met or else there will be instability in society. These needs are known as functional prerequisites. Secondly, though these functional prerequisites are important, they are ranked according to the importance that is granted to them in that society. For example, workers and managers are needed to run a factory. No factory can exist with only workers and no managers or only managers and no workers. Hence managers and workers are integral for running a factory. At the same time it will be wrong to assume that because both groups are necessary, both have equal status. This is not so. The managers enjoy higher status than the workers do. Hence integration does not mean equality. It means that all the different groups together contribute towards stability but they do so because they are stratified in a hierarchy. What is the basis of this hierarchy and, why do people accept it? These are the questions that the theorists try to explain. In the next section we shall examine the views of Davis and Moore, the most eminent of the functionalists theorists.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Outline the functionalist approach.

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## 5.4 DAVIS - MOORE APPROACH

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Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore have developed the functionalist approach of stratification. Both are eminent American sociologists and they were students of Talcott Parsons. They elaborated their view in an article titled, "Some Principles of Stratification". This article became very popular and controversial. Their views have been supported by functionalists and have been severely criticised by others. Their views are also referred to as the functionalist theory of inequality. Let us first discuss their proposition and then we can discuss some of the critiques.

Parsons stressed on the need for stratification in society. He showed that it was inevitable in every society. Davis and Moore elaborated on this and try to examine how stratification becomes effective in any society. In this way the attempt to extend Parsons' argument. The main problem they pose is why do certain positions carry different degrees of prestige? And, how do individuals get into these positions?

The authors support Parsons' view that the basis of the existence of societies is order and stability. All societies have their own functional prerequisites which help them survive and operate effectively. Let us elaborate on this point. Societies are not mere collections of individuals. These individuals have to perform specific tasks so that the requirements of society are fulfilled. There are thus a number of activities that exist in society. A society needs workers, industrialists, managers, policemen, teachers, students, artisans and so on. Different individuals who have specialised skills do these different types of work. Therefore the first functional prerequisite of any society is of allocating these different roles effectively. This will ensure that the right people are placed in proper positions.

There are four aspects of the above-mentioned functional prerequisite. Firstly, all roles in society must be filled. All societies have different types of occupations. These occupations are necessary for their existence. Hence it is necessary to ensure that these occupations are filled. At the same time, mere filled up occupations are not enough. If the wrong people (i.e. people who do not have the requisite skills) are selected for the tasks there will be instability.

in society. This is especially true if these positions are important. For example, if a power generation company employs a well-known novelist, who has no idea of power generation, the work of the company will suffer and there will be stability not only in the company but in the supply of electricity. Therefore, the second factor is that the most competent people must fill the positions. Thirdly, in order for the best people to be selected for the job, it is necessary to train them for it. Training is therefore an effective means of ensuring that the best people are selected. In the case of that novelist who is made the head of a power generation company, he would have undergone training for fulfilling the needs of that position; he could be regarded as the best person. Lastly, the roles must be performed conscientiously. This is very important for ensuring effective performance in the roles. As a person may be trained and is the best in the field, but if he does not do his work with dedication, the system will suffer. Hence, all these four factors are necessary in order to meet the functional prerequisites of a society.

### 5.4.1 Functions of Stratification

Davis and Moore state that all societies need some mechanism for ensuring that the best people are selected for the positions and they perform well. According to them, the most effective means for ensuring this is social stratification. This system is effective because it offers unequal rewards and privileges to the different positions in society. If all people are given the same rewards, then there will be no motivation for people to work harder. There may also be a tendency for people to avoid taking up positions of responsibility or challenging jobs. They know that no matter how well they perform and no matter what position they occupy, they will get the same rewards. Therefore, stratification is necessary for the efficient functioning of the system.

#### Activity 2

**What is the need for stratification in a society? Discuss with students in the study centre and note down your findings in your notebook.**

The main contributions of a system of unequal rewards are two-fold. Firstly, it motivates people to fill certain positions. When positions carry higher rewards, people put in greater efforts, become qualified for positions. For example, if the position of a lecturer carries higher rewards than other professions, bright students will strive to fulfill the qualifications for becoming lecturers. In this way, society will get better teachers. Secondly, the rewards must be unequal even after fulfilling the position so that the persons who are appointed are motivated to improve their performance further. If lecturers are rewarded for their teaching and research activities through promotions and increased salaries, they will perform their duties better as they would like the higher rewards. In this manner, the system of stratification, based on unequal rewards, is beneficial for societies.

