

## Equality

“Unstratified society with real equality of its members is a myth that has never been realized in the history of mankind.” – **P.A. Sorokin**

Equality is a modern value. It is also used as a measure of modernity and of the whole process of modernization. Equality is associated with the development of the nation state, political egalitarianism and social justice. Equality, both as a value and a principle, took a concrete shape in the slogan “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”, given in the French Revolution of 1789.

Traditional societies (except primitive ones), be it caste-based Hindu society or Western feudal societies based on estate system, were largely inegalitarian in nature. Hence, equality as a value and a concept is of recent origin, making an appearance during the post-Renaissance and Enlightenment period.

However, the concept of equality has developed through various stages. For example, during the French Revolution, one of the major cry of people was for ***equality before law***. Protesting against the exploitative estate system, people demanded that in the eyes of law all should be treated equal. Soon this led to the demand for ***political equality*** which resulted in universal adult suffrage. **Turner** writes that “the modern notion of equality cannot be divorced from the evolution of citizenship.” [Bryan S. Turner]

Further, as the criticism against the exploitative capitalist system grew, demand for ***socio-economic equality*** also mounted. Marxist scholars argued that unless there is socio-economic equality, equality before law and political equality would remain illusory (not real). As a result the notion of **welfare state** developed and various reforms such as land reforms, tax reforms (progressive taxation) etc., were initiated to promote greater socio-economic equality.

**John Rawls** in his well-known work ‘**A Theory of Justice**’ deals with the question of “equality” from the point of **social justice** than merely as a political concept. Rawls realized that a society could not avoid inequalities among its people. Inequalities result from such things as one’s inherited characteristics, social class, personal motivation, etc. Even so, Rawls insisted that a just society should find ways to reduce inequalities in areas where it can act. He advocated that societies should strive to provide for “**fair equality of opportunity**” to all its members. One way for a society to do this would be to **eliminate discrimination**. Another way would be to **provide everyone easy access to education**. Rawls

relates equality to the basic structure of society that governs the assignment of rights and duties and regulate the distribution of social and economic advantages.

In recent times, feminist scholars have been very vocal about the issues related with **gender equality**. The advocates of gender equality have extended their argument to the **human rights of transgenders** and **decriminalization of Article 377 of Indian Penal Code** related to homosexuality.

Equality, however, is meaningless unless we can answer the question: **equal in what?** In social sciences, the term equality has very different implications, depending upon what is being apportioned.

**Foundational Equality:** is the idea that human beings are ‘born equal’ in the sense that their lives are of equal moral value.

**Formal equality:** refers to the formal status of individuals in society in terms of their rights and entitlements. Its clearest expression is in the form of **legal equality** (equality before law) and political equality (universal suffrage and one person–one vote, one vote–one value).

**Equality of opportunity:** means that everyone has the same starting point, or equal life chances. Equality of opportunity concept developed in response to the inadequacies of formal equality. In a society marked by gross economic inequality, formal equality would serve little purpose. As a result it was argued that people should have a fair chance or level playing field in society. They should have equality in terms of various rights and resources so that they can nurture their talent. In other words, equality of opportunity tries to ensure **equality of conditions** so that people can become unequal based on their merit. Thus developed the concepts of welfare state and social justice to ensure equality of opportunity. For example, right to education is now a fundamental right in India. Similarly, UPSC has set Graduation as the minimum eligibility criterion for the candidates belonging to different castes, class or religion to compete in the Civil Services Examination conducted annually.

**Equality of outcome:** refers to an equal distribution of rewards. It is usually reflected in social equality, an equal distribution of income, wealth and other social goods. Marx’s dream of communist society was largely based upon this form of equality.

Although foundational equality as a philosophical principal, and formal equality as a legal and political principle are widely accepted, at least in

liberal-democratic societies, deep controversy continues to surround the idea of equality of outcome or rewards.

**Arguments in favour of social or material equality:**

- It strengthens social cohesion and community by creating a common identity and shared interests;
- It promotes justice in that the most obvious forms of social inequality are the result of unequal treatment by society rather than unequal natural endowment;
- It enlarges freedom in the sense that it safeguards people from poverty and satisfies basic needs, enabling them to achieve fulfillment;
- It is the only meaningful form of equality in that all other equalities rest upon it: genuine legal and political equality require that people have access to equal social resources.

**Arguments against social equality:**

- It is unjust because it treats unequals equally and therefore fails to reward people in line with their talents and capacities;
- It results in economic stagnation in that it removes incentives and caps aspirations;
- It can be achieved only through state intervention and a system of ‘social engineering’, meaning that it always infringes upon individual liberty;
- It results in drab uniformity; diversity is vanquished and with it the vigour and vitality of society.

Men have long dreamed of an egalitarian society, a society in which all members are equal. Karl Marx too in his theory of social change had predicted the arrival of communist society, a truly egalitarian society, without classes, without contradictions. However, in reality, the egalitarian society remains a dream.

## Inequality and Hierarchy

Human society is marked by great diversity, be it biological, psychological or social. Individuals or groups may differ either in terms of their biological attributes like age, sex, and race, or psychological attributes like aptitude, intelligence and motivation, or social attributes, such as wealth, power and prestige.

When such different categories of people are treated alike (or equal) and one is not treated as more significant than the other, it is called **social differentiation**. According to **Dipankar Gupta**, difference or social differentiation is salient when diversity in human society is understood in a 'qualitative sense'. According to this scheme, categories of individuals or groups are not arranged vertically or hierarchically, but horizontally or even separately. It is because the constitutive elements of these differences are such that any attempt to see them hierarchically would do offence to the logical property of these very elements. Such an arrangement can be easily illustrated in the case of language, religion or nationalities. It would be futile to hierarchize language, or religions or nationalities. India is an appropriate place to demonstrate this. The various languages that are spoken in India speak eloquently of an horizontal categorization where differences are paramount. Secular India again provides an example of religious diversity where religions are not hierarchized or unequally privileged in law, but have the freedom to exist separately in full knowledge of their intrinsic differences.

However, the concept of difference or social differentiation offers limited success in understanding the organization of human society in reality and the egalitarian society still remains a dream. All human societies from the simplest to the most complex have some form of social inequality. Inequality is both assumed as a fact of everyday life and denounced as an offence to a civilized society. In particular, power and prestige are unequally distributed between individuals and social groups. In many societies there are also marked differences in the distribution of wealth.

- **Power**: refers to the degree to which individuals or groups can impose their will on others, with or without the consent of those others.
- **Prestige**: relates to the amount of esteem or honour associated with social positions, qualities of individuals and styles of life.
- **Wealth**: refers to material possessions defined as valuable in particular societies.

**The term social inequality refers to the existence of ‘socially created inequalities’.** Please note that when the differences among individuals or groups are recognized but not evaluated or associated with social rewards, then it is called **social differentiation**. But, when these differences among people are socially evaluated in terms of superiority or inferiority leading to unequal distribution of rewards (wealth, prestige or power) it results in **social inequality**.

**Hierarchy** is one special form of social inequality, which implies a ranking of individuals or groups according to some criterion of evaluation (for example, wealth, prestige or power) accepted as relevant within the system. According to **Louis Dumont**, hierarchy implies the regular ordering of a phenomenon on a continuous scale ‘such that the elements of the whole are ranked in relation to the whole’.

It is important to note here that equality of opportunity is a political ideal that is opposed to caste hierarchy but not to hierarchy per se. Hierarchy in itself may either be **ascribed** (ritualistic, based on birth) or **achieved** (secular, based on merit).

For example, Hindu society in traditional India was divided into five main strata: four varnas or castes, and a fifth group, the outcaste, whose members were known as untouchables. Each caste is subdivided into jatis or sub-castes, which in total number many thousands. **Jatis are occupational groups** – there are carpenter jatis, goldsmith jatis, potter jatis, and so on.

**Castes are ranked in terms of ritual purity.** The Brahmins or priests, members of the highest caste, personify purity, sanctity and holiness. They are the source of learning, wisdom and truth. Only they can perform the most important religious ceremonies. At the other extreme, untouchable are defined as unclean and impure, a status which affects all their social relationships. They must perform unclean and degrading tasks such as the disposal of dead animals. They must be segregated from members of the caste system and live on the outskirts of villages. Their presence pollutes to the extent that even if the shadow of an untouchable falls across the food of a Brahmin it will render it unclean. In general, **the hierarchy of prestige based on notions of ritual purity** is mirrored by the hierarchy of power. The Brahmins were custodians of the law, and the legal system which they administered was based largely on their pronouncements. Inequalities of wealth were usually linked to those of prestige and power. In a largely rural economy, the Brahmins tended to be the largest landowners and the control of land was monopolized by members of the two highest castes. Thus, in a caste society, the assignment of individuals to various positions in the social hierarchy is fixed by

birth. The child acquires the social status of his or her parents. Social mobility is limited in a caste society, and the process whereby one is admitted to a different level of the hierarchy is open only to some individuals depending on their initial ascriptive social status.

In contrast, in relatively open societies, where equality of opportunity prevails, the assignment of individuals to various positions in the social hierarchy is determined by some form of competitive process, and all members of society are eligible to compete on equal terms. Thus, open societies are marked by hierarchies based on secular dimension.

Thus the basis of hierarchy is unequal distribution of rewards, viz. wealth, prestige and power. So, when these rewards are unequally distributed in a given society, social hierarchy results. Social hierarchy may involve ranking of individuals or ranking of groups.

When social hierarchy involves **ranking of groups**, we call it **social stratification**. Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. It refers to the presence of social groups which are ranked one above the other, usually in terms of the amount of power, prestige and wealth their members possess. Those who belong to a particular group or stratum will have some awareness of common interests and a common identity. They will share a similar life style which to some degree will distinguish them from members of others social strata. Thus, the members of a particular stratum have a common identity, like interests and a similar life style. They enjoy or suffer the unequal distribution of rewards in society as members of different social groups.

For example: Indian caste system – Four Varnas – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. And a fifth group of ‘Untouchables’.

- Castes are ranked in terms of ritual purity.
- hierarchy of prestige → hierarchy of power → hierarchy of wealth  
(brahmins at the top and untouchables at the bottom) (inequalities of wealth)

Dear Candidate, there are writers like **Melvin M. Tumin** who think that there is no difference between social stratification and social inequality. For them, these two terms are synonymous. But, there is a band of other scholars, like **Haralambos** and **Holborn**, who have made distinction between these two phenomena. For such scholars, a society can exhibit inequality without being stratified – for example, by affording truly equal opportunity to all but distributing

rewards based on performance. Thus, it is possible for social inequality to exist without social strata.

For Haralambos, social stratification is a particular form of social inequality and it refers to the presence of social groups which are ranked one above the other, usually in terms of the amount of power, prestige and wealth their members possess. Those who belong to a particular group or stratum will have 'consciousness of kind' – a common identity, like interests and a similar lifestyle. The Indian caste system provides the best example of social stratification system.

Please note that **social stratification, however, is only one form of social inequality. It is possible for social inequality to exist without social strata.** For example, some sociologists have argued that it is no longer correct to regard western industrial society, particular the USA, as being stratified in terms of a class system. They suggest that social classes have been replaced by a continuous hierarchy of unequal positions. Where there were once classes, whose member had a **consciousness of kind**, a common way of life and shared interests, there is now an unbroken continuum of occupational statuses which command varying degrees of prestige and economic reward. Thus, it is suggested that a hierarchy of social groups has been replaced by a hierarchy of individuals.

**Inequality of stratification** can exist in 2 ways:

- Cumulative inequality of stratification
- Dispersed inequality of stratification

**Cumulative inequality of stratification** results when the status position of any social group overlaps on all the dimensions of societal rewards, viz. wealth, prestige, power, education, etc. [Note: **Karl Marx** argues that inequality tends to be cumulative in nature.]

**Dispersed inequality of stratification** results when a particular social group enjoys high status position on one dimension but does not automatically enjoys similar status position on other dimensions of societal rewards.

For example, traditional caste system, particularly in north India, was marked by cumulative inequality of stratification. Brahmins enjoyed higher position on all axis of societal rewards viz. social prestige, power, education and wealth, while the untouchables occupied the lowest position in the caste hierarchy along these dimensions. However, in modern India, cumulative inequality of stratification has

given way to dispersed inequality of stratification on account of various welfare initiatives taken by Indian state such as policy of protective discrimination in educational institutions and government services, land reforms, reserved seats in political institutions, etc. Though Brahmins still occupy high prestige on account of their higher ritual position in the caste hierarchy but in the last few decades several lower caste groups have witnessed upward mobility in terms of education, power and wealth. While modern education, reservation policy and land reforms improved their economic position (land owning castes), their sheer numbers (numerical majority) facilitated their dominance in political sphere. For example, **Yadavs of U.P. and Bihar, Chamars of western Uttar Pradesh, Meenas of Rajasthan, etc. [Mayawati, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Ram Vilas Paswan, etc.]**

\*Please note that the **dispersed inequality of stratification** gives rise to **relative deprivation**. For example, **Dr. Ambedkar – Dalit Movement**.

**Gerhard Lenski** also talks about two related and important concepts:

- **Status crystallization** – is the situation where an individual or a group is high or low on all the three dimensions of social rewards (traditional caste system).
- **Status inconsistency** – results when an individual or a group is high on one dimension, but low on another (caste system in modern India).

\*Please note that **status inconsistency** results in the feeling of **relative deprivation** → **protest** → **conflict**.

For example, Dr. Ambedkar enjoyed a very high status in terms of his educational qualification yet he, and his caste (Mahar), occupied the lowest status in the ritual hierarchy of the caste system. Thus, leading to frustration, collective mobilization and protest against the inhuman and exploitative caste system. Ambedkar called for the annihilation of the caste system for the emancipation of dalits. Thus, the emergence of Dalit movement could be best accounted by status inconsistency and feeling of relative deprivation. However, this is only one of the explanations for the rise of Dalit movement.

**Andre Beteille** talks about two types of stratification systems:

- **Harmonic system of stratification** is the one in which the norms and values of society legitimize social inequality.

\*for example, traditional caste system – **Purushasukta hymn** of the tenth mandala of the Rig Veda – The *Purushashukta* hymn of *Rigveda* tells us that the *brahmana* emanated from the mouth of the primeval man (*Brahma*), the *kshatriya* from his arms, the *vaishya* from his thighs and the *shudra* from his feet. The particular limbs associated with these divisions and the order in which they are mentioned probably indicate their status in the society of the time, though no such interpretation is directly given in the hymn. In this particular account of the creation not only is the origin of the classes interpreted theologically, but also a divine justification is sought to be given to their functions and status. This may be a *post facto* rationalization of the occupations and of the positions that the various groups came to occupy in the social hierarchy.

\*through its **Guna theory**, Brahmanism seeks to justify the social hierarchy of varna system (hitherto taken for granted) in terms of different qualities and capacities of the individuals. In the *Bhagavadgita* the Creator is said to have apportioned the duties and functions of the four varnas according to the inherent qualities and capacities of the individuals. This theory claims that all existing things, animated and inanimated, inherent three qualities (*Gunas*) in different apportionment. **Sattva** qualities include wisdom, intelligence, honesty, goodness and other positive qualities. **Rajas** include qualities like passion, pride, valour and other passionate qualities. **Tamas** qualities include dullness, stupidity, lack of creativity and other negative qualities. Thus, brahmanas are predominated by *sattva guna*, kshatriyas by *rajas guna*, vaishyas by *rajas* and *tamas guna* and shudras by *tamas guna*. Of course, this theory fails to explain how the individuals at the very beginning of creation came to be possessed of peculiar qualities and capacities. This theory of origin, though it slurs over the above difficulty, tries to provide a rational sanction for the manifestly arbitrary divisions. God separated the people into four varnas, not merely because they were created from different limbs of his body nor again out of his will, but because he found them endowed with different qualities and capacities.

\*with the **doctrine of Karma**, the lawgivers of the age propagated the view that the conscientious practice of the duties proper to one's own varna, led to a birth in a higher varna and thus to salvation. (Please note that after having

legitimized the caste-based inequality, lawmakers of the age sought to reinforce it with the doctrine of *Karma*. However, interestingly, the *Karma* theory instead of being inner-worldly, tended to be other-worldly in its effect.)

Thus, the prevailing norms and values of society in the traditional caste system legitimized as well as reinforced social inequality on various grounds and by various means. Beteille argues that inequalities in such a system do not generate conflict. Conflict in harmonic system of stratification is minimal and does not threaten the existence or stability of the system.

- **Disharmonic system of stratification** is the one in which norms and values of society prescribe equality but in reality there is inequality. In other words, while the normative order prescribes equality, the existential reality is marked by inequality.

\*for example, in modern India, the constitution (normative order) enshrines the values of equality, liberty and fraternity but the contemporary reality is marked by gross socio-economic inequalities, political marginalization, prejudices and discrimination. Thus, generates high aspirations among the people, giving rise to the sense of relative deprivation, protest and radical social movements. Beteille argues that disharmonic system of stratification is marked by greater conflict (Naxalite- Maoist insurgency, SIMI (Students Islamic Movement of India), etc.).

### **Natural versus social inequalities**

[Q: How does hierarchy get built into the systems of natural and social inequalities?]

In social sciences, the question of the relationship between biologically based and socially created inequality has proved extremely difficult to answer. For example, many stratification systems are accompanied by beliefs which state that social inequalities are biologically based. Such beliefs are often found in systems of racial stratification where, for example, Whites claim biological superiority over Blacks and see this as the basis for their dominance.

The French Philosopher **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** provided one of the earliest examinations of this question. He refers to biologically based inequality as 'natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in a

**difference** of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or the soul'. By comparison, socially created inequality 'consists of the different privileges which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others, such as that of being more rich, more honored, more powerful, or even in a position to exact obedience'. Rousseau believed that biologically based inequalities between men were small and relatively unimportant whereas socially created inequalities provide the major basis for systems of social stratification. Most sociologists would support this view.

However, it could still be argued that biological inequalities, no matter how small, provide the foundation upon which structures of social inequality are built. This position is difficult to defend in the case of certain forms of stratification. In the **caste system**, an individual's status is fixed by birth. A person belongs to his parents' jati and automatically follows the occupation of the jati into which he was born. Thus no matter what the biologically based aptitudes and capacities of an untouchable, there is no way he can become a Brahmin. Unless it is assumed that superior genes are permanently located in the Brahmin caste, and there is no evidence that this is the case, **then there is probably no relationship between genetically based and socially created inequality in traditional Hindu society**. The rise of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, for example, defies the very logic of the argument of any biological basis of social inequality.

A similar argument can be advanced in connection with the feudal or estate system of medieval Europe. Stratification in the feudal system was based on landholding. The more land an individual controlled, the greater his wealth, power and prestige. The position of the dominant stratum, the feudal nobility, was based on large grants of land from the king. Their status was hereditary, land and titles being passed on from father to son. It is difficult to sustain the argument that feudal lords ultimately owed their position to biological superiority when a son, no matter what his biological make-up, inherited the status of his father.

The most stubborn defense of the biological argument has been provided for systems of racial stratification. In the USA, Black Americans, who make up 12% of the population, have traditionally formed a distinct social stratum at the base of the stratification system. The majority of Blacks occupied the most menial and subservient occupational statuses, being employed as agricultural labourers and as unskilled and semiskilled manual workers in industry. In the mid 1960s, the average income for Black families was only 54 % of the average for White families. Blacks had little political power being scarcely represented in local and national government: in 1962, in the southern states, only six Blacks were elected to public office. This system of racial stratification has often been

explained in terms of the supposed genetically based inferiority of Blacks. In particular, it has been argued that Blacks are innately inferior to Whites in terms of intelligence. ‘Scientific’ support for this view has been provided by intelligence tests which indicate that on average Blacks score fifteen points below Whites.

**However, most sociologists would argue that systems of racial stratification have a social rather than a biological basis.** They would maintain that systematic discrimination against Blacks, made possible by the power of the dominant stratum, accounts for the system of racial stratification in USA. Thus Blacks have been excluded from high status occupations because of lack of power rather than the quality of their genes. Support for this view is provided by evidence from the late 1960s and 1970s. During the mid 1960s, in the USA, laws were passed banning racial discrimination in areas such as employment, politics and education. Blacks are now moving out of the lowest stratum in ever increasing numbers. By 1971, seventy Blacks were elected to political office in the southern states. Although the figure is small, it represents a dramatic increase. Black family income is slowly approaching the White average. From 1960 to 1970, the percentage of Blacks employed in professional, managerial and technical occupations rose steadily and in some cases doubled. This evidence suggests that social rather than biological mechanisms were responsible for the traditional status of Blacks in the USA.

The question of the relationship between intelligence and social inequality is particularly difficult to answer. The average intelligence quotient of Blacks in America is still significantly below that of Whites. In addition, Blacks are still disproportionately represented in the lower levels of the stratification system. **Since it is generally agreed that intelligence has a genetic component, can it not be argued that social inequality has a biological basis?** A few preliminary remarks can be made to refute this view. Firstly, intelligence is based on both genetic and environmental factors; the two are inseparable. Thus an individual’s social background will affect his performance in an IQ test. In particular, the deprivations he experiences as a member of a low social stratum will reduce his IQ score. Secondly, many researchers argue that intelligence tests are based on White middle-class knowledge and skills and are therefore biased against Blacks. Thirdly, the tests measure only a small part of the range of mental abilities. Most sociologists would therefore conclude that the social status of Blacks in the USA is the result of a social rather than a biological mechanism.

So far the question of what exactly constitutes biological inequality has not been answered. **It can be argued that biological differences become biological inequalities when men define them as such.** Thus Andre Beteille states that,

‘Natural inequality is based on differences in quality, and qualities are not just there, so to say, in nature; they are as human beings have defined them, in different societies, in different historical epochs’. Biological factors assume importance in many stratification systems because of the meanings assigned to them by different cultures. For example, old age has very different meanings in different societies. In traditional aborigine societies in Australia it brought high prestige and power since the elders directed the affairs of the tribe. But in Western societies, the elderly are usually pensioned off and old age assumes a very different meaning. Even with a change of name to senior citizen, the status of old age pensioner commands little power or prestige. So-called racial characteristics are evaluated on the basis of similar principles, that is values which are relative to time and place. The physical characteristic of Blacks in America were traditionally defined as undesirable and associated with a range of negative qualities. However, with the rise of Black Power during the late 1960s, this evaluation was slowly changed with slogans such as ‘Black is beautiful’. It can therefore be argued that biological differences become biological inequalities only to the extent that they are defined as such. They form a component of some social stratification systems simply because members of those systems select certain characteristics and evaluate them in a particular way. Andre Beteille argues that the search for a biological basis for social stratification is bound to end in failure since the ‘identification as well as the gradation of qualities is a cultural and not a natural process’.

