Social Mobility:
Meaning and Characteristics
### Meaning of Mobility

Before we discuss the meaning of Social Mobility, it is important to understand the meaning of ‘Mobility’.

1. Mobility means: Shift, Change, Movement
2. The change may be of place or from one position to another
3. This Change is value-free i.e. it cannot be said that change is good or bad

### Prefixing the word ‘Social’ to mobility

1. It implies that people or individuals occupying a social position move to another position or status.
2. In the social ladder, this movement may be upward or downward or it may be inter-generational or intra-generational.

In short, social mobility stands for change in the position of an individual or a group of individuals from one status to another.
There is no society which is closed, not even India with its rigid caste system and no society which is completely open even though it may be based on the class system. No two societies are exactly the same with respect to the amount of movement allowed or discouraged. Further the speed of movement or change may differ from one period to time of another. The rate of change depends upon the level of modernization of a given society.

Sorokin

(the first sociologist who wrote a book on mobility, “Social and Cultural Mobility”)

Social mobility refers to the movement either upward or downward, between higher or lower social classes; or more precisely, movement between one relatively, fulltime, functionally significant social role and another that is evaluated as either higher or lower. This movement is to be conceived as a process occurring over time, with individuals moving from one social role and position to another because of what has happened to them in various kinds of social interaction. Therefore, mobility arises out of social interaction as each individual reacts to others in changing series of social roles.

Barber
Keeping in view the definitions quoted above:

1. Mobility provides the individual with more or less of the benefits which his economy and society have to offer.
2. For instance, A rickshaw puller’s son becomes a doctor and the son of a fruit-peddler becomes an engineer or a clerk’s son becomes a doctor. In each case change in role between father and son provides the latter with more of the good things of life.

Social mobility is assumed as a positive rather than a negative value and an open society is preferred over a closed one. It is however, not the case. A closed society, in which there is little social mobility, shelters the individual from the frustrations. It doesn't encourage expectations that cannot be fulfilled. A member of a closed society spends his life in an environment that is familiar to him.
Inclusive concept of Social Mobility

Involving both objective and subjective factors, scholars like Westoff and others, have put forth an inclusive concept of Social Mobility, highlighting the following factors:

1. Changes in occupation of the husband, on the one hand, and his own father and wife’s father on another hand.
2. Number of job changes of the husband.
3. Changes in the husband’s income and that of the family.
4. Number of changes of residence since marriage.
5. Attitude of the wife towards getting ahead, including such factors as her willingness to leave her friends and to have her husband take a job with less security but more opportunity.
6. Attitudes of the husband towards getting ahead and his willingness to sacrifice in order to do so.
7. The level of the husband’s satisfaction with his occupation and status.
### Characteristics of Social Mobility

1. There is always social mobility in both directions, but the degree is subject to changes and there can be different trends for different strata.

2. There is less downward than upward mobility for following reasons:
   a) There can be no downward mobility from the lowest stratum, which is much more numerous than the top stratum.
   b) Downward mobility in agriculture occurs only in exceptional cases.

3. Mobility is usually gradual rather than radical. Exceptions do occur but not very frequently.
4. Upward mobility from the lower stratum has been greatly facilitated by high education and vocational training.

5. The degree of competition depends on the class for which a person competes. Competition among workers is not very strong. Competition for upper-class positions is moderate because even ambitious and gifted persons realize that their chances to succeed are very slim. The greatest struggle for positions occurs in the middle and lower-upper classes.

6. Generally, the rate of mobility increases if a system is expanding and decreases if it remains stable or is shrinking. If there are more applicants than openings, social mobility will be accelerated.
Why Sociologists are interested in Social Mobility ??

It is important to understand as to why sociologists have interest in studying Social Mobility. Well, there are number of reasons:

- Rate of social mobility may have an important effect of class formation. For example, Anthony Giddens (1973) suggests that if the rate of social mobility is low, class solidarity and cohesion will be high. Most individuals will remain in their class of origin and this will provide for the reproduction of common life experiences over the generations, resulting in development of class sub cultures and strong class identifications.

- A study of social mobility can provide an indication of the life chances of the members of a society. For example, it can show the degree to which a person's class of origin influences his or her chances of obtaining a high status occupation.

- It is important to know, how people respond to the experience of social mobility i.e. how the people react when they move up and down in social hierarchy?
Henceforth, the conclusion can be drawn that social mobility is considered in several different senses. It is a change in occupation that involves a consequent change in status, a promotion within same occupational group, the accumulation of seniority within a given occupation and a Change in occupation from one generation to another.
THANK YOU ...

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