Davis and Moore explain that this system of stratification holds true for both modern societies based on competition and for traditional societies that are based on ascription. In modern societies people occupy positions according to their skills and qualifications. Those who are better qualified get better rewards and they occupy positions of prestige. In traditional societies positions are ascribed through birth. In traditional caste oriented Indian society people occupied their positions not due to their competence but through the status they had by birth. The son of a labourer would become a labourer even if he had the intelligence to do other type of superior work. Similarly the son of a landlord would become a landlord even if he were totally incompetent for the job. In such a system the provision of unequal rewards would have no effect in improving the efficiency of the system. However Davis and Moore argue that in such societies the stress is on performance of duties attached to the positions. Thus even though the son of a labourer will remain a labourer, if he performs his duties well he will be rewarded through other means.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) List down the functional prerequisites of Davis and Moore.
- 2) Say True and False for the statements that are given below:
  - i) All positions in society are of the same functional important.
  - ii) Limited people can perform functionally important roles.
  - iii) No training is required to perform functionally important roles.

### 5.4.2 Basic Propositions of Davis and Moore

In the above sections we have tried to explain the role of social stratification as a functional necessity of societies. In modern societies the basis of status is through achievement and not ascription. In other words the status of a person is determined by his or her merits and not by birth. Such societies are more dynamic and can fulfill their functional prerequisites. In order to achieve this Davis and Moore note that there are some propositions that are common for all these societies. These are:

- 1) In every society certain positions are functionally more important than the others. These positions carry greater rewards and higher prestige. For example, a position in the Indian administrative service is considered having more prestige than other jobs.
- 2) Only limited people have the necessary merit or talents to perform these roles. We can see that in the case of the IAS examinations several thousand appear for the examinations but only a handful are successful.
- 3) In most cases these positions require a lengthy and intensive training period. This involves sacrifices on the part of the people who acquire these posts. In our own society we can see that certain professions such

as medicine, engineering, chartered accountancy etc. involve intensive and expensive training involving a number of years. According to Davis and Moore, this involves sacrifice on the part of the candidate. Hence they must be rewarded for their sacrifice through higher financial rewards and greater prestige in society.

The above propositions are based on the fact that in modern societies achievement values have replaced ascriptive criteria. In these societies a person's merit is more important than his or her birth. The occupations are arranged hierarchically and those at the top have greater rewards and prestige than those below. This system of higher rewards, along with the fact that all can compete for these rewards and only those who are competent will get them, provides motivation to people to strive to perform better. However the most important condition for such a system to survive is that there is social consensus on the importance of the different occupations. This means that the ranking of occupations in terms of their superiority is based on the value consensus of that society.

#### Box 5.02

**Davis and Moore noted that there could be a problem in deciding which positions are functionally more important than others. It is possible that a position that is highly rewarded may not necessarily be functionally important. This in fact is one of the weaknesses of the theory that has been pointed out by its critics (we shall deal with this in more detail in the next section). Davis and Moore suggest that there are ways of measuring whether a superior position is functionally important or not.**

It may be argued that an engineer in a factory is no different than a skilled worker, hence the higher reward for the engineer is not justified. Davis and Moore would argue that the engineer is functionally more important because he has the skills of a skilled worker in addition to his other skills which the skilled worker does not possess. Hence though an engineer can be a skilled worker, a skilled worker cannot become an engineer. The second measure is the "degree to which other positions are dependent on the one in question". Thus an engineer in a factory is more important than the workers are because they are dependent on his for direction in their work.

In brief, Davis and Moore have carried forward Parsons' views on stratification by clarifying the reasons for social inequality. They have tried to show that the system of stratification based on unequal rewards and prestige are necessary for maintaining order in society and ensuring its progress.

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## 5.5 CRITICISM OF DAVIS AND MOORE'S APPROACH

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On the face of it the Davis-Moore approach appears rational and realistic. After all in all societies which believe in social and occupational mobility. This is in contrast to a society where there is no mobility as people are assigned roles accordance with their birth. In India to the Constitution grants equal rights to all citizens. It bans discrimination on the basis of caste, race, religion and gender. This is similar to most modern societies where a person's ability is more important than his birth. Under these circumstances the Davis-Moore theory appears realistic as it offers an explanation for the existing inequalities in society. There have been several criticisms of this theory. In fact after it was published in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1945, it aroused a great deal of interest. Several well-known sociologists of that time reacted by writing articles either in support or in criticism of the theory. As a result this journal had a special issue containing these articles. It is widely recognized that of the critical articles Melvin Tumin's was the most comprehensive. We shall discuss the points he raised in the following paragraphs.