Beliefs which state that systems of social stratification are based on biological inequalities can be seen as rationalizations for those systems. Such beliefs serve to explain the system to its members: they make social inequality appear rational and reasonable. They therefore justify and legitimate the system by appeals to nature. In this way a social contrivance appears to be founded on the natural order of things.

Thus, when natural or social differences, come to be socially evaluated or associated with social rewards (wealth, power, prestige), social hierarchy results, giving rise to natural or social inequality.

## **Social Stratification - a functionalist perspective**

Functionalists assume that there are certain **basic needs** or **functional prerequisites** which must be met if society is to survive. They therefore look to social stratification to see how far it meets these functional prerequisites. They assume that the parts of society form an integrated whole and thus examine the ways in which the social stratification system is integrated with other parts of society. Functionalists maintain that a certain degree of order and stability are essential for the operation of social systems. They will therefore consider how stratification systems help to maintain order and stability in society. In summary, functionalists are primarily concerned with the **function of social stratification**, with its contribution to the maintenance and well being of society.

### **Talcott Parsons**

Like many functionalists, Talcott Parsons believes that order, stability and cooperation in society are based on **value consensus**, that is a general agreement by members of society concerning what is good and worthwhile. Parsons argues that **stratification systems derive from common values**. In Parsons's words, 'Stratification, in its valuational aspect, then, is the ranking of units in a social system in accordance with the common value system'. Thus those who perform successfully in terms of society's values will be ranked highly and they will be likely to receive a variety of societal rewards. For example, if a society places a high value on bravery and generosity, those who excel in terms of these qualities will receive a high rank in the stratification system. Since different societies have different value systems, the ways of attaining a high position will vary from society to society. [American society-values-individual achievement and efficiency; Traditional Hindu society-values-dharma-*moksha* or better life in next birth]

Functionalists tend to see the relationship between social groups in society as one of **cooperation** and **interdependence**. Particularly in complex industrial societies, different groups specialize in particular activities. As no one group is self-sufficient it cannot meet the needs of its members. It must, therefore, exchange goods and services with other groups, and so the relationship between social groups is one of **reciprocity**. This relationship extends to the strata in a stratification system. To present an oversimplified example, it can be argued that many occupational groups within the middle class in Western society plan, organize and coordinate the activities of the working class. Each class needs and cooperates with the other since any large-scale task requires both organization and execution. In societies with a highly specialized division of labour, such as

industrial societies, some members will specialize in organization and planning, others will follow their directives. Talcott Parsons argue that this inevitably leads to inequality in terms of power and prestige. Referring to Western society, he states that. “Organization on an ever increasing scale is a fundamental feature of such a system. Such organization naturally involves centralization and differentiation of leadership and authority; so that those who take responsibility for coordinating the actions of many others must have a different status in important respects from those who are essentially in the role of carrying out specifications laid down by others’. Thus those with the power to organize and coordinate the activities of others will have a higher social status than those they direct.

As with prestige differentials, Parsons argues that inequalities of power are based on shared values. Power is legitimate authority in that it is generally accepted as just and proper by members of society as a whole. It is accepted as such because those in position of authority use their power to pursue collective goals which derive from society’s central values. Thus the power of American business executive is seen as legitimate authority because it is used to further productivity, a goal shared by all members of society. This use of power therefore serves the interests of society as a whole.

Parsons sees social stratification as both **inevitable** and **functional** for society. It is inevitable because it derives from shared values which are a necessary part of all social systems. It is functional because it serves to integrate various groups in society. Power and prestige differentials are essential for the coordination and integration of a specialized division of labour. Without social inequality, Parsons finds it difficult to see how members of society could effectively cooperate and work together.

Finally, inequalities of power and prestige **benefit all members of society** since they serve to further collective goals which are based on shared values. Parsons has been strongly criticized on all these points. Other sociologists, particularly Marxists, have seen stratification as a divisive rather than an integrating force. They have seen it as an arrangement whereby some gain at the expense of others. They have questioned the view that stratification systems derive ultimately from shared values. [ruling class ideology]

### **Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore**

The most famous functionalist theory of stratification was first presented in 1945, in an article by the American sociologists Davis and Moore entitled, *Some Principles of Stratification*. Davis and Moore begin with the observation that

stratification exists in every known human society. They argue that all social systems share certain **functional prerequisites** which must be met if the system is to survive and operate efficiently. One such functional prerequisite is **effective role allocation and performance**. Davis and Moore argue that all societies need some mechanism for insuring effective role allocation and performance. This mechanism is social stratification which they see as a system which attaches unequal rewards and privileges to the different positions in society.

Davis and Moore further argue that if the people and positions which make up society did not differ in important respects there would be no need for stratification. However, people differ in terms of their innate ability and talent. Positions differ in terms of their importance for the survival and maintenance of society. **Certain positions are more ‘functionally important’ than others**. They require special skills for their effective performance and there are a limited number of individuals with the necessary ability to acquire such skills. A major function of stratification is to match the most able people with the functionally most important positions. It does this by attaching high rewards to those positions. The desire for such rewards motivates people to compete for them and in theory the most talented will win through. Such positions usually require long periods of training which involve certain sacrifices such as loss of income. The promise of high rewards is necessary to provide an incentive to encourage people to undergo this training and to compensate them for the sacrifice involved. Thus Davis and Moore conclude that **social stratification is a ‘device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons’**.

Davis and Moore realize that one difficulty with their theory is to show clearly which positions are functionally more important. The fact that a position is highly rewarded does not necessarily mean it is functionally important. They suggest that the importance of a position can be measured in two ways. Firstly by the **‘degree to which a position is functionally unique**, there being no other positions that can perform the same function satisfactorily’. Thus it could be argued that a doctor is functionally more important than a nurse since his position carries with it many of the skills necessary to perform a nurse’s role but not vice versa. The second measure of importance is the **‘degree to which other positions are dependent on the one in question’**. Thus it may be argued that managers are more important than routine office staff since the latter are dependent on direction and organization from management.

## Melvin M. Tumin

Davis and Moore's views provoked a long debate. Tumin, their most famous opponent, has produced a comprehensive criticism of their theory. He begins by **questioning the adequacy of their measurement of the functional importance of positions**. Davis and Moore have tended to assume that the most highly rewarded positions are indeed the most important. However, many occupations which afford little prestige or economic reward can be seen as vital to society. In fact a number of sociologists have argued that there is no objective way of measuring the functional importance of positions. Whether one considers lawyers and doctors as more important than farm labourers and refuse collectors is simply a matter of opinion.

Secondly, Tumin argues that Davis and Moore have **ignored the influence of power on the unequal distribution of rewards**. Thus differences in pay and prestige between occupational groups may be due to differences in their power rather than their functional importance. For example, the difference between the wages of factory workers (better organized trade unions) and farm labourers (unorganized and dispersed) can be interpreted as a result of the bargaining power of the two groups.

Thirdly, according to Davis and Moore, the major function of unequal rewards is to motivate talented individuals and allocate them to the functionally most important positions. Tumin rejects this view. He argues that social stratification can, and often, act **as a barrier to the motivation and recruitment of talent**. This is readily apparent in closed systems such as caste and racial stratification. Thus the ascribed status of untouchables in India or Blacks in USA prevented even the most talented from occupying higher positions in society. Thus closed stratification systems operate in exactly the opposite way to Davis and Moore's theory.

Tumin suggests, however, that even relatively open systems of stratification erect barriers to the motivation and recruitment of talent. In general, the lower an individual's class position, the more likely he is to leave school at the minimum leaving age and the less likely he is to aspire to and strive for a highly rewarded position. Thus the motivation to succeed is unequally distributed throughout the class system. As a result social class can act as an obstacle to the motivation of talent.

In addition, Tumin argues that Davis and Moore have failed to consider the possibility that those who occupy highly rewarded position will erect barriers to

recruitment. Occupational groups often use their power to restrict access to their positions, so creating a high demand for their services and increasing the rewards they receive. Tumin claims that the **American Medical Association** has been guilty of this practice. By its control of entry in the profession, it has maintained a shortage of doctors and so ensured high rewards for medical service. In this way the self-interested use of power can restrict the recruitment of talented individuals to highly rewarded positions.

Tumin concludes that stratification, by its very nature, can never adequately perform the functions which Davis and Moore assign to it. He argues that those born into the lower strata can never have the same opportunities for realizing their talents as those born into the higher strata. Tumin maintains that, 'It is only when there is a genuinely equal access to recruitment and training for all potentially talented persons that differential rewards can conceivably be justified as functional. And stratification systems are apparently *inherently antagonistic* to the development of such full equality of opportunity'.

Finally, Tumin questions the view that social stratification functions to integrate the social system. He argues that differential rewards can '**encourage hostility, suspicion and distrust among the various segments of a society**'. From this viewpoint, stratification is a divisive rather than an integrating force. Stratification can also weaken social integration by giving members of the lower strata a feeling of being excluded from participation in the large society. This is particularly apparent in the racial or caste-based stratification systems. Tumin concludes that in their enthusiastic search for the positive functions of stratification, the functionalists have tended to ignore or play down its many dysfunctions.

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## **Social stratification – a Weberian perspective**

The work of the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) represents one of the most important developments in stratification theory since Marx. The similarities and differences of their approaches will become apparent as Weber's ideas are examined.

Like Marx, Weber sees class in economic terms. He argues that classes develop in **market economies** in which individuals compete for economic gain. He defines a **class** as **a group of individuals who share a similar position in a market economy and by virtue of that fact receive similar economic rewards**. Thus in Weber's terminology, a person's 'class situation' is basically his 'market situation'. Those who share a similar class situation also share similar life chances. Their economic position will directly affect their chances of obtaining those things defined as desirable in their society, for example access to higher education and good quality housing.

Like Marx, Weber argues that the major class division is between those who own the forces of production and those who do not. Thus those who have substantial property holding will receive the highest economic rewards and enjoy superior life chances. However, Weber sees important differences in the market situation of the propertyless groups in society. In particular the various skills and services offered by different occupations have differing market values. For example, in capitalist society, managers, administrators and professionals receive relatively high salaries because of the demand for their services. Weber distinguished the following class grouping in capitalist society.

1. The propertied upper class
2. The propertyless white-collar workers
3. The petty bourgeoisie
4. The manual working class

**In his analysis of class, Weber has parted company with Marx on a number of important issues.**

Firstly, **factors other than the ownership or non-ownership of property** are significant in the formation of classes. In particular, the market value of the

skills of the propertyless varies and the resulting differences in economic return are sufficient to produce differences social classes.

Secondly, Weber sees **no evidence to support the idea of the polarization of classes**. Although he sees some decline in the numbers of the petty bourgeoisie, the small property owners, due to competition from large companies, he argues that they enter white-collar or skilled manual trades rather than being depressed into the ranks of unskilled manual workers. More importantly, Weber argues that the white-collar 'middle class' expands rather than contracts as capitalism develops. He maintains that capitalist enterprises and the modern nation state require a 'rational' bureaucratic administration which involves large numbers of administrators and clerical staff. Thus Weber sees **a diversification of classes and an expansion of the white-collar middle class rather than a polarization**.

Thirdly, Weber rejects the view, held by some Marxists, of the **inevitability of the proletarian revolution**. He sees no reason why those sharing a similar class situation should necessarily develop a common identity, recognize shared interests and take collective action to further those interests. For example, Weber suggests that the individual manual worker who is dissatisfied with his class situation **may respond in a variety of ways**. He may grumble, work to rule, sabotage industrial machinery, take strike action or attempt to organize other members of his class in an effort to overthrow capitalism. Weber admits that a common market situation may provide a basis for collective class action but he sees this only as a possibility.

Finally **Weber rejects the Marxian view that political power necessarily derives from economic power**. He argues that class forms only one possible basis for power and that the distribution of power in society is not necessarily linked to the distribution of class inequalities.

While class forms one possible basis for group formation, collective action and the acquisition of political power, Weber argues that there are other bases for these activities. In particular, groups form because their members share a similar 'status situation'. **Whereas class refers to the unequal distribution of economic rewards, status refers to the unequal distribution of 'social honour'**. Occupations, ethnic and religious groups and most importantly styles of life are accorded differing degrees of prestige or esteems by members of society. A **status group** is made up of individuals who are awarded a similar amount of social honour and therefore share the same status situation. Unlike classes, members of status groups are almost always aware of their common status situation. They share a similar life style, identify with and feel they belong to their status group and often place restrictions on the ways in which outsiders may interact with them.

Weber argues that status groups reach their most developed form in the caste system of traditional Hindu society in India. Castes and sub-castes are formed and distinguished largely in terms of social honour. Life styles are sharply differentiated and accorded varying degrees of prestige. Barriers are set up to social intercourse between status groups, such as the ban on intercaste marriage. Weber sees status distinctions as the basis of group formation in caste societies.

Castes also provide a good example of the process described by Weber as **social closure**. Social closure involves the exclusion of some people from membership of a status group. In the caste system, social closure is achieved through prohibitions that prevent members of a caste from marrying outside their caste. The caste system is an extreme example of social closure, since the exclusion of outsiders from the status group is so complete. Another example of social closure was the apartheid system in South Africa, which lasted from the 1940s until 1992. The population was divided into whites, Asians, black Africans, and 'coloured' people descended from more than one 'race'. These different groups were kept apart in public places (for example, they were required to use different public toilets), they had to live in different neighbourhoods and they were prohibited from marrying someone from a different group. Not surprisingly, the better facilities and neighbourhoods were reserved for the dominant white population. Other status groups erect less formidable barriers to entry. In modern Britain, studies of elite self-recruitment suggest that those who have attended public schools usually fill certain types of job, such as senior positions in the civil service. Although individuals who went to state schools have some chance of entering these jobs, public-school-educated elites largely reserve such positions for themselves and their children.

In many societies, class and status situations are closely linked. Weber noted that 'property as such is not always recognised as a status qualification, but in the long run it is, and with extraordinary regularity'. However, those who share the same class situation will not necessarily belong to the same status group. For example, the nouveaux riches (the newly rich) are sometimes excluded from the status groups of the privileged because their tastes, manners and dress are defined as vulgar.

**Please note that status groups and class divisions may cut across each other.** For example, homosexuals from different class backgrounds are involved in gay rights organisations and events such as the annual Gay Pride celebration in Britain. In the USA, Blacks, no matter what their class situation belong to the same status group. This can form the basis for collective political action. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, many middle and working class Blacks united in various

organizations under the banner of the Black Power movement. In a study of Banbury, conducted in the 1950s, **Margaret Stacy** found that members of the manual working class distinguished three status groups within that class: the ‘respectable working class’, the ‘ordinary working class’ and the ‘rough working class’.

Similar examples could also be cited from Indian context. For example, members belonging to a particular caste, though enjoy the same status in the local caste hierarchy, but may be grossly divided on class lines. The concept of **Creamy Layer** among the **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)** and its exclusion from the reservation benefits could be one such example. On the other hand, an untouchable, no matter how much skilled or qualified, would still be considered as an untouchable.

Weber’s observations on status groups are important since they suggest that in certain situations status rather than class provides the basis for the formation of social groups whose members perceive common interests and a group identity. In addition, the presence of different status groups within a single class and of status groups which cut across class divisions can weaken class solidarity and reduce the potential for class consciousness. These points are illustrated by Weber’s analysis of ‘parties’.

Weber defines ‘**parties**’ as groups which are specifically concerned with influencing policies and making decisions in the interests of their membership. In Weber’s words, **parties are concerned with the acquisition of social “power”**. Parties include a variety of associations from the mass political parties of Western democracies to the whole range of pressure or interest groups which include professional associations, trade unions, etc. Parties often represent the interests of classes or status groups, but not necessarily. In Weber’s words, ‘Parties may represent interests determined through ‘class situation’ or ‘status situation’... In most cases they are partly class parties and partly status parties, but sometimes they are neither’. Weber’s view of parties suggests that the relationship between political groups and class and status groups is far from clear cut. Just as status groups can both divide classes and cut across class boundaries, so parties can divide and cut across both classes and status groups.

Weber’s analysis of classes, status groups and parties suggest that no single theory can pinpoint and explain their relationship. The interplay of class, status and party in the formation of social groups is complex and variable and must be examined in particular societies during particular time periods. Marx attempted to reduce all forms of inequality to social class and argued that classes formed the

only significant social groups in society. Weber argues that the evidence provides a more complex and diversified stratification.

### **Modern theories of stratification**

Many contemporary studies of stratification are based upon either a Marxist or a Weberian perspective. Some modern sociologists have remained close to the original theories of Marx and Weber. Others have drawn their inspiration from one or other of these classic sociologists, but have made significant alterations to their original theories in an attempt to describe and explain the class structures of capitalist industrial societies. Such sociologists can be referred to as new or **neo-Marxists** and **neo-Weberians**. There has been a long-standing debate between those who draw their inspiration from Marx and those who follow Weber as to which approach is more useful as a way of developing a sociological understanding of class. In the next section, we will consider one attempt to combine the approaches developed by Marx and Weber into a single theory of stratification.

### **W.G. Runciman – the class structure, roles and power**

In an attempt to determine the number of classes in British society, W.G. Runciman (1990) developed a new approach to analysing the stratification system. This approach uses both Marxist concepts, such as ‘the means of production’, and Weberian ones, such as ‘marketability’.

Runciman starts by arguing that the class structure consists of sets of roles. A role is defined as a position ‘embodying consistently recurring patterns of institutional behaviour informed by mutually shared beliefs about their incumbents’ capacity directly or indirectly to influence the behaviour of each other’. Occupational roles are the most important, but not everyone has an occupational role. Those without jobs should also be assigned roles according to the ‘economic power attaching to whatever different roles they occupy’.

Runciman then goes on to explain how roles should be allocated to classes. He defines **classes** as ‘sets of roles whose common location in social space is a function of the nature and degree of economic power (or lack of it) attaching to them through their relation to the institutional processes of production, distribution and exchange’.

According to Runciman, economic power can come from three sources:

1. **Ownership**, or ‘legal title to some part of the means of production’.
2. **Control**, or ‘a contractual right to direct the application to the process of production of some part of the means of production, whether fixed or financial assets or labour’. Managers and supervisors are examples of people who possess control by virtue of their jobs.
3. **Marketability**, or the possession of an ‘attribute or capacity’ which can be sold to employers. This refers to the skills, qualifications and ability to carry out physical labour possessed by individual workers.

The class an individual belongs to is determined by examining a combination of these three types of economic power. People can end up in a higher class by having ownership, control or marketability, or indeed any combination of the three. Those towards the bottom of the stratification system have little or no control over production; they have very little wealth, and little or nothing in the way of marketable skills or capacities.

Runciman identifies **seven classes** based upon the possession of different amounts of ownership, control and marketability. These are:

1. **Upper class** (includes the owners of the means of production, the most senior managers, and those with absolutely exceptional marketability.)
2. **Upper middle class** (includes higher-grade professionals, senior civil servants and managers)
3. **Middle middle class** (includes lower professions and middle managers)
4. **Lower middle class** (includes routine white-collar workers in ‘more or less “deskilled” jobs’)
5. **Skilled working class**
6. **Unskilled working class**
7. **Under class** (According to Runciman, it consists of those ‘whose roles place them more or less permanently at the economic level where benefits are paid by the state to those unable to participate in the labour market at all’. In

effect, members of the underclass have no control, ownership or marketability.)

There are a number of problems with Runciman's class scheme. Firstly, Runciman made no attempt to use his class scheme for research, though he did suggest how that might be done. Secondly, he offers no clear dividing lines between the classes: it is unclear how much marketability, power or control a person needs for them to be placed in a particular class.

### **John Goldthorpe's class scheme**

John Goldthorpe, a British sociologist, adopted a Weberian viewpoint in developing a class scheme which became extensively used in research. Goldthorpe used Weber's idea of **market situation** to distinguish between the class positions of different groups in the stratification system. Those with an advantaged position (with skills that were scarce and therefore in demand) were seen as being in a better position than those whose market situation was weaker. Goldthorpe also took account of **work situation**, which referred to factors such as the amount of job security and control over work that individuals had, as well as whether they managed or supervised others. As Ken Roberts (2011) notes, because it was based on market and work situation, Goldthorpe's scheme is widely seen as a new Weberian (or **neo-Weberian**) perspective. On the basis of these factors, a seven-class scale was produced, which was often simplified into three classes: **the service class** (professionals, large employers and managers), **the intermediate class** (routine white-collar workers such as clerks, small employers, some of the self-employed, and supervisors) and **the working class**. Using this scheme, almost any job could be classified into a class position, making it possible to use the scheme to carry out detailed empirical research (Goldthorpe, 1980)

The Goldthorpe scheme had its limitations. For example, it failed to identify a separate, wealthy ruling class or an underclass who were not employed.

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### **Anthony Giddens's class scheme**

Anthony Giddens (1938 - ) is a British sociologist. Giddens identifies three major classes in advanced capitalist society:

1. **Upper class** – based on – ‘ownership of property in the means of production’
2. **Middle class** – based on – ‘possession of educational or technical qualifications’
3. **Lower class** – based on – ‘possession of manual labour-power’

### **Erik Olin Wright's class scheme**

Erik Olin Wright (1947 - ) is an American neo-Marxist sociologist. Wright has developed an influential theory of class which combines the aspects of both Marxian and Weberian approaches. He has identified three important criteria that determine the class position in modern industrial societies:

1. **Ownership** – Wright argues that ownership of means of production still remains an important criterion in determining the class positions of individuals. As a result people do gain economic advantage and by virtue of which they command greater prestige and power in society. But it is only one of the criteria, not the sole criterion as Marx claimed.
2. **Credential skills** – Wright further argues that in modern complex societies, with greater division and specialization of labour, people have to undergo formal training in specialized fields for long duration. People acquire skills which are certified through credentials like diplomas and degrees. Wright argues that credential skills increases the bargaining power and enhances the market value of the individuals.
3. **Organisational asset** – According to Wright, the position that an individual occupies in the organisational structure is also an important factor in determining his class position. Please note that it is possible that an individual with low credential skills may occupy high position in the organisational structure or an individual with high credential skills may

occupy low position in the organisational structure. For example, a graduate, on qualifying the Civil Services Examination in India, occupies a high position in the bureaucratic structure, and as a result enjoys higher authority. While a PhD holder, despite having high credential skills may still be working as a low ranking official in the government service, and thus has lesser authority in the organisational structure.

