1.1 Marginalisation: Concept and Definitions

Marginalization is a process whereby something or someone is pushed to the edge of a group and accorded lesser importance. This is predominantly a social phenomenon by which a minority or sub-group is excluded and their needs to ignored. For example some products will undergo marginalization when they longer have the need to fill that they used to have in the part.

Marginality is an experience that affects millions of people throughout the world. People who are marginalized have relatively little control over their lives, and the resources available to them. This results in making them handicapped in delving contribution to society. A vicious circle is set up whereby their lack of positive and supportive relationships means that they are prevented from participating in local life, which in turn leads to further isolation. This has a tremendous impact on development of human beings, as well as on society at large.

The concept of marginality was first introduced by Robert Park (1928). Marginalization is a symbol that refers to processes by which individuals beyond groups are kept at or pushed beyond the edges of society. The term outsides may be used to refer to those individuals or groups who are marginalized.

In general, the term ‘marginalization’ describes the overt actions or tendencies of human societies, where people who they perceive to undesirable or without useful function, are excluded, i.e., marginalized. These people, who are marginalized, from a group or community for their protection and integration and are known as ‘marginalized groups’. This limits their opportunities and means for survival.

Furthermore, the term marginalization refers to individual on groups who live at the margin of society. Their situations may be historical on cultural as they suspend between social classes or cultural groups without being fully integrated to it. The term has different connotations and nuances in the modern era of postcolonial, post-modern period and in world that is pre-dominantly driven by market forces. In cultural
Anthropology marginalization is a major subject of study in which ethnic groups and their social situations are studied. It may have various forms like class, caste, gender, community and so on at one level and at the other level groups who are subjected to economic and social hardships. There groups may still be marginalized at multiple levels in a country like India which has witnessed tremendous socio-political changes in both pre-independence and post-independence period.

Marginalisation is both a historical reality and a context specific phenomenon. Structure and variants of marginality indicate a common character of domination of some groups and individuals and weakness and ineffectiveness of a large number of people at a same time. In other words, it shows dominance of a minority of people and subjugation of a large majority in specific societies. Patterns of injustice and inequality characterize the phenomenon of marginalisation in all over the world. In the Indian subcontinent and especially within the broad fold of Hindu social orders, the marginalised are designated to be the out-castes represented by the antyajas and the shudras belonging to the social categories of untouchables and others practising unclean ascribed occupations and extra-mural manual activities of various sorts. Within the conventional cultural framework of the varna system they are provided with stigmatised existence and are considered to be impure and are kept away from varieties of social and cultural interactions with the higher varnas, like the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. They are conditioned to survive at the margin of society – socially, culturally, politically, economically and even geographically. Traditionally they have remained associated to ascribed occupations compelling them to concentrate on low – paying jobs, or ‘unclean’ occupations to accept exploitative terms and conditions of work and to remain insecure socially and politically. Many of these social and cultural stigmas are also extended to women, tribal and religious minority groups. There is continuous exclusion of women towards men.
In society certain communities are ignored and excluded because they speak a different language, follow different customers or belong to a different religious group from the majority community. This is called marginalization. Marginalization is the social process of being confined to a lower social standing. Marginalization involves people being denied their fundamental rights which results in lowering their economic and social status. They experience inequality and discrimination.

**Peter Leonard** defines marginality as, “. . . being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity”.

**The Encyclopedia of Public Health** defines marginalized groups as, ‘To be marginalized is to be placed in the margins, and thus excluded from the privilege and power found at the center’.

**Latin** observes that, “‘Marginality’ is so thoroughly demeaning, for economic well-being, for human dignity, as well as for physical security. Marginal groups can always be identified by members of dominant society, and will face irrevocable discrimination.”

According to **Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary** ‘to put or keep (someone) in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group’.

**Ghana S. Gurung and Michael Kollmair** mention that the concept of marginality is generally used to analyse socioeconomic, political, and cultural spheres, where disadvantaged people struggle to gain access to resources and full participation in social life. In other words, marginalized people might be socially, economically, politically and legally ignored, excluded, or neglected, and, therefore vulnerable to livelihood change. According to

**Sommers et. al.**, "Socio-economic marginality is a condition of socio-spatial structure and process in which components of society and space in a territorial unit are observed"
to lag behind an expected level of performance in economic, political and social well-being, compared with average conditions in the territory as a whole"

These definitions are mentioned in different contexts, and show that marginalization is a slippery and multilayered concept. Marginalization has aspects in sociological, economic, and political debates. Marginalization may manifest itself in forms varying from genocide/ethnic-cleansing and other xenophobic acts/activities at one end of the spectrum, to more basic economic and social hardships at the unitary (individual/family) level.

Marginalization is often described as a social process where people are relegated to the fringes or `margins of the society. It is defined as a process, in which individuals or communities are socially excluded, systematically blocked from, or are denied access to participate in social and political processes which are basic to integrate with the society. Marginalization inhibits a person, a group, a section or a community to enjoy rights, privileges, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a society. It may therefore be considered as a discordant relationship between those who marginalize as compared to those who are being marginalized. Then possibly the term `marginalized’ may be used synonymously with the term `oppressed’ in comparison to an `oppressor’ as Paolo Freire used in his famous ‘Pedagogy of Oppressed’, `proletariat’ as used by Karl Marx, `subaltern’ used by Gramsci, `powerless’ as elaborated by Michel Foucault, or exploited, vulnerable, discriminated, disadvantaged, subjugated, socially excluded, alienated or downtrodden as used elsewhere in the available literature.

However, there are theorists have warned that some of these words cannot be equated with each other. For example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is of the view that . . . “subaltern is not just a classy word for “oppressed”, for [the] Other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie. In terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern — a space of difference. Now, who would say that’s just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It’s not subaltern… Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most
dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus; they don't need the word ‘subaltern’ . . . They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They’re within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern”.