Tumin began his criticism with the statement that functionally important positions are highly rewarded. While it was a fact that rewards were unequal as some received more reward and prestige than others it could not be categorically stated that these positions are functionally more important. It is possible that some workers in a factory are more necessary for maintaining production than their managers are, though the managers are better rewarded. In such cases if the workers are removed production will be hampered but if some managers are removed it may be still possible to maintain production. Therefore, how could functional importance of a position be measured? A society needs doctors, lawyers, workers and farmers. Each of these positions are functionally important for the existence of a society. Davis and Moore have not provided the means of measuring the functional importance of these positions. In fact some sociologists argue that the importance of position is a matter of opinion and not an objective criteria.

Tumin argues that unequal rewards to people may not necessarily stem from the functional importance of positions. The role of power in determining the importance of positions and thereby appropriating higher rewards is also an important means of determining the rewards. For example in India workers in the organized sector are better paid and get more social security than the workers in the unorganized sector. This is mainly because the former are unionised and have greater bargaining power than the latter that are not unionised and hence have little protection. The type of work done by workers in both sectors is similar but the rewards as well as the prestige are higher in the organised sector. Hence power plays a more important role in determining higher rewards than functional importance.

Tumin challenges the justification of higher rewards on the basis that these positions involve greater training. He argues that training does not necessarily mean sacrifice as the individuals also learn new skills, gain knowledge and thereby benefit. Moreover the rewards for such cases are disproportionate to the sacrifices made during training.

The proportion that unequal rewards help to motivate people in improving their work is also not true according to Tumin. In reality there are barriers to motivation. The system of stratification does not allow the talented people to have equal access to better opportunities. Social discrimination is present in every society and this acts as a barrier. In India where social inequalities are higher it is difficult for the child of a poor person to get better education in order to improve his position. This is true in America as well where Afro-Americans and coloured people are economically worse off and hence they cannot compete for better positions.

There is every possibility that in a system of unequal rewards, those who receive higher rewards will ensure that their children get the same rewards. They will also create barriers to prevent other from getting into the same positions that their children are in. Doctors may be interested in getting their children into the profession. They will not only try to ensure that their children get in but will also try and prevent other children from getting into profession. T.B. Bottomore in his study *Elites and Societies* shows that even in developed countries such as Britain and France where the stratification system is more open an overwhelming majority of the civil servants were children of civil servants.

The fact is that those at the bottom of the social hierarchy do not have access to the improving their knowledge and skills which will make them competent enough to get the better position. Tumin notes that motivation through unequal rewards can be possible in a system "where there is genuinely equal access to recruitment and training for all potentially talented that differential rewards can conceivable by justified as functionally important. This is rarely possible in most societies." Hence he asserts that "stratification systems are apparently antagonistic to the development of such full equality of opportunity." Tumin therefore argues that those already receiving differential positions can manipulate functionally important positions. Hence Tumin tries to prove that the functional theory of social stratification is not realistic.

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## 5.6 LET US SUM UP

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Social stratification exists in all societies. Every society has its hierarchy in which the different individuals are placed. The main problems for the structural functionalists, such as Talcott Parsons, Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore, was how individuals occupy these different positions, and who do we need these difference. They concluded that stratification was not only inevitable in all societies but it was also very necessary for them as it promoted stability and order.



Davis and Moore tried to examine why certain positions carry different degrees of prestige. They found that positions which are functionally more important for society carry higher rewards and greater prestige. They explained the reasons for this.

This criticism put forth by Melvin Tumin of Davis and Moore's propositions show that functional importance is not the only criteria for deciding on which positions carry higher rewards. There are other factors such as power and status based on birth. Even the so called open societies are influenced by these criteria. He challenges all the major propositions in the theory and he feels that stratification can become antagonising to members of society.

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## 5.7 KEYWORDS

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**Value consensus** : Agreement by all members of a social system on what is accepted for all.

**Functional Prerequisites** : Those values that are necessary for promoting order and stability and thus necessary for the survival of that society.

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## 5.8 FURTHER READINGS

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R. Bendix and S.M. Lipset (eds.), *Class, Status and Power*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1967.

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## 5.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress

1) Functionalist approach explains how a society is able to survive. The functionalists view society as an organism with various parts. Each of the part is separate but they form an integrated whole, and contribute to its stability. Thus the system of stratification in a society is also necessary for its integration and stability.

### Check Your Progress 2

1) This basic requirement for any society is to allocate various different roles effectively. There are four aspects to these:

- i) All roles, in society must be filled.
- ii) The most competent people must fill these positions.
- iii) Training for the job is necessary.
- iv) Roles must be performed consciously.

- 2) i) False  
ii) True  
iii) False