## Short Note

### **John H. Westergaard and Henrietta Resler - a Marxist view of the ruling class**

John Harald Westergaard (1927 – 2014), was an eminent British Marxist sociologist. *Class in a Capitalist Society: A Study of Contemporary Britain* (1975), written with Henrietta Resler, was the first comprehensive anatomy of class inequality in Britain, focusing on power, social mobility, the welfare state and the influence of the media. Contrary to the consensus at the time, it demonstrated that class had not withered away.

In a study first published in 1975, John Westergaard and Henrietta Resler argued, essentially from a Marxist perspective, that a ruling class dominated Britain. They claimed that the private ownership of capital provided the key to explaining class divisions. They argued that in detail the class system was complex, but in essence it was simple: the major division was still between capital and labour. Sociologists who focused on the details of class – for example, the differences between manual and routine white-collar workers – merely obscured the overall simplicity of the system. Such differences were insignificant compared to the wide gulf that separated the ruling class from the bulk of the wage- and salary-earning population.

To support their argument, Westergaard and Resler pointed to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small minority, the richest 5 per cent of the population. They argued that the maintenance of inequalities of wealth was due to the power of the ruling class. They believed that the ruling class was made up of perhaps 5 per cent, and at most 10 per cent, of the population. It included the major owners of the means of production, company directors, top managers, higher professionals and senior civil servants, many of whom are large shareholders in private industry. The subordinate classes consist of the bulk of the wage- and salary-earning population.

Westergaard and Resler put forward what was essentially a conventional Marxist view of the ruling class. They assumed that the ruling class continued to exist. They claimed that it was a united group that continued to dominate British society, and argued that social changes had not significantly redistributed wealth and power.

## Short Note

### Marx and the middle class

The usual way of defining the **middle class** is to see it as consisting of those individuals who have **non-manual** occupations, that is, occupations which involve, in some sense, an intellectual element. If the distinction between manual and non-manual labour is used to distinguish the middle class, then, it is a growing sector of capitalist industrial societies such as Britain. The attempt to analyse the position of the middle class in the class structure has been a major preoccupation of sociologists of stratification. This has been the case particularly for Marxist and neo-Marxist sociologists, since the growth of the middle class has often been cited as evidence against Marx's theory of class.

According to many interpretations of his work, Marx saw capitalist society as divided into only two classes of any importance: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This leaves no room for a middle class. In reality, though, Marx recognised the existence of intermediate classes (for example, members of the petty bourgeoisie, such as shopkeepers and small business people). Moreover, the growth of what is usually called the middle class has largely been the result of the increasing amount of white-collar work. In Volume 3 of *Capital*, Marx noted this trend when he argued that the increasing size of enterprises made it impossible for them to be run by a single person. In these circumstances there was a need for 'the employment of commercial wage-workers who make up the actual office staff'. **Although he identified the trend towards more nonmanual workers, Marx made no detailed attempt to explain how they fitted into his theory of stratification.** On the surface, at least, as non-owners of the means of production, they can hardly be considered as part of the bourgeoisie. Nor, it is often argued, can they be seen as part of the proletariat. Many commentators suggest that non-manual workers enjoy considerable advantages in employment over their manual counterparts: they tend to enjoy greater job security, shorter working hours, longer holidays, more fringe benefits and greater promotion prospects.

In the early 20th century, small business people (the self-employed and shopkeepers) made up a greater proportion of the working population than they did in 1971. As the size of many businesses grew, the number of employers was reduced. **Guy Routh** (1980) found that the number of employers in Britain declined from 7,63,000 in 1911 to 6,21,000 in 1971. The number of self-employed also fell by 24,000 over the same period. Obviously, larger employers might be considered part of the upper class, but the others are often seen as part of the ‘old’ middle class. Marx predicted that this group, which he referred to as the petty (or petite) bourgeoisie, would be progressively squeezed into the proletariat. They would be unable to compete with larger companies which could buy and sell in bulk and take advantage of advanced technology (Marx and Engels, 1848).

Although up to 1971 the trends provided support for Marx’s view on the likely fate of the petty bourgeoisie, data since the 1980s indicate a reversal of previous trends. According to official figures, the numbers of self-employed and small proprietors rose from 1.9 million in 1971, to 3.6 million in 2003, and in the three months to November 2011 the number of self-employed alone reached 4.1 million. Nevertheless, most of the expansion of the upper middle class is accounted for by the growth of white-collar employment.

Dear Candidate, the professions were one of the fastest growing sectors of the occupational structure during the 20th century. According to Routh (1980), the number of people employed in the professions rose from 4 per cent of the employed population in 1911 to 11 per cent in 1971. Using a slightly different definition of the professions, government statistics show a rise in the proportion of employees in the UK in professional work between 1990 and 2010, from 15.7 per cent to 18.8 per cent among men and from 13.2 per cent to 19.7 per cent among women. Similar trends are evident in all Western industrial capitalist societies.

Several reasons have been given for the rapid growth of the professions. The increasing complexity of business demands financial and legal experts such as accountants and lawyers. The development of industry requires more specialised scientific and technical knowledge that results in the development of professions such as science and engineering. The creation of the welfare state and the expansion of local and national government have produced a range of ‘welfare professions’, and have led to the growth of the medical and teaching professions, as well as the greater employment of professionals in government bureaucracies.

## Short Note

### Proletarianisation Thesis

Routine white-collar workers include such groups as clerical workers, secretaries and shop assistants. The growth in their numbers during the 20th century has fed to a long-standing debate about their position in the class structure:

1. Some sociologists argue that they have become proletarianised; that is, they have effectively become members of the working class.
2. Others claim that routine white-collar workers still belong to the middle class.
3. A third viewpoint suggests that they form an intermediate group between the middle and working classes.

The theory of proletarianisation suggests that routine white-collar workers have become part of the proletariat and so can no longer be considered middle-class. This viewpoint has most usually been associated with Marxist sociologists who have questioned the assumption that the working class is a rapidly declining section of the population in capitalist societies. They see routine non-manual workers as little different from manual workers: they neither own the means of production nor do they perform important social control functions for capitalists.

### Harry Braverman – the deskilling of clerical work

**The American Marxist Harry Braverman (1974) supports the proletarianisation thesis on the grounds that many routine non-manual jobs have become deskilled.** As companies grew larger and their clerical workforce expanded, the work was reorganised so that each worker specialised in particular tasks and clerical work became little more than a production line for mental work. Braverman also claims that most ‘service workers’ have been deskilled. Computerisation has further reduced the skill required of checkout assistants, and the control of stock and the keeping of accounts have also become largely automated. According to Braverman, most routine white-collar work requires little more than basic numeracy and literacy. With the advent of mass compulsory education, the vast majority of the population now have the necessary skills to undertake this type of work. As a result the bargaining position of these workers is little better than that of manual workers.

## David Lockwood – a Weberian perspective

According to many Marxists, then, the positions in the class structure occupied by most routine non-manual workers have been proletarianised. In an early study of clerks from a neo-Weberian point of view, however, **David Lockwood (1958) denied that clerks had been proletarianised.** He suggested that there were three aspects of class situation: market situation, work situation and status situation.

1. By **market situation** he was referring to such factors as wages, job security and promotion prospects.
2. By **work situation** he meant social relationships at work between employers and managers and more junior staff; this involved consideration of how closely work was supervised.
3. By **status situation** he meant the degree of prestige enjoyed by particular groups of workers in society.

In terms of market situation, Lockwood admitted that the wages of clerical workers had dropped, but he argued that they had considerable advantages over manual workers in other respects. They had greater job security and were less likely to be laid off or made redundant. They also worked shorter hours, had more chance of being promoted to higher-status jobs and were more likely to be given fringe benefits such as membership of a pension scheme.

Lockwood reached similar conclusions with regard to work situation. He accepted that there had been some changes – in particular that offices had grown in size – but he denied that this had led to clerical workers becoming proletarian. Compared to manual workers, clerks still worked in relatively small units, they had closer contact with management, and clerical jobs tended to be more varied and less standardised than manual work.

Finally, in terms of status situation Lockwood was more willing to concede deterioration in the position of the clerical workforce. He accepted that mass literacy, and the recruitment of growing numbers of workers from manual backgrounds, and of women, had reduced the status of clerical work. However, he still believed their status was superior to that of manual workers.

## Short note

### Embourgeoisement Thesis

Writing in the 19th century, Marx predicted that the intermediate stratum would be depressed into the proletariat. During the 1950s and early 1960s a number of sociologists suggested that just the opposite was happening. They claimed that a process of embourgeoisement was occurring whereby increasing numbers of manual workers were entering the middle stratum and becoming middleclass. From the 1950s onwards it was suggested that a growing group of affluent manual workers were joining the middle class. As a consequence, a middle class that was growing rapidly increasingly dominated the stratification system.

The theory used to explain this presumed development was a version of economic determinism. It was argued that the demands of modern technology and an advanced industrial economy determined the shape of the stratification system. For instance, the American sociologist **Clark Kerr** (1962) claimed that advanced industrialism requires an increasingly highly educated, trained and skilled workforce that, in turn, leads to higher-paid and higher-status occupations among manual workers. The supporters of embourgeoisement argued that middle-range incomes led to middle-class lifestyles. The process of embourgeoisement was seen to be accelerated by the demands of modern industry for a mobile labour force. This tended to break up traditional close-knit working-class communities found in the older industrial areas. The geographically mobile, affluent workers moved to newer, suburban areas where they were largely indistinguishable from their white-collar neighbours.

In a famous study entitled **The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure**, conducted in the 1960s, Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt presented the results of research designed to test the embourgeoisement hypothesis. They tried to find as favourable a setting as possible for the confirmation of the hypothesis. If embourgeoisement were not taking place in a context that offered every opportunity, then it would probably not be occurring in less favourable contexts.

**Goldthorpe et al.** chose Luton, then a prosperous area in southeast England with expanding industries. A sample of 229 manual workers was selected, plus a comparative group of 54 white-collar workers drawn from various grades of clerical work. The study was conducted from 1963 to 1964 and examined workers from Vauxhall Motors, Skefko Bal Bearing Company and Laporte Chemicals. Nearly half the manual workers in the survey had come from outside the southeast

area in search of stable, well-paid jobs. All were married and 57 per cent were home owners or buyers. They were highly paid relative to other manual workers and their wages compared favourably with those of many white-collar workers. However, white-collar workers retained many of their market advantages such as fringe benefits and promotion chances. If affluent manual workers were becoming middle-class they should be largely indistinguishable from white-collar workers in these areas. However, the research did not find that this was the case.

Goldthorpe et al. concluded that, in the area of work, there were significant differences between affluent manual workers and white-collar workers. The affluent workers defined their work in instrumental terms, as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Work was simply a means of earning money to raise living standards. Largely because of this instrumental orientation they derived little satisfaction from work. By contrast, white-collar workers did not define work in purely instrumental terms. They expected and experienced a higher level of job satisfaction. They made friends at work, became involved in social clubs and actively sought promotion.

Goldthorpe et al. found little support for the view that affluent manual workers were adopting middleclass lifestyles. Affluent workers drew their friends and companions from predominantly working-class kin and neighbours, while the white-collar workers mixed more with friends made at work and with people who were neither kin nor neighbours. Furthermore, the affluent workers showed no desire to seek middle-class status.

Finally, Goldthorpe et al. found little support for the view that affluence leads manual workers to vote for the Conservative Party. In the 1959 election, 80 per cent of the affluent worker sample voted Labour, a higher proportion than for the manual working class as a whole. However, support for the Labour Party, like support for trade unions, was often of an instrumental kind rather than based on strong loyalty.

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## Short note

### Marxism and the homogeneous working class

Marx and Engels (1848) predicted that members of the working class would become increasingly homogeneous, or alike. The American Marxist Harry Braverman (1974) agreed with Marx. He claimed that the pursuit of profit had led to more and more automation in factories. This in turn had reduced the need for skilled workers and had led to an increasingly undifferentiated and unskilled working class.

Sociologists have debated whether the working class has become more homogeneous. For example, Ralph Dahrendorf (1959) argued that technology had led to an increasingly divided working class. Ever more complex machinery required more skilled workers to design, build and maintain it. This led to divisions in the working class between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers.

## Short note

### Class consciousness

Many Marxist sociologists argue that the contradictions of capitalism will eventually lead to a class-conscious proletariat. **Class consciousness involves a full awareness by members of the working class of the reality of their exploitation, a recognition of common interests, the identification of an opposing group with whom their interests are in conflict, and a realisation that only by collective class action can that opponent be overthrown. When practical steps are taken in pursuit of this goal, the working class becomes a 'class for itself'.** Evidence from a variety of studies suggests that the working class is a long way from becoming a class for itself.

**Ken Roberts** (2011) argues that most manual workers still see themselves as working-class, but beyond this there is little evidence of class consciousness. According to Roberts, the working class has become **disorganised**, and consequently lacking in class consciousness. He says that the working class has 'lost not only its capacity to act collectively but even to develop shared knowledge of its interests and common aspirations'. Roberts believes the working class has become **disempowered** by losing control over its key organisations (such as the Labour Party) and through a reduction in the

influence of working class movements. He gives a number of examples of this disorganisation and disempowerment:

1. Trade union membership has declined and in some cases union membership is higher in middle-class groups than in working-class groups.
2. The Labour Party is no longer the party of the working class. In the 1990s the Labour Party tried to disassociate itself from being a party representing working-class interests. It weakened its links with trade unions and tried to build closer links with employers.
3. Not only have the above organisations ceased to be based in the working class, but members of the working class have also distanced themselves from them. Roberts argues that, compared to the 1960s, ‘fewer manual workers today are even instrumentally attached to trade unions and the Labour Party’. Indeed, unions have become rather more middle-class, as the strongest unions are now in the public sector, which employs a high proportion of white-collar workers.
4. Close-knit working-class communities in which working class solidarity developed have been broken up by factors such as the decline of heavy industry, urban redevelopment and geographical mobility.
5. The working class has also become disorganised in its leisure. Roberts says: ‘Working men’s clubs and other community, free-time organizations have been largely -replaced by television and commercial leisure.’

As well as the working class becoming disempowered and disorganised, it has also become **devalued**. Roberts believes that members of the working class find it increasingly difficult to take pride in being working-class. He claims that ‘identifying with the working class is no longer associating oneself with a powerful group, or a way of life with features that others should envy’. To back up this claim, he quotes research by Beverley Skeggs (1997) into a group of working-class women in northwest England. Skeggs found that the women believed it was stigmatising to be working-class and aspired to being seen as respectable. Roberts admits that men may feel differently from women about being working-class, but nevertheless claims that ‘those who remain working-class nowadays are likely to feel that they are being left behind’. Among middle-class commentators in the

media, 'disgust' is the most common attitude expressed towards the working class.

However, not all sociologists believe that the working class is losing its sense of class consciousness. **Fiona Devine** (1994) believes that the seeds of class consciousness remain within the working class. Her study of affluent workers in Luton during the 1980s found considerable evidence of the persistence of class consciousness. The workers wanted to improve their living standards and those of their families, but that did not prevent them from perceiving society as unjust or from desiring change. They shared with other workers a similar living standard and a desire to improve it and gain increased security. According to Devine, these shared experiences and desires were a basis for class solidarity. The affluent workers' sense of injustice focused on the very rich. Many resented the fact that, unlike ordinary members of society, the very rich did not have to work for a living. This led the affluent workers to hope for 'a more equitable distribution of resources in society as it stood, and, by implication, a more equal, free and democratic society in which people would be more justly and fairly rewarded than at present'.

Trade unions and the Labour Party were still regarded as 'collective means of securing both individual and collective ends'. However, support for them had declined because some of Devine's sample thought they had failed in delivering improvements for the working class.

Various studies such as **Mackenzie et al.** say, 'the commitment to the principles of collective solidarity remained'. There was also a strong sense of having different interests from those of higher classes. The workers saw their collective plight as the result of a combination of global structural forces that had affected their industry, and the failure of higher classes in local and national government, management and banks to do anything to protect it. Overall, their working-class identity remained strong and they continued to see society as divided between a disadvantaged working class and powerful classes, which showed little or no concern for the interests of the working class.

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## Short note

### The lower strata

In recent years, sociologists, journalists and politicians have all paid considerable attention to the ‘problem’ of the lower strata, but this interest is nothing new. In the 19th century **Karl Marx** was among those who expressed views on these groups. He used a number of different terms to describe those at the bottom of the stratification system, of capitalist societies. He used the word **lumpenproletariat** to describe the lowest group of all. The picture he paints of them is less than flattering. They are variously seen as:

*This scum of the depraved elements of all classes... decayed rouses, vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, brothel keepers, tinkers, beggars, the dangerous class, the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society.*

It is unclear from Marx’s writing whether he regarded this group as a class or not. Although, at times, he did refer to these people as a class, at other times he dismissed the idea that they can form a class because he saw them as having little potential for developing class consciousness or taking collective action. One reason perhaps why Marx was so critical of the lumpenproletariat was that he did not see them as having the potential to develop class consciousness.

Unlike Marx, most contemporary sociologists have used the term **underclass** rather than lumpenproletariat to describe the groups at the bottom of the stratification system.

**Anthony Giddens** (1938 - ) sees underclass in terms of its economic situation and he also integrates his theory of the underclass into a theory of stratification. Giddens sees the middle class as those who possess educational or technical qualifications. This gives them an advantage in the labour market over the working class, who have only their manual labour power to sell. Members of the underclass also have to rely upon selling their manual labour power, but, compared to the working class, they are at a disadvantage when trying to do so. As a result, they tend to secure employment in the least desirable and most insecure jobs.

Giddens argues that contemporary capitalist societies have a **dual labour market**. Jobs in the primary labour market have ‘high and stable or progressive

levels of economic returns, security of employment and some chance of career mobility'. Jobs in the secondary labour market have 'a low rate of economic return, poor job security, and low chances of career advancement'.

Employers need to plan ahead, and to be able to do so they need a reliable and committed group of workers in key positions. High and secure rewards are necessary to ensure the loyalty of these workers. This inevitably raises labour costs. In order to reduce overall costs, workers who are in less important positions and who are more easily replaced are paid much lower wages and are offered less job security. It is these secondary sector workers who come to make up the underclass. Giddens argues that women and minority ethnic groups are particularly likely to be found in the underclass. Employers recruit women to underclass jobs partly because of 'social prejudice', but also because they are likely to interrupt their careers as a result of marriage and childbirth. Minority ethnic groups are also the victims of discrimination and prejudice. In the UK, African Caribbeans and Asians are more likely than other groups to be in the underclass. Giddens argues that the underclass is likely to be more radical than the working class because their experience of deprivation makes them more sympathetic to radical social change.

Critics have questioned Giddens's theory of the underclass. Kirk Mann criticises Giddens's theory of the dual labour market. He argues that there is no clear dividing line between a primary and a secondary labour market. For example, some jobs are well paid but with little job security; others are poorly paid but relatively secure. It is unclear from the dual labour market theory whether such jobs should be seen as primary or secondary jobs. Mann also criticises the theory for failing to explain why some groups of workers (such as women and minority ethnic groups) tend to end up in the secondary labour market. The theory lacks an explanation of sexism and racism.

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## Short Note

### Pierre Bourdieu – class and culture

Unlike Marxist and Weberian sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002) attaches as much importance to the cultural aspects of class as he does to the economic aspects. In his most influential work on class, ***Distinction*** (1984, first published in French, 1979), Bourdieu systematically analyses the differences in culture and lifestyle between classes in France. However, Bourdieu does not see culture and lifestyle simply as products of economic differences. Culture and lifestyle can themselves shape chances of upward social mobility and becoming better off. Bourdieu argues that there are four main sources of capital in society.

### Types of capital

1. **Economic capital** consists of material goods – wealth in such forms as shares, land or property, and income from employment and other sources. Wealth can be passed on quite easily through gifts or inheritance from parents to children.
2. **Cultural capital** can take a number of forms. First, it includes educational qualifications. Second, it includes a knowledge and understanding of creative and artistic aspects of culture, such as music, drama, art and cinema. In this artistic sense of culture, Bourdieu distinguishes different levels of cultural capital:
  - (a) The highest level is what he calls **legitimate culture**. This is the culture of the dominant classes in society. It involves an appreciation of works of art in fields such as music and painting, which are considered to be the height of good taste. Legitimate culture tends to be appreciated by those with the highest educational qualifications.
  - (b) **Middlebrow culture** includes ‘the minor work of the major arts’. They are generally accepted as having artistic merit, but are seen as less serious or worthy than legitimate culture. They are popular among the middle classes.
  - (c) **Popular taste** is the lowest form of culture. In music, for example, it includes songs ‘totally devoid of artistic ambition or pretension’.

Bourdieu does not argue that there is anything intrinsically superior about higher levels of culture. He sees this cultural hierarchy as socially constructed. It is used by classes to distinguish themselves from one another and by higher classes to establish and maintain their dominant position.

A third type of cultural capital relates to **lifestyles** and the **consumption** associated with different lifestyles. Even in areas as mundane as eating and dressing, different classes distinguish themselves from one another through their differences in taste. Higher classes tend to prefer food which is ‘light’, ‘delicate’ and ‘refined’, whereas lower classes favour ‘the heavy, the fat and the coarse’. Expensive or rare meat and fresh fruit and vegetables are popular with higher classes. Teachers, who have plenty of cultural capital but less economic capital, favour exotic or original cooking (such as Italian or Chinese food) which can be purchased at low cost.

