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Definitions: 1. According to Duncan Mitchell, social status refers to " the position occupied by a person, family, or kinship group in a social system relative to others. This determines rights, duties and other behaviours, including the nature and extent of the relationships with persons of other statuses'. 2.

Ralph Linton says that " status is the place in a particular system, which a certain individual occupies at a particular time". 3. Robert Bierstedt is of the opinion that " A status is simply a position in society or in a group.... the status is the position afforded by group affiliation, group membership, or group organisation. It is ' set' in the structure of the group or of the society before a given individual comes along to occupy it". 4. For Morris Ginsberg " A status is a position in a social group or grouping, a relation to other positions held by other individuals in the group or grouping".

Nature of Status: 1. External symbols to identify the status: As Kingsley Davis has said, a person's identity in a social situation reveals his status. Though not always certain external symbols help the identification of one's statuses in society. The style of dress is one such indicator. Soldiers and army officers, nurses, doctors, advocates, policemen, religious missionaries, priests wear different dresses.

Their statuses could be understood by means of their dresses. The various badges the policemen and the army officials wear further pin point their status. Sex status of men and women could be ascertained with the help of the dress that they wear. In some societies married and unmarried persons, the old and young, the merchants and craftsmen wear different costumes.

This kind of identification has its limitations because some unauthorised persons may wear certain type of costumes for fun, fashion or for cheating.

2.

Every status has its own rights, duties and obligations: The nature of these rights and duties is decided by the normative system of society. A right is a legitimate expectation that one can entertain as an occupant of a status in relation to the behaviour of a person in another position. From the viewpoint of another person their claim represents only an obligation. For example, it is the right of an employer to expect a particular behaviour from his employee and it is the obligation of the employee to behave in the so desired manner. Similarly, it is the right of an employee to expect some rewards for his labour from his employer, and it becomes the obligation; but it becomes a duty on the part of the employer to give the rewards to the employee. Thus, 'rights' and 'obligations' are only different definitions of the same relationship.

3. Social statuses are governed by norms: These norms vary with persons, situations and statuses, even though they are believed to be common to all. For example, the norms like 'be honest' 'be truthful' etc., are believed to be common to all. But in practice we know that a doctor cannot always tell the truth to the patient regarding the state of his disease. Similarly, a merchant cannot practice honesty always in his trade.

Thus norms are always relative to situations. Which norms apply in a given case depends upon the relations between the statuses of the interacting persons and the situations in which they interact. 4. One individual may have several statuses: Since society can be understood as the network of

statuses, it is quite natural that in every society we find a large number of groups which have many statuses. Every individual occupies many such statuses.

His status will differ with the type of group. In a modern complex society each individual during the course of a single day may find himself in a large number of statuses. Example: A college student may be a student to his teachers, a customer to the shop owner, a depositor to his banker, a passenger to the bus driver, a brother to his sister, a son to his father and mother, a secretary to the members of the cricket club, a male to all females, a patient to his doctor, and so on. It means the individual occupies the statuses such as student, customer, depositor, passenger, brother, son, secretary of the cricket club, patient and many such statuses in the course of a single day.

It becomes thus impossible to enlist all the statuses that each one is likely to occupy at one time or other in the course of his entire life. Of course, in smaller and simpler societies an individual can have only a few statuses. 5.

Statuses exercise an influence upon the careers of individuals: The behaviour of individuals can be understood only by understanding the statuses that they assume in their respective groups or societies. For example, an Eskimo cannot think of becoming a nuclear physicist because such a status is not there in his society. Similarly, no American boy at present wants to become a witch-doctor because there is no such status in his society. 6. Statuses differ with their degree of importance: Some statuses are more important than others in deciding the position of an individual in

society. Different societies have different criteria for deciding the importance of statuses. Sociologist E.

T. Hiller has made use of the concept of 'key status' to denote a man's position in society. In most of modern industrial societies, for example, 'occupational status' has become the 'key status'. It mostly influences his various other statuses.

In some societies, kinship statuses, religious statuses or even political statuses may be more important and hence become 'key statuses'. In India, caste status and occupational status may be more important. Russians may attach more weight to political status and so on.

In primitive societies age, sex and kinship statuses are important than others. 7. Statuses add to social order and social stability: We are all born into a society in which the statuses are already there. They are the part of the structure of our society. We are not creating them afresh. The statuses of farmers, soldiers, teachers, clerks etc., are not our creations. In exceptional cases some may find out new ways and new paths of living and thus may create new statuses.

Like other elements of culture, status, which is a cultural item, is also dynamic. Some statuses, may, in course of time, become obsolete, and disappear from the social structure. But most of the individuals, in most of the cases occupy statuses that are already there established in the societies in which they are born. 8. Social status has a hierarchical distribution also: All the statuses in society are not equally distributed among all.

Thus a few persons occupy the highest positions while the majorities assume the so called 'ordinary' statuses. The theoretical assumption behind the distribution of the statuses is that the statuses are determined competitively by the possession of abilities relative to the demand for abilities in society. Thus, it could be said in the competitive struggle those who possess greater abilities and qualities assume higher statuses in society. But in actuality, the relation between the possession of abilities and the assumption of higher statuses has not been found to be invariable. The factors such as private property, inheritance, social services, etc., all modify the form of the distribution of statuses.