Following on from differences in consumption, a fourth type of cultural capital is that which is **embodied**. People’s bodies can themselves come to reflect and represent differences in taste. Diet affects body shape, and the way in which you present your body can suggest that you are ‘vulgar’ or ‘distinguished’, lower-class or higher-class. Such things as your haircut, make-up, and whether you have a beard or moustache can all function as social markers indicating your position in class hierarchies. Even your posture and gestures can be indicative of belonging to a particular class.

Cultural capital cannot be passed on from generation to generation in quite as straightforward a way as economic capital. Nevertheless, through socialisation and the acquisition of the class **habitus** (see below), children from families rich in cultural capital do tend to acquire considerable cultural capital for themselves.

3. The third type of capital is **social capital**. Social capital consists of social connections – who you know and who you are friendly with; who you can call on for help or favours.
4. The fourth type of capital is **symbolic capital**. Symbolic capital is similar to the concept of status and refers to ‘a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability’.

## Capital, class, lifestyle and the habitus

These different forms of capital relate to one another. For example, it may be difficult to accumulate economic capital without the possession of some cultural, social or symbolic capital. Without educational qualifications, the appropriate taste to enable you to mix in the right circles or to impress at an interview, the ‘right’ social contacts, or a reputation for competence, it might be difficult or impossible to get a well-paid job.

To a certain extent, one type of capital can be used to accumulate a different type of capital. The wealthy who lack cultural capital can spend extra money on education to help increase their children’s cultural capital. Similarly those with cultural capital can use it to make social contacts or to acquire educational qualifications that might help them make money.

Classes can be distinguished according to both the type and the amount of capital they possess and their past history. Groups who have been upwardly mobile through education may lack the knowledge of ‘good’ taste to fit in with those who have been established in higher classes for more than one generation. Groups high in cultural capital but low in economic capital (such as teachers) tend to have rather different lifestyles from those with plenty of economic capital but little cultural capital (such as successful small business people). It is out of such differences that each class, or class faction, develops its own habitus.

**Habitus** is the Latin word which in literal sense means ‘habit’ or ‘disposition’. The word ‘disposition’ implies ‘a predominant tendency’ or ‘a person’s inherent qualities of mind and character’. The concept of habitus is overwhelmingly associated with the writing of the eminent French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. It is a philosophical term that was used by Aristotle and then intermittently by later authors including Hegel, Durkheim and Weber.

Bourdieu defines habitus as a system of ‘durable, transposable dispositions’. Elsewhere, he has defined habitus as a “*system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organizing principles of action.*”

In other words, **habitus**, according to Bourdieu, refers to **a set of acquired patterns of thought, behaviour, and taste, which constitutes the link between social structures and social practice (social action)**. Thus the concept offers a possible basis for a cultural approach to structural inequality and permits a focus on agency (actor).

By habitus, Bourdieu denotes certain properties that are embedded within the mind and bodies of human beings. These properties he defined as the ‘durable and transposable dispositions through which people perceive, think, appreciate, act and judge in the world’. By dispositions Bourdieu means the variety of enduring orientations, skills and forms of ‘know-how’ that people simply pick-up by being socialized onto particular cultures and subcultures. These can range from forms of bodily deportment, speech, gesture, dress and social manners, through ranges of motor and practical skills, to specific kinds of mutual knowledge and collective memory.

Habitus is essentially the way in which the culture of a particular social group is embodied (internalised) in the individual, during the socialisation process beginning in early childhood. Habitus is, “society written into the body, into the biological individual”. This embodied culture provides the basis for a particular set of ‘durable dispositions’, i.e. ways of acting, seeing and making sense of the world.

Habitus refers to the lifestyle, the values, the dispositions and the expectations of particular social groups. A particular habitus is developed through experience. Individuals learn what to expect out of life, how likely they are to succeed in different projects, how others will respond to them if they behave in particular ways, and so on. Because different social groups have different experiences and chances in life, the habitus of each group will be different. Individuals internalise the values, behaviour and expectations of the habitus, and it shapes their future actions. They are not total captives of a habitus, they are free to act as they choose, but it tends to lead them towards making certain choices and regarding certain types of behaviour as normal.

Individuals have to react to particular events, many of which are novel, but they tend to do so in terms of behaviours that they have come to see as “reasonable”, “common-sense”, behaviours’. Bourdieu therefore argues, ‘the habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production’.

Habitus is not a set of consciously held beliefs or values. Rather, it operates below the level of consciousness as a kind of second nature, ever present in our tastes for particular kinds of food or music, as well as in the way we talk, walk, or dress. It operates as a kind of tacit knowledge, enabling us to deal with a wide variety of situations in predictable ways, but without our consciously following a set of rules – rather like the way we carry out our everyday routines.

Habitus is durable because, like rock formations, it is formed over a long period, beginning with childhood socialisation. Habitus therefore, is “embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history”. In other words, habitus is historically conditioned and deeply internalised, thus forming a kind of second nature and giving our thoughts, feelings and actions their apparently ‘natural’, or ‘spontaneous’ character. Habitus is transposable, i.e. transferable (rather like ‘transferable skills’), operating across a variety of settings, e.g. economic, political, social, artistic, religious etc. This means that members of the same social class are likely to think and act in a consistent manner across a range of settings e.g. in family gatherings, work, leisure, and share similar tastes in say sport, food, or music.

Thus Bourdieu argues that **habitus consists of the subjective ways in which different classes understand and perceive the world, and the sorts of tastes and preferences that they have.** A habitus tends to produce specific lifestyles. For example, it will influence the sorts of leisure pursuits that different classes follow, who they mix with, what sort of television programmes they watch, which newspapers (if any) they read, how highly they value education, what food they eat, and so on.

**Each habitus develops out of a ‘position in the structure of the conditions of existence’ – in other words out of economic position.** The habitus of the working class, for example, reflects their lack of money and their everyday struggle to make ends meet. Bourdieu claims that the working class are not particularly concerned about the aesthetic merits of household objects. It doesn’t matter to them if things around the house look nice so long as they are affordable and do the job they were bought for. On the other hand, the habitus of higher classes reflects their economic security and the greater range of choices open to them. They are far more concerned that what they buy for their home looks good and is in the ‘best’ possible taste. **The habitus therefore has a structure and it structures the everyday life of individuals.**

According to Bourdieu, habitus is ‘a structured and structuring structure’. In other words, habitus is both structured and structuring. On the one hand, it is the product of our position in the social structure. On the other hand, it shapes our thoughts and actions (‘practice’), which also maintain (reproduce) the social structure. Habitus is therefore, “the product of structure, producer of practice, and the reproducer of structure”.

Most importantly, class position (i.e. dominant/subordinate) is determined by the relationship to the means of production (i.e. economically); but class

identity is forged through individual's sharing the same habitus (i.e. culturally). It is the "immediate adherence...to the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias, which more than declared opinions, forges the unconscious unity of a class"

**A habitus is not fixed and unchanging.** As the economic position of different groups changes, so will their habitus. Groups struggle to get their culture accepted as legitimate, and this too may lead to changes, as some tastes gain in legitimacy while others lose ground. Success in the cultural field can bring economic success and so change the habitus. However, Bourdieu does not portray the class system as being very fluid. It is reproduced to a considerable degree. Dominant groups can to a large extent use their control over culture and what is considered good taste to maintain their position, pass it on to their children, and devalue cultures that do not stem from their habitus. Those from culturally disadvantaged classes are, by and large, kept in their place by cultural means.

Despite being extremely influential, Bourdieu's work has come in for some criticism. Firstly, Bourdieu's view is rather deterministic. Although he tries to introduce an element of fluidity and change into his theory, the concept of the habitus implies a high degree of reproduction of class cultures from generation to generation. Classes seem to have a particular culture imposed on them by their position. The importance of individual choice and creativity is underplayed. And secondly, Bourdieu neglects the importance of social institutions in shaping class structures. For example, he does not discuss how the development of the welfare state may have influenced class culture, particularly among professionals employed by the state.

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## Short Note

### Jan Pakulski and Malcom Waters – postmodernism and the death of class

In recent years there has been a vigorous debate within sociology about the usefulness of the concept of ‘class’. Some sociologists have even questioned whether it is still a useful concept in attempting to understand contemporary societies. Australian academicians Jan Pakulski (1950 - ) and Malcom Waters have been prominent amongst those who argue that class is no longer the key to understanding contemporary societies. In their book, *The Death of Class* (1996), they argue that contemporary societies have undergone profound social changes and are no longer to be accurately seen as ‘class societies’.

According to Pakulski and Waters, classes only exist if there is a ‘minimum level of clustering or groupness’, and such clusterings or groupness is no longer evident. People no longer feel they belong to class groupings, and members of supposed classes include a wide variety of very different people. Pakulski and Waters do not claim that social inequality is disappearing, but they do argue that there are new ‘cleavages that are emerging in post-class society’ which overshadow class differences. If people do not act as members of classes and do not see class-based issues as of special significance, then sociologists should not give special importance to class. To Pakulski and Waters, class can be seen as just one, not very important, division in society, along with ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, age, etc.

### Types of society

Pakulski and Waters argue that the stratification systems of capitalist societies have gone through three phases.

In **economic-class society**, which existed in the 19th century, society was divided into property owners and workers. The property-owning class controlled the state, and culture was divided into ‘dominant and subordinate ideologies and into high and low cultures’. **Organised-class society** existed during roughly the first 75 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The state became the dominant force in society and it was ‘typically ruled by a single unified bloc, a political-bureaucratic elite, that exercises power over subordinated masses’. The state elite exercised a strong control over the economy and may have followed policies of redistribution or state ownership of some industries. With this type of government in office the mass of the population tried to influence the state through political parties rather than through conflicts within industry.

In the last quarter of the 20th century capitalist societies developed into **status-conventional societies**. In this phase stratification became based on cultural rather than economic differences. Pakulski and Waters say, ‘the strata are lifestyle- and/or value-based status configurations. They can form around differentiated patterns of value consumption, identity, belief, symbolic meaning, taste, opinion or consumption.’ People can choose their lifestyles and values and are therefore not restricted in the groups they can join by their background or job. Because people’s tastes and identities can change rapidly, the stratification system ‘appears as a shifting mosaic’. There are many different groupings within society based on these cultural differences and status depends on the values of these groupings.

Pakulski and Waters argue that industrial societies are now undergoing a period of tremendous social change and the political, social and economic importance of class is in decline. Industrial societies have changed from being *organized class societies* to a new stage, which they call ‘**status conventionalism**’. Pakulski and Waters use this term to indicate that inequalities, although they remain, are the result of differences in status (prestige) and in the lifestyle and consumption patterns favoured by such status groups. So, class has outlived its utility as a conceptual tool to describe pattern of inequality in society and to explain conflict and change in society. For Pakulski and Waters, contemporary societies are stratified, but this stratification is achieved through cultural consumption (lifestyle), not class position in the division of labour.

Economic inequalities become much less important in shaping status differences. ‘Symbolic values’, the value of different images, become the crucial factor shaping stratification, and the conventions that establish these values form the basis of hierarchies in status-conventional societies. For example, the decor of your house becomes more important than the value of your house. Similarly, low-paid but desirable jobs in the media might give you more status than less well-paid but unfashionable jobs in manufacturing industry. Pakulski and Waters distinguish four key features of the change in the stratification system in status-conventional societies:

1. **Culturalism.** Stratification is based on lifestyles, aesthetics and information flows. ‘Material and power phenomena are reducible to these symbolically manifested lifestyle and value phenomena.’
2. **Fragmentation.** In this new type of society people have many different statuses based on their membership of different groups and different patterns

of consumption. There is a ‘virtually infinite overlap of associations and identifications that are shifting and unstable’.

3. **Autonomisation.** Individuals become more autonomous or independent in their values and behaviour. People choose how to act and what to believe and you can no longer predict these things from their class background or other characteristics.
4. **Resignification.** People can change their preferences and identifications, leading to great fluidity and unpredictability in the status system of society. People constantly change what they see as especially significant.

In arguing for this change in the nature of stratification, Pakulski and Waters are highly critical of those theorists who, as they see it, cling to outdated notions about the centrality of class. They say that sociology is still failing:

*to recognise that oppression, exploitation, and conflict are being socially constructed around transcendent conceptions of individual human rights and global values that identify and empower struggles around such diverse focuses as postcolonial racism, sexual preferences, gender discrimination, environmental degradation, citizen participation, religious commitments and ethnic self-determination. These issues have little to do with class. In the contemporary period of history, the class paradigm is intellectually and morally bankrupt.*

To Pakulski and Waters, class politics is dead and issues to do with ethnicity, gender, religion and cultural differences and preferences are far more important. People have become more interested in saving the environment than fighting for class interests, and a much wider variety of issues has become politically important.

### **Reasons for the death of class**

Pakulski and Waters offer a number of explanations for the death of class. Class divisions in earlier years of the 20th century were first undermined by the growth of increasingly interventionist states. The most interventionist states of all were fascist (for example, Nazi Germany) or communist (for example, the USSR). In other societies the development of welfare states and consensus between governments, business and unions reduced the direct impact of class relationships.

More recently there has been a shift towards ‘market-meritocratic’ relationships, where the state intervenes less in the economy and society.

Alongside this, the division of labour has become more complex, and educational qualifications and professional skills have become more important than class background in shaping job opportunities. Property has increasingly moved from private hands to being owned by organisations. Individuals or families own fewer large businesses. Property ownership has also become more dispersed, making property ‘a decreasing source of power’. Many people own their own homes and have some savings. Pakulski and Waters argue that in capitalist societies wealth became progressively more equally distributed during the 20th century.

With wider distribution of wealth, more people are able to consume products well in excess of what they need for physical survival. As a result, there is much more opportunity for individuals to demonstrate taste and to choose products that match their identities. Similarly they can judge others in terms of what they consume. Thus the ecologically aware might judge those who have more money but who consume ecologically damaging products to be inferior. Thus, consumption is becoming the standard by which individuals judge others and themselves. Consumer goods become signs of association and lifestyle. They are consumed for the images they convey, rather than because of utility or aesthetics, much less out of necessity.

In the age of globalization, marked by greater geographical mobility, people now live in an “individualized society”. Rather than see themselves as members of a social class, people nowadays tend to see themselves simply as individuals. Their identity will be more influenced by their status, through their consumption patterns and through factors such as their race, gender, regional or national identity, ethnicity, etc.

Globalisation of the world economy has meant that class inequalities within individual countries have become less important. Since exploitation now stretches beyond nations, there is much less common ground for class conflict developing within particular societies. Partly as a consequence of this, voting and party allegiance become less based on class and there is a ‘decline in the use of class imagery and consciousness in politics’. For example, Pakulski and Waters quote studies of voting in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and the USA which suggest that there has been a decline in the strength of the relationship between manual workers voting for left-wing parties and non-manual workers voting for right-wing parties. In its place, ‘new politics’ based on non-class issues has grown in significance. They say:

*class simply does not fit the wars and conflicts of the Middle East, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the Bosnian conflict, or the religious and ethnic conflicts of the Indian subcontinent. National, religious, regional, ethnic, gender, racial and sexual preference identities are much more important.*

Although these various identities and non-class sources of conflict have always existed, they used to be overshadowed by class issues. Now, they overshadow class issues. Pakulski and Waters thus conclude that ‘the intellectual armoury of class theory is about as useful for the contemporary social scene as a cavalry brigade in a tank battle’. Even apparently new classes, such as the ‘underclass’, cannot be seen in conventional class terms. According to Pakulski and Waters, ‘membership of the underclass is a function not of its members’ exploitation but of their incapacity to consume. An earlier generation of social scientists wrote of poverty as a culture. Perhaps it is time to do so once again.’

However, critics argue that in the theory of Pakulski and Waters, there is an implicit reference to the highly developed, industrially advanced societies where the class inequalities have significantly reduced on account of strong welfare state. But in the third world societies which are marked by gross economic inequalities, the concept of class is still a relevant and useful tool for the analysis of social stratification.

Further, by claiming that consumption patterns and differences in lifestyle have become more significant than class differences, Pakulski and Waters neglect the obvious point that class differences influence the types of lifestyle that different groups can afford. It seems strange that they appear to think that the underclass chooses a poverty-stricken lifestyle rather than that they adopt such a lifestyle due to lack of money. The ‘culture of poverty’ theory, which Pakulski and Waters mention approvingly, has come in for sustained and highly damaging criticism. Of course, people with similar levels of income can make different decisions about their lifestyles and consumption patterns, but those with few resources are inevitably excluded from the many choices that are only available to those with sufficient income or wealth. As John Westergaard puts it, ‘consumer power, after all, is money power: quite simply, the rich and the comfortably off have much more of it than ordinary wage-earners, let alone the poor who are out of wage work’.

More recently, **John Scott** and **Lydia Morris** have argued for a need to make a distinction between the class positions of individuals (their location in a division of labour) and the collective phenomena of social class through which people express a sense of belonging to a group and have a shared sense of identity

and values. It is this latter aspect of class that appears to have diminished in recent years. This does not mean that status and the cultural aspects of stratification are now so dominant that the economic aspects of class are of no significance; indeed, mobility studies and inequalities of wealth indicate the opposite. Class is not dead – it is just becoming that bit more complex.

### **Short Note**

#### **John H. Westergaard – the hardening of class inequality**

John Westergaard (1995) takes a very different approach from that of Pakulski and Waters, and Beck. He argues that, far from dying, class differences became stronger in the late 20th century, particularly in Britain. While the claims of postmodernists, Beck's work and politicians' rhetoric might suggest that class is less important, the objective reality is that class divisions are becoming more important, not less.

Westergaard broadly follows Weberian and Marxist approaches to class, saying that 'class structure is first of all a matter of people's circumstances in life as set by their unequal places in the economic order'. He goes on to state unequivocally, 'in that sense, class structure has recently hardened in Britain'. He tries to substantiate this claim with a range of empirical evidence.

#### **Evidence of the hardening of class structure**

Westergaard (1996) quotes a variety of statistics from British government sources to back up his claim:

1. Between 1980 and 1990 the earnings of the highest-paid 10 per cent of white-collar workers rose by approximately 40 per cent in real terms, while the poorest-paid 10 per cent of blue-collar workers saw virtually no rise in their real incomes.
2. The share of total household income going to the poorest 20 per cent of households fell from 10 per cent in the late 1970s to 7 per cent by the late 1980s, while the share of the richest 20 per cent grew from 37 per cent to 44 per cent.
3. Private ownership of property has become more concentrated. Thus the share of marketable wealth owned by the richest 5 per cent of the British

population rose from 36 per cent at the start of the 1980s to 38 per cent at the end of that decade.

Westergaard argues that the power of the highest social classes, and of big business, has also been growing. He says: the power of private business has grown, of course, as free market policies intended. To take just one instance, business representation in the governance of public education and health has been consistently stepped up; and, more generally, business-style prescriptions for ‘cost-efficiency’ have spread widely in the conduct of public-sector affairs.

The denationalisation of public enterprises such as British Steel and British Airways) has concentrated more power in the hands of private businesses. Changes in the City of London have increased the power of finance capitalists, while the influence of trade unions has declined. According to Westergaard, ‘a small network of top people from top corporations and institutions’, including ‘insurance companies and pension funds’, wields enormous power, which ‘comes from the mass of corporate assets whose strategic deployment they lead’. The top class comprises less than 1 per cent of the total population but, from this viewpoint, its power steadily increased from 1979 to the late 1990s.

### **Reasons for the hardening of class inequality**

The main reasons for these changes, according to Westergaard, are economic and political. Economic growth has become more varied, and North American and Western European economies have faced growing competition from Asia. Transnational corporations have developed faster than nationally based companies. British government policies changed from 1979 onwards in response to these developments. What Westergaard calls the ‘class compromise’ of the 1940s involved redistributive taxation and a commitment to the welfare state and state ownership of some industries. Conservative governments strengthened the importance of market relationships in the economy and reduced the progressive elements in taxation. There were increased inequalities in earnings as the market value of unskilled labour declined and the market value of some types of skilled labour increased. The government accepted, even encouraged, the growth of these inequalities as necessary in a competitive market economy.

### **Class and other divisions**

Westergaard accepts the point made by postmodernists such as Pakulski and Waters that there are important divisions other than class. However, he does not

accept that these divisions have superseded class. As suggested above, divisions along consumption lines reflect differences in income to a considerable extent.

Westergaard accepts that gender divisions are an important aspect of inequality. However, class and gender divisions ‘twine together, to reinforce the effects of class rather than go against them’. For example, most women with white-collar jobs are married to men with white-collar jobs, and working-class women are largely married to working class men. Many families therefore enjoy the material benefits of two white-collar salaries, whereas few households have the income from one blue-collar wage boosted by a partner’s higher professional or managerial salary. Women suffer the same sorts of class disadvantages as men. The main difference is that, typically, they are worse off than men.

Similarly, ethnic divisions are an important source of disadvantage, but again they tend to reinforce rather than contradict class divisions. Westergaard argues that ‘racial division – on this score much like gender division – comes to expression in good part as low placement of its victims precisely in the economic order of production and distribution: that is in the structure of class’.

Nor does Westergaard see a sharp division between an underclass and the rest of the class structure. Those who are usually seen as part of the underclass tend to be those from working-class backgrounds who have retired or cannot find work. The unemployed or retired middle class tend to have savings or pensions which mean they are not as disadvantaged as those held to be in the underclass.

### **Class ‘in itself’ and class ‘for itself’**

Westergaard comments, in concluding his argument, that ‘we are still left with a puzzle: when class division “in itself” has sharpened, why does class division “for itself” seem to have faded?’ If the inequalities between classes are greater, why does there appear to be less class consciousness? He argues that, in Britain at least, the Labour Party may be largely responsible. As the party which traditionally represents the interests of the disadvantaged, it is important in expressing and mobilising class consciousness in the working class. However, factors such as internal party disputes and the widespread strikes in the late 1970s, under a Labour government, led to disillusionment with the party. In order to regain support, it abandoned many of its traditional policies, which were in favour of redistribution to the less well-off. This left no major party to articulate the interests of a class-conscious working class.

Nevertheless, Westergaard maintains that there is the potential for the revival of class consciousness and leftwing policies. Reviewing opinion poll evidence, he says, ‘Many people, then, appear to want to see “fairer shares”’. And although many are sceptical about the means to that end, popular conceptions are nevertheless quite out of line with fashionable social theory and right-wing ideology.’ Like Marshall et al. and many other sociologists, he thinks that class is far from dead – indeed in some respects it is not only alive but kicking the disadvantaged in society harder than for many decades.

Westergaard’s data are now a little dated, but the evidence from recent trends and research tends to support his views that inequalities of income and wealth have not declined significantly in recent years.

## **Short Note**

### **Post-Industrial Society**

Industrial Revolution, spanning the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, is an event of great socio-economic and historical significance. It transformed much of Europe and the United States by replacing essentially agriculturally based societies with industrial societies based on the use of machines and inanimate (non-animal) sources of energy to produce finished goods. Industrialism is based on the application of scientific knowledge to the technology of production, enabling new energy sources to be harnessed. It permits machines to do the work that was previously done by people or animals. The industrial society, which emerged in the wake of industrial revolution, is distinguished by a new economic order. The entire production is shifted away from the family and the household to the factory. Family is no longer a production unit, as in an agrarian setting. Moreover, machine technology, which is the basis of the new economic order, is the cause as well as the effect of a complex division of labour.

The high levels of productivity of industrial societies further stimulate population growth with increasing members living in cities and metropolitan areas. An industrial society is largely associational in nature. Numerous associations grow in order to take care of varied needs of the people - health care, education recreation, etc. Social control is possible only through formal means, such as law and order machinery of the political authority. Merit norm, rather than ascription, becomes the dominant value. One can, therefore, rather improve one’s social status by fulfilling the merit norms prescribed by society. In other words, open class structure replaces the closed class structure of an agrarian society. As industrialism spreads and population grows, division of labour becomes highly complex.

Industrial society creates tens of thousands of new specialised jobs. More and more statuses are achieved rather than ascribed. Various technological and scientific developments have made religion to lose its hold as an unquestioned source of moral authority. Science emerges out as a new and very important social institution. All technological innovations depend on the growth and refinement of scientific knowledge. Science is looked upon as a promising and an effective means of socio-economic progress. State which assumes the central power in the industrial society is more known for its welfare activities than for the regulative functions. State is increasingly involved in the economic, educational, medical, military and other activities.

**Daniel Bell** (1919 – 2011), an American sociologist, in his famous work *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973), argued that the industrial society was in the process of being replaced by something qualitatively new, which he dubbed “post-industrial society”. The conviction that we have entered a new stage in the history of industrial society was shared by many others, and a wide range of labels have been suggested, including Peter Drucker’s “knowledge society,” Ralf Dahrendorf’s “service class society,” Zbigniew Brzezinski’s “technetronic era,” and a number of “posts,” such as postbourgeois, postmodern, postscarcity, postcivilized, and posteconomic. It is obvious that Bell was not alone in thinking that we had entered or were about to enter a novel age that in some substantial way moved beyond industrial society. The term Bell chose to employ, *post-industrial* – a term also adopted by the French sociologist **Alain Touraine** (1971) at approximately the same time – would catch on as the most commonly used term to depict advanced industrial society.

The son of Jewish immigrants, Bell was born in New York City in 1919. When he was 13 years old, he joined the Young People’s Socialist League. Bell (1981) described the reason for this decision as follows:

I had grown up in the slums of New York. All around me I saw the “Hoovervilles,” the tin shacks near the docks of the East River where the unemployed lived in makeshift houses and rummaged through the garbage scows for food. Late at night I would go with a gang of other boys to the wholesale vegetable markets on the West Side, to swipe potatoes or to pick up bruised tomatoes in the street to bring home, or to eat around the small fires we would make in the street with the broken boxes from the markets. **I wanted to know, simply, why this had to be. It was inevitable that I would become a sociologist.**

In the late 1930s, he attended the City College of New York along with numerous other second-generation ethnics. During the 1940s and 1950s, Bell worked primarily as a journalist and editor, first as managing editor of the labor periodical *New Leader* and later for *Fortune* magazine. **Bell continued to view himself as a socialist, by which he meant that he remained committed to the idea that a community's resources must first be used to meet everyone's basic human needs.** During this time, he wrote books on Marxism and on right-wing extremists, culminating in a book titled *The End of Ideology* (1965), in which he argued that old political ideas could no longer account for the changed circumstances after midcentury. The idea that we were entering a distinctly new period in the development of industrial society was related to Bell's earlier work on ideologies, reaching its full expression in his influential *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973). His central thesis in this book is that whereas industrial society was a "goods-producing society, . . . postindustrial society is organized around knowledge for the purpose of social control and the directing of innovation and change".

A postindustrial economy requires the existence of a highly educated professional class that possesses the scientific, technical, managerial, and administrative training needed to ensure that the economy will function well. Moreover, this class should be capable of making decisions independently. The success of postindustrial society depends on whether it is in a position to ensure that rational decisions are made, ones that stress efficiency, calculability, and control. A postindustrial economy also requires more highly centralized coordination than was the case in industrial society – coordination that can occur only in the political arena. Thus, a new interconnection arises between the economy and the political system. Bell considers government to be the "cockpit" of the new industrial order, and insofar as this is the case, the knowledge class needs to assert itself in government planning and policy formulation as well as in decision making in economic firms.

| Indicators          | Industrial     | Post-Industrial                     |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Key Resource        | Machinery      | Knowledge                           |
| Key Institution     | Business Firm  | University                          |
| Key Decision Makers | Businessperson | Professional / Expert               |
| Power Base          | Property       | Knowledge / Skill                   |
| Role of Politics    | Laissez-Faire  | Government / Corporate Partnerships |

**Figure: Contrasting Industrial and Post-Industrial Societies**

At times, Bell seems to be saying that the driving force of change is technology and, like such optimistic cheerleaders for technology as Alvin and Heidi Toffler, that technology will lead us into a brave new world. For instance, he claims that one of the consequences of technological developments during the past 200 years is “**a steady decrease in the disparity among persons**” – in other words, that technology has reduced the levels of inequality. He writes of a future in which, because of advances in knowledge, compared to the past we have far greater control over, and thus the ability to change for the better, our social world. He envisions, for example, a **post-scarcity society** in which all human needs can be met.

Daniel Bell, in his famous work *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973), coined the phrase ‘post-industrial society’ to describe the new social structures evolving in modern industrially advanced societies, particularly in the U.S.A., in the second half of the twentieth century. According to Bell, a post-industrial society is one where knowledge has displaced property as the central preoccupation, and the prime source of power and social dynamism. It is therefore also one in which technicians and professionals are the ‘pre-eminent’ social groups, as well as one in which the service industries are more important than manufacturing. Post-industrial society is a combination of various dimensions or features. These features separate it from the modern society. Some of the important features are as follows:

- i. **Service Economy:** In post-industrial society, agriculture and manufacturing do not absorb a majority of the work force. A majority of the population is engaged in services. Services and trade are the major avenues of employment and the governments are major employers. Today only the U.S.A. shows indications of this stage where over 60 per cent of the work force is engaged in services. In a post-industrial society, however, the emphasis is on a different kind of service. Personal services (retail stores, hair-cutting saloons, laundries, garages, etc.), business services (banking and finance, real estate, insurance), services related to transportation, communication and utilities are not distinctive features of this society. What is unique for post-industrial society are the services related to health, education, research, and government. This category represents the expansion of a new intelligentsia in the universities, research organisations, professions and government.

- ii. **Professional and Technicians:** In industrial societies blue collar and semi skilled labour predominate. However in post-industrial societies professional and technical operators grow to dominate. A new class structure begins to form the basis of post-industrial society.
- iii. **Theoretical Knowledge:** In post-industrial society, theoretical knowledge has a crucial value. Scientific knowledge along with mathematics based social science become very significant. In fact a shortage of scientifically trained professionals is felt. In providing this need, universities gain a great deal of importance. The axial principle of post-industrial society is the centrality of theoretical knowledge as the source of innovation and of policy formulation for the society. Post-industrial society is organised around knowledge for the purpose of social control and the direction of innovation and change. This, in turn, gives rise to new social relationships and new structures. Knowledge has, of course, been necessary in the functioning of any society. What is distinctive about post-industrial society is the organisation of decisions and the direction of change in the character of knowledge itself. What has become crucially important for the organisation of decisions and the direction of change is the emphasis on theoretical knowledge as opposed to empirical knowledge and the codification of knowledge into abstract systems of symbols that can be used to illuminate many and varied areas of experience. Every modern society now lives by innovation and social control of change, and tries to anticipate the future in order to plan ahead. The need for forecasting and planning makes theoretical knowledge so crucial.
- iv. **Technology Planning:** In modern society, use of some technologies has proved to be harmful e.g. DDT is affecting crops, birds, wildlife. Nuclear generating plants are creating nuclear wastes and accident risks as in Chernobyl, USSR. Post-industrial societies have technology assessment to prevent any harmful effects of the technology. Thus, the government and people are much more aware of the possibility that the advance of technology can often lead to harmful side consequences.
- v. **Intellectual Technology:** A new intellectual technology will be crucial to post-industrial society. It is not the machine technology of the modern age. Intellectual technology comprises management and other techniques needed

to organise. Vast use of computers and new mathematics is crucial. Decisions regarding the actual use of advanced technology rest with the politicians and not with the technicians. In this situation, the economy may feature an all-out exploitation of the less-developed population. This may lead to a revolution on the part of those exploited. Thus, the post-industrial society may not last long.

Today, only the USA shows indications of this stage. There is much speculation about this future society, but there is little doubt that 'knowledge' will be the new principle of stratification in post-industrial society.

**Bell, however, does not think that postindustrial society signals the end of social divisions and conflict. Far from it, because one of the characteristic features of post-industrial societies is a lack of coherence and unity across three key sectors of society: the economy, the polity, and the cultural realm. Problems arise insofar as each operates on the basis of what Bell calls differing axial principles, by which he means different norms and rules.**

As noted previously, the economy is guided by axial principles based on instrumental rationality. In contrast, the polity is guided by principles that promote equality and an expansion of citizen involvement. What emerges out of this is a tension between (1) the need to accord the knowledge class considerable say in the running of the economy and (2) the polity and the demand on the part of the larger sectors of the population for an expansion of democratic participation. This built-in tension can at various times lead to conflict regarding how power is allocated.

In his book *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), Bell seeks to illustrate that there is also a tension between the axial principles guiding the economy and those informing the culture. In this book, Bell was in no small part responding to the cultural changes that swept the United States during the 1960s. In his view, the youth counterculture of that period epitomized the new cultural sensibility, which placed a premium on feelings, self-expression, and the quest for individual fulfillment. Decidedly antirational, this youth subculture promoted a hedonistic worldview made possible by an affluent consumer society. This shifting cultural sensibility constituted a marked departure from the culture of previous generations, a shift "from the Protestant ethic to the psychedelic bazaar". Despite the book's catchy title, Bell skirts the issue of the role that capitalism might play in generating these contradictions.

The implications of these divisions are not entirely clear, but Bell is convinced that we are entering a period of great uncertainty and instability. Although he is not unduly pessimistic, Bell's apprehensions about the future of post-industrial society stand in sharp contrast to the exuberance about future prospects that can be found in the writings of the first great theorist of industrial society, Karl Marx.

### **Critical Responses to Bell**

Critics of Bell have frequently accused him of overemphasizing the differences between earlier capitalist industrial society and its post-industrial version. Indeed, the choice of terms to describe contemporary society implies a disjuncture or break between the two. It can be seen to imply that the problems of earlier industrial society have been surmounted. In recent years, however, the resurgence of serious levels of poverty is strikingly reminiscent of the scenes from Bell's youth. We clearly have not entered a postscarcity society in which everyone's human needs are being met, which raises anew the sociological question Bell posed as a youth regarding why this has to be. It also raises a question about whether social theorists should, like Marx, focus increased attention on capitalism and not simply on industrial society – on the differences between the past and present as well as the continuities.

Although at times it appeared that capitalism evaporated from Bell's work, at other points it was clearly still there – as his study of the cultural contradictions of capitalism makes clear. In this regard, intellectual historian Howard Brick (2006) observes that “Bell consistently resisted the inference some readers drew that his post-industrial society could no longer be understood as ‘capitalist’”. It has certainly been placed center stage by a variety of theorists who have sought to identify changes in the character of capitalist economies during the past century. This is, for example, evident in discussions initiated by British neo-Marxists about what they characterize as the shift within the sphere of production from “Fordism” to “post-Fordism.” Fordism refers to the mechanized production methods associated with the assembly line introduced by Henry Ford and the use of scientific management techniques developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor. The interventionist state that Bell argued was integral to post-industrial society was clearly necessary for Fordist production, entailing both the implementation of Keynesian economic policies and the administration of an expanding welfare state to ensure societal stability. However, changes brought about by automation and the global exportation of manufacturing operations to less developed nations where labour costs were considerably lower led to the process of

deindustrialization, which Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison (1982) describe as “the widespread, systematic disinvestment” in the manufacturing sector.

Deindustrialization set the stage for the advent of post-Fordism, a somewhat imprecise term referring to new manufacturing techniques that rely on flexible, decentralized, specialized, and just-in-time production methods. Industrial enterprises, increasingly reliant on new information technologies, require expanded cadres of knowledge experts while at the same time need a much smaller blue-collar workforce. In this regard, there is agreement with Bell. **In a post-Fordist economy, however, the state does not assume the role of pilot in the cockpit, coordinating economic activities.** Rather, the introduction of neoliberal economic policies – seen most explicitly in the regimes of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States – signaled a new relationship between state and economy.

Neoliberalism involved a frontal assault on the welfare state, promoting, in the words of **Alain Touraine** (2001), a situation in which “the market had replaced the state as the principal regulatory force” in the economy and throughout the rest of society. His French counterpart **Pierre Bourdieu** (2003) forcefully made a similar case when he wrote that “Neoliberalism aims to destroy the social state . . . which . . . safeguards the interests of the dominated, the culturally and economically dispossessed, women, stigmatized ethnic groups, etc.”.

With these trends in mind, **Scott Lash** and **John Urry** (1987) contend that we have moved into a third stage in the history of capitalism. If the era of Marx can be seen as the period of **liberal capitalism**, and the era of Fordist methods can be viewed as the period of **organized capitalism**, Lash and Urry suggest that since the 1960s this second stage has been giving way to “**disorganized capitalism.**” Moreover, disorganized capitalism resonates with the culture of postmodernity rather than being at odds with it.

In other words, contrary to Bell, who views these changes as the consequence of the culture, economy, and polity operating according to different axial principles, Lash and Urry and similar commentators, such as David Harvey (1996) and Fredric Jameson (1991), see them as reflections of the functional requisites, or the “cultural logic,” of contemporary capitalism.

Whatever the misgivings various critics have expressed about Bell’s post-industrial society thesis, there is nonetheless a consensus among scholars that the task of sociological inquiry – staked out by Marx and continued on through to Bell and contemporaries – remains. Sociologists seek to explore the continuities

and changes that characterize capitalist industrial society and to make sense of the complex ways that the economy reciprocally shapes and influences democratic politics, individual identities, communal attachments, and modern culture.

## Short Note

### Information Society / Knowledge Society / Network Society

The roots of the idea of the information society are closely associated with the idea of post-industrialism. Although the scientific and industrial predecessors of electronics based information technologies can be found in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was during the second world war and its aftermath that the major technological breakthrough in electronics took place. Inventions such as the first programmable computer, transistor, microelectronics (microprocessor) lead to the true Information Technology Revolution.

**Daniel Bell's *The Coming of the Post-Industrial Society* (1973)** brought the information age to the attention of social scientists in the United States and Europe. For Bell, 'the axial principle of the postindustrial society ... is the centrality of theoretical knowledge and its new role, when codified, as the director of social change'. He said that the variables it was crucial to study were information and knowledge, and it was now necessary to focus on business and management issues as well as broader societal concerns. Bell is generally credited with having introduced the term **Information Society**.

According to **Daniel Bell**, in information society, **knowledge and information will supplant labour and capital as the central variables of the economy**. In information society, the information will be treated as a commodity and the possession of information will give more power to its owner. In the 1970s research in Japan by **Yoneji Masuda** was developing a vision of The Information Society. The goal of the plan he devised for the Japanese government, was:

*'the realization of a society that brings about a general flourishing state of human intellectual creativity, instead of affluent material consumption'.*

According to Masuda, in the post-industrial, information-based society, knowledge will be the driving force of society, rather than industrial technologies. Thus in the evolving information age the generation, dissemination and application of knowledge becomes the basis of all aspects of society.

**Manuel Castells** contends that the new information technologies, which include microelectronics, computers and tele-communications diffused widely in 1970s, accelerating their synergistic development and converging into a new paradigm.

Castells further argues that in the new economy that emerged around the world as a result of the current phase of globalization process, productivity and competitiveness is by and large a function of knowledge generation and information processing. In the new information age, knowledge became the power and the tool for capital accumulation. Castells prefers to call the emerging society as “informational” society where the process of generation and transformation of information has rather become the fundamental sources of productivity and power.

Castells, in his famous work *The Rise of Network Society* (1996), argues that the information society is marked by the rise of networks and a network economy. He argues that the new economy is organized around global networks of capital, management and information. For Castells, new information technology is changing the way in which organizations work. The arrival of internet means that data can now be processed instantaneously in almost any part of the world; hence there is no need for physical proximity between those involved. As a result, the introduction of new technology has allowed many companies to ‘re-engineer’ their organizational structure, becoming more decentralized and reinforcing the tendency towards smaller, more flexible types of enterprises. The physical boundaries of organizations are being eroded by the capabilities of new technology. Many organizations now work as loose networks, rather than as ‘self-contained independent units. For example, various parts of a car are manufactured at different locations depending upon the cost and accessibility of raw material, and later assembled at the workshop.

Thus Castells argues that the ‘network enterprise’ is the organizational form best suited to a global, information economy. By this, he means that it is increasingly impossible for organizations – be they large corporations or small businesses – to survive if they are not part of a network. What enables the process of networking to occur is the growth of information technology. Due to advances in information technology, organizations around the world are able to locate each other and coordinate joint activities through an electronic medium.

While commenting upon the nature of labour and social relationships of production in this emerging network society, Castells argues that under the conditions of the network society, capital is globally coordinated (profitable

ventures) while at the same time there is trend towards greater differentiation of work and segmentation of labour on a global scale.

For these authors and many others, the task at hand was to forge a strong commitment to technological innovation as the mobilizer of economic and social progress. However, some other scholars held a different view.

According to **Scott Lash**, in the information society, the source of power is information. Power in the manufacturing age was attached to property as the mechanical means of production. In the information age, it is attached to **intellectual property** in the form of patent, copyright, and trademark so that they can be used to create profit. There is thus **commodification of information**. In this information age, inequality is less defined in terms of the relations of production but more by exclusion from knowledge or information.

According to **Bob Jessop**, knowledge can acquire commodity value after entering the labour market and once it is made artificially scarce and its access depends on payment of rent. Knowledge can be transformed into a fictitious commodity by transforming it from collective resources (intellectual commons) into intellectual property (patent, copyright, etc.) for revenue generation; subsuming of knowledge production under exploitative class relations and by transforming intellectual labour into wage labour for producing knowledge for the market.

### **Features of Information / Knowledge society**

- the generation, dissemination and deployment of knowledge forms the basis of development of an information society
- in knowledge society, scientific knowledge is considered an asset and the scientific and technical group will rise into prominence
- the creation and retrieval of knowledge plays a decisive role in the organization of work and occupation. The occupations which make more and more innovative knowledge will become predominant in this economy
- the information or knowledge is treated as commodity and the possession of knowledge gives more power to the owner

- in knowledge society, inequality is defined in terms of exclusion from knowledge or information
- the central work force will be the highly specialized people and not the generalists. The people who acquire specialized knowledge will have the greater scope of mobility

### Arguments in favour (Thesis)

- Bell argues that new information and new technologies that are developed through research and development act as a ‘common resource’ in society. This would lead to an improvement in the quality of life of people in general and would be for good of all.
- **Tom Stonier** suggests that with greater information accessibility political participation would increase and decision-making would be more decentralized. Thus facilitating greater democratization. Further, information technology would enable us to overcome the environmental and ecological problems associated with industrialism.
- **James Martin**, in his work *The Wired Society*, highlights the non-polluting and non-destructive quality of information technology.
- with greater information flow, the industrial relations tend to become more egalitarian – informal structures of communication emerge
- facilitate greater decentralization of work
- service sector predominates the occupational structure – a sign of progressive society – for example, for a textile unit – need for financial services (banks), legal services (lawyers), transport and communication facilities, managerial professionals, engineers, etc.

### Arguments against (Anti-Thesis)

- As **Scott Lash** has indicated that in information society knowledge has displaced property as the basis of class formation – inequalities in terms of knowledge emerge
- Production and distribution, and even application of knowledge is determined by vested political and military interests. Critics argue that research and development is often financed by political rather than social reasons, developed for military rather than economic purposes.
- Problems like deskilling (due to automation) and unemployment (technology-induced) emerge – learning of new skills required
- loss of privacy and personal contact
- digital divide emerges within society as well as between societies – Who controls information? – for example, Monsanto (Genetically Modified crops) – in the form of intellectual property rights such as patents, copyrights, trademarks, etc. – thus income divide and knowledge divide overlap with as well as reinforce each other
- tendency for social adaptation to information technology (technological determinism); rather than how information technology may be designed to suit people
- Last but not the least, some critics also highlight the environmental pollution caused by electronic waste like silicon, carbon, etc.

Sociology is Simple  
Sociology is Scoring  
provided that you  
Study Sociology Systematically

## Short Note

### Ulrich Beck – Risk Society – ‘beyond status and class’

It is not only postmodernists who have suggested that classes may be dying out. Ulrich Beck (1944 – 2015), a well-known German sociologist, also argues that contemporary societies are undergoing transformation, but not into postmodern societies. Instead, he sees society as changing to a risk society (Beck, 1992).

According to Beck, there have been three main stages in the development of societies: **premodernity**, **simple modernity**, and **reflexive** or **late modernity**. In simple modernity, religion and tradition were replaced by ‘technological rationalisation’ and a sense of certainty that came from a belief in the ability of science and technology to solve problems. However, in the period of reflexive modernity, a risk society becomes established. In simple modernity, most conflicts concerned the distribution of wealth. A shortage of wealth was a widespread problem: most people suffered from ‘genuine material need’. People’s chances in life were significantly undermined by a lack of money. The risks associated with poverty, lack of job security and inequality was at the forefront of people’s concerns.

The inequalities produced by the class structure in simple modernity were analysed by writers such as Karl Marx and Max Weber. Since there was insufficient wealth to go around, the most important conflicts in society concerned the distribution of wealth. These sorts of issues remain paramount in the ‘third world’, where poverty and material scarcity are still major problems.

However, in Western Europe and other affluent societies, technological developments have led to a greatly increased productive capacity and a reduction in material need. It has become possible to produce enough to meet people’s essential material needs. As Beck puts it, ‘the struggle for one’s “daily bread” has lost its urgency’.

In countries such as Germany, material scarcity ceased to be the main problem from the early 1970s. However, this did not mean the end of all problems and conflicts. Instead, a new series of problems began to confront such societies. **The societies changed from wealth-distributing societies to risk-distributing societies.** The central problem in society changed from creating and distributing wealth to managing the risks that were created by science and technology. In particular, science and technology came to be seen as creating problems rather

than simply solving them. There was a growing awareness of the hazardous side effects and destructive potential of science and technology.

### **The problems of risk society**

Beck uses a number of examples to illustrate the problems of risk society:

1. Thanks to developments in agriculture, shortage of food is no longer a problem in the rich countries. However, a plentiful supply of processed food has led to unhealthy diets, obesity and consequent health problems.
2. Atomic energy has helped to produce abundant energy supplies, but nuclear waste and the possibility of nuclear accidents create serious health risks for people.
3. Toxins in the environment, particularly in the air, water and foodstuffs, produce 'systematic and often irreversible harm'. The toxins are often invisible and people are not immediately aware of the risks they create.

Many of these risks are not confined to particular social groups. They may be as likely to afflict the wealthy as the poor, and are beyond the control of individuals. For example, the risks of atomic accidents do not just affect those working at or living near to a nuclear power plant. Radioactivity knows no geographical limits and can spread across national borders. The rich may make some effort to avoid or minimize risks. For example, they can buy food that has less chance of being affected by pollutants – hence the popularity of organic food. They might choose to buy second homes or go on holiday in areas where environmental risks are low. However, they cannot avoid risks altogether. Like radioactivity, air and water pollution cannot be entirely avoided. Acid rain caused by industrial pollution in one country might affect another country. Some risks, such as the greenhouse effect and global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer, are global in nature. Nobody can avoid them. As Beck puts it, the only way to avoid all risks would be by 'not eating, not drinking and not breathing'.

In the latest phase of modernity the predominant concern becomes how to control the risks. People are no longer exclusively concerned 'with making nature useful, or with releasing mankind from traditional constraints, but also and essentially with problems resulting from technoeconomic development itself'. The biggest concerns of late modernity are problems created by modern science and technology. For these reasons Beck defines the latest period of modernity as **reflexive modernity**. In reflexive modernity people are concerned to reflect upon modernity itself and the problems it creates.

## Individualisation and the decline of class

In the risk societies of reflexive modernity, the social groupings that were so significant in simple modern societies begin to lose their importance. In particular, class and status groups lose social significance. Beck does not deny that inequalities between rich and poor remain. Furthermore, he accepts that the basic features of capitalism do not change. He says, 'the fundamental conditions of wage labour have remained the same'. However, according to Beck, 'ties to a social class recede mysteriously into the background for the actions of people. Status-based social milieus and lifestyles typical of a class culture lose their lustre.' Despite the continuance of inequality, people no longer feel a sense of class identity or base their lifestyle around class membership. The main reason for this is that risks are no longer related to class membership. In simple modernity, the working class were much more insecure than higher classes. In reflexive modernity, risks created by science and technology affects all classes. People cannot protect themselves against them by having a high income.

Even economic insecurity ceases to be based on class differences. Beck argues that in Germany unemployment has affected all classes. Between 1974 and 1983 about a third of Germans, from every class, experienced at least one period of unemployment. In this situation people do not experience risk as a class-based problem: it has the potential to affect everybody. **Beck therefore believes that social inequality has been individualised.** People experience and worry about risk as individuals rather than as members of a particular class.

A number of factors work together to encourage individualisation and to undermine class cultures and identities. Education becomes increasingly important in determining opportunities. There is increased experience of social mobility and competition between people for jobs. Employment becomes less stable. People change jobs more often and fewer have a job for life. In all these respects, individuals have to make their own way through life rather than experiencing life in terms of class membership. They experience it as individuals involved in planning and shaping their own destiny.

Classes are increasingly divided between those with different levels of educational qualifications. As people become geographically mobile, moving from job to job, residential areas are no longer based around particular classes. Beck says, 'People from a great variety of social backgrounds are mixed together and social relations in the neighbourhood are much more loosely organized.' In these circumstances, people can no longer rely on relating to others in terms of class culture. The newly formed social relationships and social networks now have to be

individually chosen; social ties, too, are becoming reflexive, so that they have to be established, maintained, and constantly renewed by individuals.'

In politics, too, the importance of class declines. Political conflicts increasingly take the form of 'temporary coalitions' between individuals concerned about a particular problem, such as an ecological threat. Risks that affect all classes become an important focus of political concern. People continue to experience discrimination resulting from 'ascribed characteristics'. Conflicts in terms of such characteristics as 'race, skin colour, gender, ethnicity, age, homosexuality, physical disabilities' rise to prominence as the importance of class declines. Beck does not argue that class solidarity disappears completely, or immediately. There is a gradual process whereby class loses its social significance. The end result will be a situation where 'Class society will pale into insignificance beside an individualized society of employees.'

Beck's work on risk society has been widely influential, but it has also been subject to criticism. A key criticism is that Beck greatly exaggerates the shift from a society in which risks stemmed from scarcity to a society in which risks affect all classes however well off they might be. Alan Scott (2000) argues that even in pre-industrial times the rich could not isolate themselves from all risks. Problems such as harvest failure could affect the food supply of the rich. Infectious diseases, which were responsible for many deaths, and natural disasters, knew no class boundaries. Scott also argues that in contemporary societies money can give far more protection from risks than Beck acknowledges. Scott says, 'Those who can, do move away from areas of high pollution, environmental degradation and danger.' They cannot isolate themselves from total catastrophe (such as nuclear war). Beck recognises that inequality continues to exist, but he does not acknowledge the extent to which this still affects life chances. As discussed earlier, class differences continue to affect life expectancy and child mortality. Beck can also be criticised for simply asserting that class no longer has a significant effect on identity, or influences differences in lifestyle. There is much empirical research that suggests class identities still exist and that class still influences lifestyle. Like postmodernists such as Pakulski and Waters, Beck has a tendency to make unsubstantiated generalisations.

## Social Mobility

Mobility means movement, and social mobility refers to the movement from one social position to another in the given social structure of the society. This social position may be with reference to economic, occupation, income, and so on. In context of social stratification, social mobility implies an upward or downward movement of people from one social stratum to another within a stratification system.

Even though no actual system of stratification is completely rigid or flexible, yet on the basis of degree of **social mobility** that a system allows, systems of stratification have been classified into two types, viz., open and closed system. It is generally agreed that the rate of social mobility – the amount of movement from one stratum to another – is significantly higher in industrial societies than in pre-industrial societies. Industrial societies are therefore sometimes described as open. In other words, they have a relatively low degree of closure. In particular, it is argued that status in pre-industrial societies is largely ascribed, whereas in industrial societies it is increasingly achieved. As a result, ascribed characteristics such as class of origin, sex, race and kinship relationships have less influence on an individual's social status. Status is seen to be achieved on the basis of merit: talent, ability, ambition and hard work are steadily replacing ascribed characteristics as the criteria for determining a person's position in the class system.

In an **open system** of stratification, the boundaries between the social strata are relatively more flexible. Open systems are assumed to have greater degree of social mobility. A completely *open* society, which exists only in theory, would be one in which all individuals could achieve the status for which their natural talents, abilities, and inclinations best suited them. A person can achieve a higher status on the basis of individual ability and effort, or merit. Statuses that can be gained by the direct effort of the individual, often through competition, are called **achieved statuses**, the best examples being most occupational positions in modern societies. American class system is an example of open system of stratification. An open society would not be a society of equals; there would still be inequality stemming from unequal social positions. But these social positions would be gained solely by personal achievement and merit. However, as stated earlier, in reality, no absolute open society exists. Even in the so called open class societies of the west, restrictions and hindrances of various kinds are found to persist which restrict free social mobility. Though the modern industrial societies are increasingly becoming meritocratic and open yet the class of origin has a significant bearing on the life chances (for example, educational attainment, training in specialized skills) of an individual or group and its prospects for upward mobility.

In a **closed system**, on the other hand, the boundaries between social strata are rigid. A completely *closed* society, also purely hypothetical, would be one in which all individuals were assigned a status at birth or at a certain age, which could never be changed either for better or worse. Such statuses are called **ascriptive statuses**. Here status is ascribed to the individuals by society more or less arbitrarily and permanently on the basis of traits over which they have no control such as birth, skin colour, gender or age group etc. In a closed system social position is usually hereditary; individual ability and efforts generally do not count. Caste system in India and feudal society in Europe are the best examples of closed system of social stratification. But certain amount of mobility exists even in the closed systems. For example, in France, there were two kinds of nobles: the nobles of the sword and the nobles of the robe. The nobles of the robe were nobles not by birth but by title. Similarly, in the traditional Indian caste system, some degree of mobility was facilitated through the practices of hypergamy and sanskritisation. **Hypergamy** (or *anuloma*) is that form of marriage in which the ritual status of a man is higher than that of his prospective wife. Please note that although the norms of caste endogamy were widely prevalent in traditional Hindu society yet the practice of hypergamy or anuloma form of marriage provided one of the avenues of social mobility to the family and caste group of the girl from the lower caste when she gets married to a man from higher caste.

**M. N. Srinivas** argues that even in traditional India, caste system permitted some degree of mobility through the process of '**Sanskritisation**'. The term Sanskritisation was first used by M. N. Srinivas in the course of his study of the Coorgs in erstwhile State of Mysore. According to Srinivas, "***Sanskritisation is a process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribe or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste.***" Srinivas found that lower castes, in order to raise their position in caste hierarchy, adopted some of the practices of the Brahmins. At the same time, these castes gave up some of their own customs, which were considered impure such as meat-eating, consumption of alcohol and animal sacrifice to their deities. They also emulated life-styles of the high caste Brahmins in term of dress, food and rituals. By imitating these practices the lower castes claimed higher position over a period of time in the local hierarchy of castes. This process of mobility was initially called 'Brahmanisation'. However, later it was realised that the process described by Brahmanisation was not a general trend and the lower castes in several cases adopted the practices of the non-Brahmin higher castes. Therefore, the term Brahmanisation was replaced by Sanskritisation which was considered more appropriate. Sanskritisation is an endogenous source of upward mobility for a caste. The mobility caused by this process, however, leads to

only positional changes in the system. It does not result in structural change. Change occurs within the caste hierarchy. The caste system itself does not change.

Social mobility is primarily of two types, vertical mobility and horizontal mobility. **Vertical mobility** refers to the movement from one social position to another position of higher or lower rank. Thus, there can be upward vertical mobility or downward vertical mobility. **Horizontal mobility**, on the other hand, refers to movement of a person from one social position to another position of the same rank. It does not bring about a change in the social position of the individual or group that has moved. For example, if a teacher is transferred in the same rank from one school to another school, it is an instance of horizontal mobility. But if the teacher gets promotion in the school where he is working or where he is transferred, then it will be a case of vertical mobility.

While discussing the dimensions of vertical mobility, it is also important to note that mobility may be intra-generational or inter-generational. **Intra-generational mobility**, refers to social mobility within a single generation. It is measured by comparing the occupational status of an individual at two or more points in time. Thus if a person begins their working life as an unskilled manual worker and 10 years later is employed as an accountant, they are socially mobile in terms of intragenerational mobility. **Intergenerational mobility**, refers to social mobility between generations. It is measured by comparing the occupational status of sons or daughters with that of their fathers (or less frequently with that of their mothers). Thus if the son of an unskilled manual worker becomes an accountant, he is socially mobile in terms of intergenerational mobility.

### **The importance of social mobility**

Sociologists are interested in social mobility for two main reasons:

1. **Ken Roberts** (2011) believes that social mobility is important because ‘We are all interested in whether we live in a fair society, commonly understood to mean a “meritocratic” society where individuals’ achievements depend on their own talents and efforts rather than their social origins.’ Studies of social mobility reveal the extent to which there is opportunity for talent and effort to be rewarded.
2. Roberts also argues that social mobility should be studied because it can help to show ‘whether the classes into which we divide the population are demographic entities’. Classes that have a relatively stable membership –

where most of the children born into the class stay in that class – are more likely than unstable classes to develop their own distinctive cultures. Where there are high rates of mobility into and out of the class, the members of that class may have little sense of shared interests and will be unlikely to develop a strong and distinctive class culture.

It is not just sociologists who see social mobility as important. The Coalition government in the UK published a report in 2011 entitled *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility*. In the foreword, the deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg, of the Liberal Democrats, argued that ‘A fair society is an open society. A society in which everyone is free to flourish and rise. Where birth is never destiny’ (Cabinet Office, 2011). Thus the study of social mobility plays a vital part both in understanding the class structure of any society and in determining how meritocratic a society is.

### **Studies on Social Mobility:**

**David Glass** conducted the first major study on social mobility in Britain in 1949 but it had significant methodological flaws. The next major study of social mobility in England and Wales was conducted in 1972. Known as the **Oxford Mobility Study**, it is based on a seven-class scheme devised by John Goldthorpe.

The first major study of intergenerational mobility in England and Wales was conducted by **David Glass** and his associates in 1949. In his study Glass developed a seven class model based on **occupational prestige** as the criterion and compared the status of sons with the status of their fathers. **Overall, the study indicated a fairly high level of intergenerational mobility.** However, for the most part, the change in status is not very great. **Most mobility is short range,** sons generally moving to a category either adjacent or close to that of their fathers. There is little long range mobility either from top to bottom or vice versa. In the higher status categories, there is a considerable degree of **self-recruitment** – a process by which members of a stratum are recruited from the sons of those who already belong to that stratum. Family background appears to have an important influence on life chances. The higher the occupational status of the father, the more likely the son is to obtain a high status position. **Glass’s study therefore reveals a significant degree of inequality of opportunity.**

After 1949, the next major study of social mobility in England and Wales was conducted in 1972, popularly known as the **Oxford Mobility Study**. The results cannot be compared in detail with those of the 1949 study since different

criteria were used as a basis for constructing the various strata. Where Glass used a classification based on occupational prestige, the Oxford study categorized occupations largely in terms of their **market rewards**.

### **Absolute mobility**

**One of the most striking differences between the 1972 and 1949 surveys is the amount of long range mobility (movement across various classes), particularly, mobility out of the manual working class.** For example, the **Oxford Mobility Study** indicated that 7.1% of the sons of class 7 fathers (the lowest class, containing unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers) are in class 1 (the highest class, containing higher professionals and high-grade managers) in 1972. **The study found high rates of absolute mobility (the total amount of social mobility); in no social class did more than 50 per cent of the sample originate from the same social class.**

The Oxford Mobility Study also found there was more upward than downward mobility because the proportion of non-manual jobs in the occupational structure had increased while the proportion of manual jobs had decreased. It also found that the chances of those from working-class backgrounds reaching a higher social class had improved during the course of the century.

### **Relative mobility**

On the surface, these findings seem to support the claim that British society is becoming more open. However, the study found that relative mobility chances varied greatly between the classes, and the relative chances had changed little during the course of the century. **The concept of relative mobility refers not to the total amount of social mobility, but to the comparative chances of those from various class backgrounds reaching particular positions in the social structure.** Thus 45.7 per cent of sons with class I fathers – but just 7.1 per cent of those with class 7 fathers – ended up in class I. By comparing the relative mobility chances of different generations it is possible to determine whether the class structure has become more open. In other words, there has been no significant increase in the openness of the British stratification system.

However, despite the **relatively high rate of long range upward mobility**, a large proportion (45.7%) of the sons of class 1 fathers are themselves in class 1 in 1972. The combination of a fairly high degree of inheritance of privileged positions and a relatively high rate of long range upward mobility is probably due to the fact that there is literally more room at the top. The occupations which make

up class 1 expanded rapidly in the twenty or so years before 1972. They have grown at such a rate that they can only be filled by recruitment from below. Class 1 fathers simply do not produce sufficient sons to fill class 1 occupations in the next generation.

The following reasons have been given to account for the rate of social mobility in industrial society. Firstly, there is considerable change in the occupational structure. For example, in Britain, the proportion of manual workers in the male labour force has declined from 70% in 1921 to 55% in 1971. Thus, for each succeeding generation, there are more white-collar and fewer blue-collar and fewer blue-collar jobs available. This helps to account for the finding of the Oxford study that upward mobility considerably exceeds downward mobility. Secondly, manual and non-manual fertility rates differ. In particular, working-class fathers have generally had more children than middle-class fathers. This differential fertility can also be seen as a reason for the relatively high rate of upward mobility. As the Oxford study indicated, class 1 fathers did not produce sufficient sons to fill the rapidly growing numbers of class 1 occupations. As a result recruitment from lower strata was essential to fill those positions. Thirdly, many sociologists have argued that occupational status in industrial society is increasingly achieved on the basis of merit. Jobs are allocated in terms of talent and ability rather than through family and friendship connections. Education is seen to play a key part in this process. The educational system grades people in terms of ability, and educational qualifications have a growing influence on occupational status and reward. Since educational opportunities are increasingly available to all young people, no matter what their social background, the result is more open society and a higher rate of social mobility. **[Social mobility, therefore, can be seen as an index of economic development.]**

### **Problems with the Oxford Mobility Study**

The Oxford Mobility Study and Goldthorpe's later work suggest that there is not a high degree of social closure at the top of the British stratification system, but Goldthorpe can be criticised for ignoring the existence of small elites, or, in Marxist terms, a ruling class. Goldthorpe's class 1 is a relatively large grouping, containing 10-15 per cent of the male working population. Studies that concentrate on small elite groups within class I reveal a much higher degree of closure.

The process by which members of wealthy and powerful groups are drawn from the children of those who already belong to such groups is known as **elite self-recruitment**. The Oxford study, while showing a relatively high rate of mobility into class I, does not indicate the degree of elite self-recruitment. A wider

range of studies, however, show high levels of elite self-recruitment. Though class I as a whole appears fairly open, elite groups within that class are relatively closed. A second major problem with the Oxford Mobility Study is the fact that it ignores women. Goldthorpe believes that the unit of stratification in industrial societies is the family. The class position of the family is given according to the occupation of the main breadwinner, which is usually a man. Other sociologists hotly dispute this view.

**Seymour M. Lipset** and **Reinhard Bendix** in their study titled *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (1959) indicated that fully industrialized, bureaucratically organized societies like the United States tend to be most open, while the most closed societies are preindustrial, especially agricultural, societies based on kinship.

**Thomas Fox** and **S.M. Miller** in their study “*Economic, Political and Social Determinants of Mobility: An International Cross-sectional Analysis*” (1965) sought to identify the determinates of upward mobility in many different nations. Their research uncovered two conditions that seem to encourage a high degree of upward social mobility: **an advanced stage of development of an industrial economy**, and **a large educational enrolment**. As societies become more and more industrialized, the unskilled, low-salaried jobs at the bottom of the occupational status ranking are slowly eliminated, for these are the jobs most easily performed by machines. Simultaneously, more jobs are added at the middle and upper levels, to manipulate and control the flow of machine-produced goods and information. The vertical mobility resulting from such system changes – rather than individual achievement – is called **structural mobility**. But the higher ranking job opportunities will not be fully utilized unless the children of lower-level parents are given the knowledge and training necessary to achieve them. Compulsory public education and the opportunity for low-cost, unrestricted higher education provide this necessary condition.

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## Sources and causes of social mobility

### I. Structural factors:

#### 1. Expansion of industrial economy

- change in the occupational structure
- agrarian – industrial – post-industrial  
(farming) (manufacturing) (service sector)
- with industrialization and mechanization – manual jobs decline – unskilled jobs taken over by machines – technical and high skill jobs require specialized skills and knowledge
- manual labourers and farmers – unskilled and less educated – witnessed downward mobility
- For example, in USA – in 1900 – agricultural workers constituted 40% of labour force . But, in 2000, agricultural workers constitute only 4% of the total labour force.
- in the age of globalization – international competition – even well-educated managers, technicians and other professionals witnessed downward mobility – because of outsourcing of jobs (BPOs)
- but at the same time, industrialization and the growth of service sector has led to the diversification of the occupational structure – leading to the creation of numerous high status jobs

#### 2. Government sponsored mass education programmes

- such as National Literacy Mission, etc. – opening up various industrial training institutes (ITIs) – for specialized knowledge and vocational skills

### 3. Lower birth rate in higher classes

- as economy expands, more higher positions are created
- but, due to low birth rate, self-recruitment in higher classes is not sufficient enough
- as a result, people from lower classes get an opportunity to occupy higher positions so created.

## II. **Individual factors** (high education, talent, achievement motivation, hard work, etc.)

Some personal characteristics are achieved, such as education, talent, motivation and hard work. Others are ascribed, such as family background, race and gender. As has been suggested, both achieved and ascribed qualities have a hand in determining the degree of mobility an individual or group attain in a given society. But the popular belief in equal opportunity would lead us to expect career success to be attained through achievement more than ascription. Is achievement then, really the more powerful determining force in upward mobility?

According to most sociological studies, achievement may appear on the surface to be the predominant factor, but it is actually subject to the influence of ascription. It is well known that the more education people have, the more successful they are in their careers. But the amount of education people have is related to their family background. Thus, compared with children from blue-collar families, children from white-collar families can be expected to get more education and then have a better chance for career mobility. [Case studies: **Jencks et al.** (1994), **Erickson and Jonsson** (1996)]

### **III. Social factors**

#### **1. Government policy of redistribution and social justice**

- for example, land reforms, reservation policy, etc.
- has facilitated upward mobility of socially and economically weaker sections of society in India, such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, etc.

#### **2. Collective mobilization**

- in wake of the democratization of societies
- dalit movement, backward class movement (eg. Yadavs of UP and Bihar), peasant movements, etc.

#### **Consequences of social mobility:**

Sociologists are interested in social mobility for a number of reasons. Firstly, the rate of social mobility may have an important effect on class formation. For example, Anthony Giddens 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 generations'. As a result distinctive class subcultures and strong class identifications will tend to develop. Secondly, a study of social mobility can provide an indication of the life chances of members of society. For example, it can show the degree to which a person's class of origin influences his chances of obtaining a high status occupation. Thirdly, it is important to know how people respond to the experience of social mobility. For example, do the downwardly mobile resent their misfortune and form a pool of dissatisfaction which might threaten the stability of society?

The nature and extent of social mobility in Western industrial societies pose a number of questions concerning class formation and class conflict. Marx believed that a high rate of social mobility would tend to weaken class solidarity. Classes would become increasingly heterogeneous as their members ceased to share similar backgrounds. Distinctive class subcultures would tend to disintegrate since norms, attitudes and values would no longer be passed from generation to

generation within a single stratum. Class identification and loyalty would weaken since it would be difficult for mobile individuals to feel a strong consciousness of kind with other members of the class in which they found themselves. As a result, the intensity of class conflict and the potential for class consciousness would be reduced.

Ralf Dahrendorf believes that this situation has arrived in modern Western societies. He argues that as a result of the high rate of social mobility, the nature of conflict has changed. In an open society, there are considerable opportunities for individual advancement. There is therefore less need for people to join together as members of a social class in order to improve their situation. In Dahrendorf's words, 'instead of advancing their claims as members of homogeneous groups, people are more likely to compete with each other as individuals for a place in the sun'. As a result class solidarity and the intensity of specifically class conflict will be reduced. Dahrendorf then goes a step further and questions whether the rather loose strata of mobile individuals can still be called social classes. But he stops short of rejecting the concept of class, arguing that, 'although mobility diminishes the coherence of groups as well as the intensity of class conflict, it does not eliminate either.'

A number of sociologists have attempted to assess the effects of mobility on social order. Frank Parkin has seen the relatively high rate of upward mobility as a 'political safety valve'. It provides opportunities for many able and ambitious members of the working class to improve their situation. As a result, the frustration which might result, if opportunities for upward mobility were absent, is prevented from developing. To some degree this will weaken the working class. Research from a number of Western societies indicates that upwardly mobile individuals tend to take on the social and political outlooks of the class into which they move. American studies in particular suggest that those who move upward into the middle class often become more conservative than those born into it. Thus the upwardly mobile pose no threat to social stability. Indeed, they can be seen to reinforce it.

Similar conclusions have been drawn from studies of downward mobility. American sociologists Harold Wilensky and Hugh Edwards examined the response of 'skidders' – persons moving down into the working class – to the experience of social demotion. They found that the downwardly mobile tend to be more politically conservative than those born into and remaining within the working class. The experience of downward mobility did not lead them to reject the social order and so threaten the stability of society. Instead they clung to middle class values, anticipating upward mobility and a restoration of their former status. Their

presence in the working class tends to weaken that class since they are not really a part of it. Thus both upward and downward mobility tend to reinforce the status quo. Both introduce conservative elements into social strata, both appear to weaken working-class solidarity and therefore reduce the intensity of class conflict.

Further, studies substantiate the fact that downward mobility can cause great personal stress and psychological disruption. Warren Breed, for example, found that suicide rates are markedly higher among the downwardly mobile than either the nonmobile or the upwardly mobile. But it is not always realized that upward mobility can also cause stress and disruption along with many other undesirable consequences. Upward mobility has been linked to schizophrenia and psychoneurosis; persons who are upwardly mobile exhibit more prejudice against low status people than do nonmobile individuals at the same level; and upward mobility often puts a great strain on the relationship between parents and children.

Upward mobility is not always advantageous for the society at large. High rates of mobility may mean that individuals are moving too fast and too frequently to be easily assimilated into their new levels. Moreover, in a society such as that of the United States in which upward mobility is both valued and highly visible, expectations may be over aroused. Although many want to be upwardly mobile, not everyone can succeed. This phenomenon of rising expectations is frequently cited as a source of social discontent and civil strife.

The more closed society, however, operating with low mobility and ascribed statuses, has problems that are far more serious. Parentage is no guarantee of capability, as the history of any hereditary monarchy will verify. A father of extraordinary ability may have sons and daughters of only mediocre talents, and vice versa. Yet social efficiency demands that high born undesirables sink into obscurity and talented persons of lower classes rise to positions of power and influence. In addition to being inefficient in its assignment of people to jobs, a closed society is extravagant with human resources: it does not encourage achievement from everyone.

It is interesting to speculate about a future society based almost entirely on achievement or merit. We can only imagine the psychological consequences on those persons of lowest status who were at the bottom knowing, as would everyone else, that they truly lacked merit. In a brilliant satire entitled ***The Rise of the Meritocracy***, Michael Young imagines a future British society in which talent and social roles would be perfectly matched, in which the most able individuals would fill the functionally most important positions. Social status would be achieved on the basis of merit in a society where all members have an equal opportunity to

realize their talents. Following Michael Young's usage of the term, such a system of role allocation has come to be known as a meritocracy.

Young questions the proposition that a stratification system based on meritocratic principles would be functional for society. He notes the following dysfunctional possibilities. Firstly, members of the lower strata may become totally demoralized. In all previous stratification systems they have been able to divert blame from themselves for their lowly status by providing reasons for their failure. They could claim that they never had the opportunity to be successful whereas those who filled the top jobs owed their position to their relatives, friends and the advantages of birth. However, in a meritocracy, those at the bottom are clearly inferior. As a result they may become demoralized. Since all members of a meritocracy are socialized to compete for the top jobs and instilled with ambition, failure could be particularly frustrating. In a meritocracy, talent and ability are efficiently syphoned out of the lower strata. As a result these groups are in a particularly vulnerable position because they have no able members to represent their interests.

Members of the upper strata in a meritocracy deserve their position; their privileges are based on merit. In the past they had a degree of self doubt because many realized that they owed their position to factors other than merit. Since they could recognize 'intelligence, wit and wisdom' in members of the lower strata, they appreciated that their social inferiors were at least their equal in certain respects. As a result they would accord the lower orders some respect and the arrogance which high status tends to encourage would be tempered with a degree of humility. All this may change in a meritocracy. Social inferiors really are inferior, those who occupy the top positions are undoubtedly superior. Young argues that this may result in an upper stratum free from self-doubt and the restraining influence of humility. Its members may rule society with arrogance and haughty self assurance. They may despise the lower strata whose members may well find such behavior offensive. This may result in conflict between the ruling minority and the rest of society.

Although Young's picture of a meritocracy is fictional, it indicates many of the possible dysfunctional elements of such a system. It suggests that a society based on meritocratic principles may not be well integrated. It indicates that a stratification system which operates in this way may, on balance, be dysfunctional. Young's ideas are important because they cast serious doubt on liberal views of a just society. Many liberal reforms have aimed to create greater equality of opportunity, to give every member of society an equal chance of becoming

unequal. Michael Young's picture of a fully operative meritocracy suggests that the liberal dream of a fair and just society may produce far from perfect reality.

The United States, however, is not moving toward that state of affairs very rapidly. Several studies have indicated that in recent decades the United States has moved slowly, if at all, toward a more open society. Indeed, the amount of vertical mobility in the United States today is only a small percentage of what it would be if people born at all levels had a truly equal chance to attain any given status.

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|                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Social Exclusion, Poverty, Deprivation and Inequalities</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|

## **Social Exclusion**

In almost all human societies, exclusion in some or the other form exists. Certain groups or individuals are excluded from the mainstream society. They are deprived of some opportunities which are needed for the full blossom of human life. While, the way in which individuals or groups are excluded is context-specific, certain social differences continue to serve as grounds for exclusion. These differences include belonging to a particular ethnic, religious, caste, gender, or age group; or living in a particular geographic area; or having certain physical or mental disabilities. Various forms of social differences overlap and intersect in complex ways over time.

Compared with established concepts such as poverty, class or social mobility, social exclusion has a relatively short history. The term itself was coined in the 1970s by French politician **Rene Lenoir** to describe that section of the French population that had been cut-off or marginalized from mainstream society and had slipped through the 'welfare net'. The concept has particular resonance in countries which share with France a Republic tradition, in which social cohesion is held to be essential in maintaining the contract on which society is founded.

Social exclusion terminology was adopted at a European Union level in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Right-wing governments, including the Thatcher government in the UK, did not recognize the existence of poverty in their own countries, while commentators on the left were becoming increasingly concerned about the social polarization associated with rapidly growing income inequality. By the 1980s, the concept had a prominent place in the European political agenda and today, the European Social Charter guarantees all citizens of the European Union protection against poverty and social exclusion. By the mid-1990s, use of the term 'social exclusion' by Labour politicians in the UK was commonplace, and the Social Exclusion Unit was set up shortly after the 1997 General Election. [Please note that while poverty and income inequality were high on the agenda of Old Labour in UK, social exclusion was the central theme of New Labour. New Labour in UK, for example Tony Blair, was keen to establish that social exclusion was more than traditional 'poverty'. It is more damaging to individual self esteem, corrosive for society as a whole and is more likely to be passed down from generation to generation than material poverty.]

In the international arena, the United Nations Development Programme has been at the forefront of attempts to conceptualize social exclusion across the

developed and developing world. A series of country studies led to the formulation of a rights-focused approach, which regards social exclusion as lack of access to the institutions of civil society (legal and political systems), and to the basic levels of education, health, and financial well-being necessary to make access to those institutions a reality.

There are a multitude of definitions of social exclusion but no single official definition of the concept exists, and apart from the shared notions of marginalization and non-participation, particular definitions often emphasize different aspects of exclusion. The Social Exclusion Unit described social exclusion as ‘what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown’.

The statement alerts us to the possibility that communities and not simply individuals can experience social exclusion. In addition, different forms of exclusion are cumulative and do not stand in isolation from each other. They are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. For example, poor health can impact on employability or family breakdown may impact on a child’s educational performance and poor quality housing can undermine physical and mental health. **Ruth Levitas** focuses on this interconnectedness and the multidimensional nature of social exclusion. There is also an acknowledgement that exclusion is not just an individual experience but has wider implications related to the question social cohesion.

**Ruth Levitas argues that social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the denial or lack of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion society as a whole.**

**Walker and Walker**, drawing on T H Marshall’s framework, identify social exclusion as denial of citizenship. They recognize that exclusion is not simply an absolute state but that it has gradations:

The dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. Social exclusion may, therefore, be seen as the denial (or non-realization) of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship.

## **Social exclusion: a more powerful concept than poverty?**

How useful is the concept of ‘social exclusion’ and does it have greater explanatory power than poverty? Similarly, does social exclusion offer us enhanced insights into the experiences of marginalized group and communities? Many would argue that poverty is a narrower, more limited concept than social exclusion. Poverty focuses essentially on the distribution of material resources, on matters related to income, wealth and consumption. Social exclusion is a broader, more multidimensional notion which focuses on economic, political, cultural and social detachment (Walker and Walker, 1997).

**G.J. Room** has argued that the notion of poverty is primarily focused upon *distributional* issues: the lack of resources at the disposal of an individual or household. In contrast, notions such as social exclusion focus primarily on *relational* issues: in other words, inadequate social participation, lack of integration and lack of power, etc.

Poverty and social exclusion often go hand in hand. Poverty is frequently a significant element in social exclusion and can trigger social exclusion. However, the relationship is contingent rather than categorical; someone can be socially excluded without being poor. For example, there is no evidence that the experience of sexual minorities is essentially defined by poverty. Nevertheless, their lives continue to be defined by a social, cultural and political exclusion. They continue to be vulnerable to hate crimes and have their sexuality denied legitimacy. Likewise, not all people with a physical disability may be poor but will experience a degree of social exclusion, most obviously a lack of accessibility which impacts on their mobility and on social relations. Some elderly people may not be poor but in an ageist society they will experience a degree of social exclusion. The value of social exclusion lies in the fact that it offers explanatory insights beyond that of poverty.

## **Social exclusion and mental health**

The Social Exclusion Unit report described people with mental health issues as ‘one of the most excluded groups in society’. It is clear that the concept of poverty fails to capture and explain their experience, although poverty is often part of their lives.

For some of us, an episode of mental distress will disrupt our lives so that we are pushed out of the society in which we were fully participating. For others, the early onset of distress will mean social exclusion throughout our adult lives, with no prospect of training for a job or a

future in meaningful employment. Loneliness and loss of self-worth lead us to believe we are useless, and so we live with this sense of hopelessness, or far too often chose to end our lives. Repeatedly when we become ill we lose our homes, we lose our jobs and we lose our sense of identity.

The severity of the social exclusion experienced by people with a mental health problem is well documented – poor physical health, high level of unemployment, social isolation, vulnerability to stigma and suspicion. The Social Exclusion Unit recognized that these deprivations are interconnected and may form a ‘cycle of deprivation’. Some elements in this cycle are particularly significant. In terms of work, it has been said that there is greater discrimination against those with a record of mental illness than those with a criminal record. People with mental health problem have one of the lowest employment rates of all disabled groups. Unemployment can be an important driver of social exclusion as it often has significant financial, social and psychological implication. Financially, unemployment means restricted power to consume in a society in which consumption is an important source of status. Exclusion from employment means a loss of, or reduced, social networks and psychologically, our sense of identity, our sense of self, is often defined by our occupation. As Secker argues:

In addition to the negative impact on confidence, self-esteem and mental health itself, unemployment can result in restricted income, fewer opportunities to meet other people or develop skill, and loss of a productive identity that, for many people, is central to a sense of belonging within society.

Through such studies, one begins to develop a sense of the intensity of social exclusion experienced by people with mental health problems.

The concept of social exclusion alerts us to dynamic and complex process; the way in which different forms of deprivation do not exist independent of each other but interact and are mutually reinforcing. Poor mental health can be both a cause and consequence of social exclusion, and mental illness can cause or intensify social exclusion; similarly, social exclusion can deepen mental illness. While the concept of poverty will remain a vital tool for student of social policy, social exclusion expands the realm of our enquiries into issues of marginalization and disadvantage that may not be related to income and wealth.

### **Competing discourses of social exclusion**

Dear candidate, as previously noted, there is no simple, single, accepted definition of social exclusion and the concept implies diverse things to different people with politicians of different political persuasions seeking to harness the

concept for diverse ends. There are competing discourses of social exclusion which variably stress that the causes of social exclusion may be seen as being located at the level of the individual, the family, or locally, nationally or even globally.

**Ruth Levitas** (2005) has made an important contribution to our understanding and identifies three discourses of social exclusion. Please note that social exclusion discourses are underpinned by different assumptions about the way in which society is structured and the distribution of power within it. They offer opposing accounts of the causes and extent of, and solutions to, social exclusion.

The first discourse identified by Levitas is a **Moral Underclass Discourse** (MUD). Here, individuals and communities are seen as deviant, immoral, impulsive, welfare dependent, unhealthy and criminal. Often, poor parenting and the notion of the dysfunctional family is implicated. Deviant values and norms are passed from generation to generation (deviant culture). There is often a spatial dimension to this discourse, with an identified ‘underclass’ concentrated in deprived neighbourhoods, characterized by high levels of crime, poverty, unemployment and poor health, and low levels of educational attainment. This kind of analysis, notably associated with the work of American political scientist Charles Murray, has attracted a powerful sociological and political critique. It is worth noting that cultures do not develop in a vacuum but can be understood as a response to a particular set of material conditions. In other words, individuals or communities cannot be understood in isolation from their relationship to wider societal structures and groups. The application of a MUD-type discourse is ideologically driven and diverts attention away from social divisions such as ‘race’ and ‘class’, which are rendered insignificant in explaining and understanding the deviance and social protest.

The second discourse identified by Levitas is the **Social Integrationist Discourse** (SID). Here, social exclusion is viewed primarily as a consequence of exclusion from the paid labour market. SID was at the forefront of New Labour’s attack on social exclusion where access to paid work was seen as the most effective way of overcoming social exclusion and entry into the labour market was considered to be the key to inclusion. It was stated that ‘The best defence against social exclusion is having a job, and the best way to get a job is to have a good education, with the right training and experience’. Under New Labour’s **conditional welfare state**, welfare policy became a way of integrating people into the labour market. This strategy involved using a mixture of ‘carrots’ such as benefit incentives, and ‘sticks’, i.e. the threat of a reduction or withdrawal of benefits for those who failed to recognize their responsibilities to work. There is a

moral dimension to SID, as paid work is seen to offer more than simply income. The employed citizen is a 'responsible' citizen and exposure to the discipline of the workplace is viewed as important because it is said to give a structure to unemployed people's lives.

The idea that work is the key to social inclusion has an attractive simplicity but Levitas herself is less than convinced. A social integrationist discourse seems to suggest that those in employment are equally included but this ignores the hierarchical structure of the paid labour market and the fact that much work is poorly paid, insecure and casual and that many people who work hard remain in poverty despite their best efforts. It makes no reference to the status of the working poor – those who remain poor in spite of being in paid work. Inclusion in the labour market through marginal, low paid, insecure jobs under poor working conditions does not constitute genuine poverty free social inclusion. Also, work within this discourse is very narrowly defined – it is paid work. Levitas argues that many of those excluded are employed. They are simply not in *paid* employment, rather they are engaged in informal, familial, 'caring' work. Such work, generally carried out by women, is often invisible, undervalued and unrecognized. More broadly, a SID lacks sociological rigour. It closes down analysis prematurely by failing to consider adequately the structural causes of unemployment.

In the third discourse identified by Levitas, the **Redistributionist Discourse** (RED), a social exclusion is viewed as a consequence of poverty and structural inequality. If SID was a defining idea of New Labour, then RED is associated with Old Labour and socialism. Here, poverty is not seen as a residual problem but as an inevitable product of capitalism. Social exclusion is therefore rooted in de-industrialization, global economic change and a rolling back of the welfare state. The other two discourses, i.e. MUD and SID, are seen as distraction or diversions which shift attention from the broader processes that cause social exclusion. New questions begin to emerge under RED, about power and the way it is exercised. If someone is excluded, then someone or something is doing the excluding. The focus is on the structural causes of that exclusion, and not simply the operation of the labour market or the individual 'immorality' of the excluded.

If the causes of social exclusion are seen as structural, then structural change is required to counter it, for example a programme of redistribution (through state intervention) including a reform of the taxation system and an expansion of welfare benefits and public services: 'RED broadens out from its concern with poverty into a critique of inequality, and contrasts exclusion with a version of citizenship which calls for substantial redistribution of power and wealth'. RED offers a radically different perspective on the social disturbances, refuting any

notion of ‘pure criminality’. Thus rioting or any form of social protest is not simply a meaningless, abnormal phenomenon but is deeply rooted in the history and culture of a given society. Social protest can be understood as a form of political action – as a meaningful, if chaotic, protest by those who are socially excluded.

It is important to recognize Levitas’s discourses as artificial constructs. They are ideal type accounts – grounded in reality but not capturing the diversity and complexity of that reality; nonetheless they have heuristic value and offer a framework to develop competing understanding of social exclusion. Thus it would be misleading to suggest, in a simple way, that MUD is a discourse of the New Right, or SID of New Labour or RED of Old Labour; the reality of policy is more complex.

It is important to go beyond the simple binary (i.e. consisting of only two parts) divisions in our understanding of social exclusion. For example, mental illness may be the defining experience of a person or group but it does not exist in isolation from other aspects of difference, and people with mental health issues are not a homogenous group. The experience of a person with mental illness may also be defined by their class, gender, ethnicity, etc. In other words, mental illness can be an important driver of social exclusion but when this condition is associated with membership of an ethnic minority community, for example, that exclusion can be sharpened and even more debilitating.

Finally, social exclusion is not simply an issue for the socially excluded. It has wider significance for issues of equality, citizenship, social stability and cohesion. Social exclusion is not just a problem for those who are excluded, it is a problem for social structure and social solidarity generally. If significant numbers of people are excluded.....then social order will likely become more polarized and unequal – and ultimately perhaps more unstable for all.

Sociology is Simple  
Sociology is Scoring  
provided that you  
Study Sociology Systematically

## **Social Exclusion in India**

As stated earlier, compared with established concepts such as poverty, class or social mobility, social exclusion has a relatively short history. The term itself was coined in the 1970s by French politician **Rene Lenoir** to describe that section of the French population that had been cut-off or marginalized from mainstream society and had slipped through the ‘welfare net’.

Social exclusion terminology was adopted at a European Union level in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The concept of social exclusion has increasingly replaced the concept of poverty amongst the policy makers within the European Union. Social exclusion, presently, has become the central theme of social policy in many European countries.

According to **Amartya Sen**, social exclusion emphasizes “the role of relational features in deprivation”. It refers to the norms and processes that prevent certain groups from equal and effective participation in the social, economic, cultural, and political life of societies. It is both an outcome and a process that renders similar outcomes more likely. Social exclusion thus involves at least four factors: the excluded, the institutions from which they are excluded, the agents whose actions result in the exclusion, and the process through which exclusion occurs. Social exclusion is a relational phenomenon, implicating those with power and affecting those without. To complicate the dynamic, power asymmetries are observed even within groups of excluded individuals.

In brief, social exclusion refers to the process through which groups are, wholly or partially, excluded from full participation in the society in which they live. These main processes include discrimination, deprivation, isolation, shame, etc. It involves both the act of restricting access to resources and the consequences that follow.

**Christine Bradley** pointed out following five main mechanisms through which social exclusion is practiced:

### **1. Geographical segregation:**

Social exclusion can be a function of geography and direct correlations between rural isolation and poverty are often found. In general, the poor live in the most marginal areas, which compound the cycles of poverty and exclusion. It is generally observed that the so-called untouchables (dalits) and even minorities are residentially segregated from the mainstream society. They are made to live and

construct their residential places and dwellings outside the villages or at the periphery of village or town. Most of the tribals live in hills and forests and are excluded from the mainstream population.

## **2. Intimidation:**

As a mechanism of social exclusion, it is often used to reinforce social stereotypes and power relations. In general, those with power use the threat of harm to maintain their dominance over those without power. In India there is deeply entrenched caste exclusion. The threat of violence is reported to be the major form of control of upper castes over backward castes and men over women. To exclude, intimidation in any form is used as the main arm. Verbal abuse, sarcastic remarks, threat of harm, etc., are the main means of intimidation. It can be observed at every level in a society.

## **3. Physical Violence:**

When threat of harm does not work, actual violence is used. It can be committed by the state, community, group or individuals. Violence against women in the household and against poor people and ethnic and religious minorities is reported to be practiced all over the world. Domestic violence is rooted in the norms of gender inequality and patriarchy. Violence against dalits and service castes is a common feature in many rural areas of India.

## **4. Barriers to entry:**

Transaction costs and documentation requirements are the two most common barriers to entry. Transaction costs are those costs that are involved in acquiring a good or service above and beyond its actual price. Barriers to entry involving the state bureaucracy are mostly related to documentation requirements. The state, which is often inflexible in helping the excluded, denies them access to resources. Documentation is also held responsible for the inability of the poor to gain access to resources. Documentation allows the state to humiliate and deny services to the excluded. Other barriers to entry include hostility and unfairness confronted by excluded people while dealing with bureaucracy.

## **5. Corruption:**

Corruption as a social evil is a common problem in all parts of the world. Corruption not only makes access harder for the poor in financial terms, but also destroys the trust that a society needs to function effectively. It makes equal access

and fair treatment from the state impossible for the poor and excluded and accelerates their disengagement from a wider society.

### **Excluded Sections of Indian Society**

Exclusion as a social phenomenon is expressed in different forms all over the world. In almost all human societies, certain groups are excluded and deprived of some opportunities. While the way in which each of these groups is excluded is context-specific, certain social differences continue to serve as grounds for exclusion. These differences include belonging to a particular ethnic, gender, caste, religion or age-group, living in a particular area or having certain disabilities. Various forms of social differences overlap and intersect in complex ways over time.

In Indian context, the main bases of social exclusion are religion, ethnicity, gender and caste. In India, unique forms of exclusion are observed, where certain groups like the dalits, backward classes, women and religious minorities experience systematic exclusion in regard to accruing the advantages of development. Institutional inequality and discrimination have been pervasive features of the Indian society. **Narayan** calls it a process that prevents certain groups from equal and effective participation in the social, economic, cultural and political lives of the societies. Discrimination, inequality and isolation are the main features of social exclusion which negatively affect the quality of life.

In the Indian context, exclusion revolves around institutions that discriminate, isolate and deprive the subordinate groups on the basis of identities such as caste, religion and gender. It is mainly based on caste and patriarchy. The salient features of social exclusion on the basis of caste are social stratification, social inequality, hierarchy and hegemony. Patriarchy breeds gender inequality and social exclusion of weaker sections is closely associated with the discriminatory practices and inequality embedded in the institution by caste. Some of the common categories of excluded groups are described below:

**Ethnic Groups:** Social exclusion due to ethnic differences is a common feature across the globe. In India the exclusion on the grounds of ethnicity is seen in the form of caste system. For example, in traditional India, each caste group maintained strict norms about interdining and also accepting water from other communities. Any violation would lead to conflict within the village. The practice of untouchability can be seen in most villages of India. Similarly, various linguistic and religious minorities also face social exclusion in various forms at interpersonal and institutional levels.

Women: In most of the societies women are considered subordinates to men. They are just considered important to look after their family but in the globalization world the increasing role of women in low-paid formal and informal job markets has brought new opportunities as well as burden. Now they have dual responsibilities, increasing violence at home and exploitation at work place clearly indicate the transformation of society and new emerging threats to women.

Children: Children are among the most disempowered groups in the society and they are more susceptible to abuse. Customary law considers children as property of their respective families and gives them no individual rights. Exclusion from schools and prevalence of bonded child labour are problems related to children. The widespread acceptance of highly exploitative labour practices and the practice of child prostitution are among the most extreme examples of vulnerability of children.

The poor: social exclusion and poverty are different but still they are connected. Poor people live in the vicious cycle of exclusion of everything and it is difficult for them to break the shackles of poverty. In India around 30% of population is below poverty line and most extreme thing about poverty is that it translates itself into intergenerational poverty.

**Please note that while social exclusion and poverty are distinct concepts, they are deeply connected. Poor people remain poor because they are excluded and deprived from access to the resources, opportunities, information, and connections the less poor have. For poor people in developing countries this translates into intergenerational poverty. In addition, poverty is socially stigmatized, making it even harder for poor people to gain access to the networks and resources they need for survival. This vicious cycle is difficult to break. Poverty carries with it painful and humiliating stigma and powerlessness.**

People with HIV/AIDS: In India HIV/AIDS infected people face social exclusion. Our society is not very progressive and it is considered as if the infected person has committed a sin. The major fear associated with HIV/AIDS is the fear of social isolation that would befall on the household or individual if the infection is disclosed. This causes many to hide the fact, thereby hampering further awareness.

The Elderly: In India the elderly are treated with deference and respect. Their vulnerability is compounded by the rapid collapse of support systems that provided them security in their retired lives. With increasing economic stress and breakdown

of family solidarity, the elderly are emerging as a new category of excluded poor in many countries across the globe.

Widows: In many parts of India, widows are considered as an excluded group. The widows are excluded from attending certain social ceremonies and rituals at both family and community levels. The combination of social prejudices, kinship, customs and lack of accountability on the part of state explains why widows face great risk of poverty and exclusion. Socially they are often neglected and considered a burden to the family. The widow beggars in Vrindavan are examples.

The Disabled: Disability is frequently reported as one of the important reasons cited for exclusion. The disabled are excluded at work place as well as home.

### **Impact of Social Exclusion**

Social exclusion results in the following main consequences:

1. It leads to various kinds of deprivations—economic, educational, cultural and social.
2. It leads to the impoverishment of human life and develops a poorer sense of well-being.
3. It leads to inequality, poverty, unemployment and involuntary migration.
4. It leads to social stigmatization and marginalization.
5. It develops fear complex among the excluded.
6. It puts various restrictions on the excluded about their free and full participation in the economic, cultural and political activities.
7. On the whole, it puts an intense negative impact on the quality of life.

## Human Rights and Indian Constitution

India has adopted a clear policy on human rights set forth in the constitution, such as, right to equality, right to freedom, right against exploitation, right to freedom of religion, cultural and educational rights and right to constitutional remedies. Article 14, 15, 16 have been provided with equality provisions. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution ensures equality before law to all persons within the territory of India. Article 15(1) and (2) prohibits discrimination between citizens on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. The constitution has abolished untouchability under Article 17 and forbids its practice in any form. Right to shelter has been held to be necessary for the enjoyment of 'right to life' guaranteed under Article 21 of the constitution. Freedom of movement is guaranteed by the Articles 19(1)(d) and 21.

Different laws have been enacted to protect the right of citizens. For example, for women various acts like Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Hindu Succession Act 1956, Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, Dowry Prohibition Act 2005, Sati Act 1961, Widow Remarriage Act 1856, Immoral Traffic Act 1956 and Equal Remuneration Act, etc., have been enacted from time to time to remove gender discrimination and protect women's rights. To check caste discrimination The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 has been enacted. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 gave more teeth to the law enforcing agencies to bring to book those who humiliate and dishonor scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

## Social exclusion and inclusive policy

In the Indian context, where structural and systematic exclusion based on caste, gender and ethnicity and in some cases religious minorities combine with the class inequality, it results in accumulative social exclusion. Overcoming 'exclusion' constitutes the most elementary pre-requisite for building of a democratic society and can be done through the 'policy of social inclusion', particularly by the state by taking affirmative action to change the circumstances that lead to social exclusion. Indian Constitution provides equality to all citizens irrespective of caste, creed, religious and gender. It also directs the State to take various measures to remove the different forms of discrimination and inequality and thereby help to eradicate social exclusion. **Social inclusion is a coordinated response to the very complex system of problems that arise because of social exclusion. It operates both at the public and private levels; it becomes the responsibility of the civil society as well as the state to ensure social inclusion is a reality and inclusion as desirable.**

## Conclusion

It can be said mere enacting laws against social exclusion will not help. It is the implementation part that is more important. The gaps in the laws should be rectified and implemented in a better way. Secondly it is the cooperation of the society and state which is very much essential for social inclusion. In India focus is upon the Human Development Index and not on any measurement of deprivation and exclusion, which is the need of hour. Focus upon exclusion will help to understand the dimensions of exclusion, the true needy people will be identified and policies will be directed in order to empower these people/sections.

## Poverty

The problem of poverty has been with the human culture and civilization since ages. In the beginning the human beings were dependent on nature for the fulfillment of even their basic needs for survival such as food, clothing and shelter. The society was at a low level of social organisation and technological development. The state of poverty was general in nature faced by all members of society.

Gradually, there occurred great progress in social organisation and technological development. Human beings started producing food and clothes and building houses for themselves. They also produced various other articles for maintaining a comfortable life. This conquest of the human being over nature has gone a long way over the ages. However, the fruits of socio-economic progress have not been equally shared by all sections of society. Society has been broadly divided into two classes i.e. the rich and the poor. The rich people are economically rich, politically dominant and socially superior. But the common masses are economically poor, politically dominated and socially inferior. On the one hand, we find affluence of the ruling class and poverty of the mass on the other. This type of poverty of the weaker sections of society is a social product. It is intrinsically related to the prevailing socio-economic structure of society. The poverty of the masses is generated and perpetuated by the social system. It has been called '**artificial**' poverty. This means that poverty is a socially created state. It is multi-dimensional in nature comprising economic, political, social and cultural aspects. But economic poverty constitutes the basis and gets reinforced and perpetuated by political, social and cultural backwardness. Hence a sociological understanding of 'poverty' becomes important.

Poverty is a social problem. The first step in the solution of a problem is to identify it and this requires a definition. The second step is to assess the size of the problem which involves the construction of ways to measure it. Once the problem has been identified, defined and measured, the next step is to discover what causes it. Only after answers have been obtained to the questions, 'What is poverty?'; 'What is the extent of poverty?' and 'What are the causes of poverty?' can the question 'What are the solutions to poverty?' be asked. This chapter examines some of the answers that social scientists have given to these four questions.

### **Absolute poverty**

Since the nineteenth century when rigorous studies of poverty began, researchers have tried to establish a fixed yardstick against which to measure poverty. Ideally, such a yardstick would be applicable to all societies and should establish a fixed level, usually known as the **poverty line**, below which poverty begins and above which it ends. This concept of poverty is known as absolute poverty. It usually involves a judgment of basic human needs and is measured in terms of the resources required to maintain health and physical efficiency. Most measures of absolute poverty are concerned with establishing the quality and amount of food, clothing and shelter deemed necessary for a healthy life. **Absolute poverty is often known as 'subsistence poverty' since it is based on assessments of minimum subsistence requirements.** It is usually measured by pricing the basic necessities of life, drawing a poverty line in terms of this price, and defining as poor those whose income falls below that figure.

There have been many attempts to define and operationalize – put into a form which can be measured – the concept of absolute poverty. For example **Drewnowski** and **Scott** in their 'Level of Living Index', define and operationalize 'basic physical needs' in the following way: nutrition, measured by factors such as intake of calories and protein; shelter, measured by quality of dwelling and degree of overcrowding; and health, measured by factors such as the rate of infant mortality and the quality of available medical facilities.

Some concepts of absolute poverty go beyond the notion of subsistence poverty by introducing the idea of 'basic cultural needs'. This broadens the idea of basic human needs beyond the level of physical survival. Drewnowski and Scott include education, security, leisure and recreation in their category of basic cultural needs. The proportion of children enrolled at school is one indication of the level of educational provision; the number of violent deaths relative to the size of the population is one indication of security; and the amount of leisure relative to work time is one measure of the standard of leisure and recreation.

The concept of absolute poverty has been widely criticized. It is based on the assumption that there are minimum basic needs for all people, in all societies. This is a difficult argument to defend even in regard to subsistence poverty measured in terms of food, clothing and shelter. Such needs vary both between and within societies. Thus Peter Townsend argues, 'It would be difficult to define nutritional needs without taking account of the kinds and demands of occupations and of leisure time pursuits in a society'. For example, the nutritional needs of the nomadic hunters and gatherers of the Kalahari Desert in Africa may well be very different from those of members of Western society. Within the same society, nutritional needs may vary widely, between, for example, the bank clerk sitting at his desk all day and the labourer on a building site.

The concept of absolute poverty is even more difficult to defend when it is broadened to include the idea of 'basic cultural needs'. Such 'needs' vary from time to time and place to place and any attempt to establish absolute, fixed standards is bound to fail. Drewnowski and Scott's basic cultural need of security is a case in point. Financial security for aged members of the working class in nineteenth-century England involved younger relatives providing for them, whereas today it is largely met by state old age pensions and private insurance schemes. Increasing longevity, reduction in the size of families, and earlier retirement have altered the circumstances of the aged. Definitions of adequate provision for old age have changed since the last century. Thus, in terms of security, both the situation and expectations of the aged in England have changed and are not strictly comparable over time. A similar criticism can be applied to attempts to apply absolute standards to two or more societies. For instance, recreational and leisure provision in the West may be measured in terms of the number of televisions, cinemas, parks and playing fields per head of the population. However, the concept of leisure on which this is based and the items in terms of which it is measured may be largely irrelevant for other societies. For example, the Hopi and Zuni Indians of the southwestern USA have a rich ceremonial life which forms the central theme of their leisure activities. Recreational needs are therefore largely determined by the culture of the particular society. Any absolute standard of cultural needs is based in part on the values of the researcher which to some degree reflect his particular culture. Peter Townsend notes that when societies are compared in terms of recreational facilities, 'Cinema attendance and ownership of radios take precedence over measures of direct participation in cultural events', such as religious rituals and other ceremonies. This is a clear illustration of Western bias.

## Relative poverty

In view of the problems involved, many researchers have abandoned the concept of absolute standards based on notions of physical and/or cultural needs. In their place they have developed the idea of relative standards, that is standards which are relative to the particular time and place. Thus the idea of absolute poverty has been replaced by the idea of relative poverty. Relative poverty is measured in terms of judgments by members of a particular society of what is considered a reasonable and acceptable standard of living and style of life according to the conventions of the day. Just as conventions change from time to time and place to place, so will definitions of poverty. **Peter Townsend** argues that, 'Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diets, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities'.

In a rapidly changing world, definitions of poverty based on relative standards will be constantly changing. Thus Samuel Mencher writes, 'The argument for relative standards rests on the assumption that for practical purposes standards become so fluid that no definition of need, no matter how broad, satisfies the ever changing expectations of modern life'. The argument is put in a nutshell by I. M. Rubinow, 'Luxuries become comforts, comforts become necessities'. In Western society, products and services such as hot and cold running water, refrigerators and washing machines, medical and dental care, full-time education and motor cars have or are travelling the road from luxuries, to comforts, to necessities. Thus in Peter Townsend's words, any definition of poverty must be 'related to the needs and demands of a changing society'.

There are, however, a number of problems with the concept of relative poverty. It cannot be assumed that there are society wide standards of reasonable and acceptable life styles. Within a particular society, ethnicity, class, age, religion, region and a variety of other factors can vary judgments of reasonable living standards. For example, acceptable standards for the lower working class may differ significantly from those of the middle class. Townsend has suggested that it is possible to draw up a list of 'types of customs and social activities practised or approved by the majority of the population'. These may include things like having a refrigerator and taking a summer holiday away from home.

The concept of relative poverty also poses problems for the comparison of the poor in the same society over time, and between societies. For example, an insistence on a purely relative concept of poverty prevents a comparison of the poor in present-day and nineteenth-century England, or of present-day England and Third World countries in Africa, Asia and South America. From the viewpoint of relative poverty, circumstances and expectations differ from time to time and place to place. Comparisons are therefore invalid. Despite this such comparisons are made, for example, between the grinding poverty of the Third World and living standards in Western societies. One solution to the problem of comparison has been suggested by Peter Townsend. He argues that ‘two standards of poverty are required, “nation-relational” and “world-relational”’. Nation-relational standards are based on relative poverty according to the conventions of the particular society. World relational poverty would have to be based on more artificial standards which involves a return to absolute standards of poverty, despite all their drawbacks. In this way it would be possible to compare poverty in different societies.

**In addition:**

**Approaches to Poverty**

Poverty has been defined differently in the developed and the developing countries because of their different levels of economic development. There are two main approaches to the problem of poverty – **the ‘nutritional’ approach** and **the ‘relative deprivation’ approach**.

**Nutritional Approach**

This approach has been adopted in the developing countries. In this case, poverty is measured on the basis of minimum food requirements. This is calculated in terms of consumption of adequate calories (generally 2250 calories) to maintain working capacity of a person. People who are unable to fulfill this bare minimum in food consumption due to their low income are placed below the ‘poverty line’. The concept of poverty line is used to demarcate the poor from the non-poor. It is formulated in terms of an income level, which is considered to be adequate for enabling a person to maintain a minimum level of consumption of goods and services. Persons whose income level is below the poverty line are identified as poor. This is a measure of **‘absolute’ poverty** i.e. poverty defined with reference to some predetermined standard or norm.

### **Relative Deprivation Approach**

In case of the developed countries, the ‘relative deprivation’ approach has been adopted for measuring poverty because fulfillment of minimum need of food is not the major problem. Here, poverty is seen in terms of relative deprivation of a class or a section of population against the privileged ones. Poverty is perceived in terms of an exclusion of a class or section of population from average living patterns, activities and participation in social life because of lack of resources e.g. wealth, income, education and political power. The emphasis is more on social inequalities than nutritional requirements.

Please note that the ‘nutritional’ approach to poverty is highly deficient in nature because it excludes essential non-food requirements for human living. In defining poverty, we must include essential non-food requirements like clothing, housing, education and health-care facilities, which are as important as the essential food requirements for an average human life in a civilized society. We cannot reduce human life to sheer animal life, which is concerned only with basic survival needs.

### **Subjective poverty**

To the concepts of absolute and relative poverty can be added a third, subjective poverty. This refers to whether or not individuals or groups feel they are poor. Subjective poverty is closely related to relative poverty since those who are defined as poor in terms of the standards of the day will probably see and feel themselves to be poor. However, this is not necessarily the case. For example, a formerly wealthy individual reduced by circumstances to a modest lower-middle-class income and life style may feel poor but other members of society may not regard him as such. Conversely, individuals and groups judged in terms of majority standards to be in poverty may not see themselves as poor. Many old age pensioners may fall into this category since their expectations of acceptable living standards may be lower than those of most members of society. The concept of subjective poverty is important since, to some degree, people act in terms of the way they perceive and define themselves.

## Theories of poverty

### Poverty as a positive feedback system

**Ken Coates** and **Richard Silburn** who conducted a major study of poverty in Nottingham argue that, 'poverty has many dimensions, each of which must be studied separately, but which in reality constitute a interrelated network of deprivations'. The US Council of Economic Advisors stated in 1964, 'The vicious cycle, in which poverty breeds poverty, occurs through time, and transmits its effects from one generation to another. There is no beginning to the cycle, no end'. These two statements contain the kernel of the theory that views poverty as a positive feedback system, that is a system in which each part reinforces the others and so maintains the system as a whole. This theory, sometimes known as the '**vicious circle**' **theory of poverty**, argues that the various circumstances of the poor combine to maintain them in poverty. They are trapped in the situation with little chance of escaping. Although the theory has some merit, it will be argued later that it provides only a partial explanation for poverty.

The following data and observations from the President's Commission on Income Maintenance Programs illustrate the view of poverty as a positive feedback system. The majority of Americans officially designated as poor have inadequate diets which can have various consequences. Poor nutrition during pregnancy can hinder foetal brain envelopment and increase the possibility of premature birth. Protein deficiency during early childhood can retard brain development. Inadequate diet can lead to low energy levels which can hinder progress at school and work and which can be interpreted by teachers and employers as evidence of disinterest, lack of motivation and laziness. Since the poor often work in physically demanding jobs, for example as unskilled labourers, low energy levels are particularly significant. Poor nutrition lowers resistance to disease which can lead to longer absences from school and work compared to the non-poor. In America the situation is made worse due to minimal provision of socialized medicine and the high charges of private medicine which are often beyond the means of the poor. Frequent illness and low energy levels can sap the drive and determination needed to escape from poverty.

The above examples illustrating how the various circumstances in the life of the poor combine to maintain poverty can be multiplied. However, despite the abundant evidence to support the view of poverty as a positive feedback system, the theory is inadequate as an explanation of poverty. Instead of answering the question 'Why poverty?' the positive feedback theory directs itself more to the question, 'Once poverty exists, how is it maintained?'

## **The culture of poverty**

Many researchers have noted that the life style of the poor differs in certain respects from that of other members of society. They have also noted that poverty life styles in different societies share common characteristics. The circumstances of poverty are similar, in many respects, in different societies. Similar circumstances and problems tend to produce similar responses, and these responses can develop into a culture, that is the learned, shared, and socially transmitted behaviour of a social group. This line of reasoning has led to the concept of a '**culture of poverty**' (or, more correctly, a subculture of poverty), a relatively distinct subculture of the poor with its own norms and values. The idea of a culture of poverty was introduced in the late 1950s by the American anthropologist, **Oscar Lewis**. He developed the concept from his fieldwork among the urban poor in Mexico and Puerto Rico. Lewis argues that the culture of poverty is a 'design for living' which is transmitted from one generation to the next.

As a design for living which directs behaviour, the culture of poverty has the following elements. In Lewis's words, 'On the level of the individual the major characteristics are a strong feeling of marginality, of helplessness, of dependence and inferiority, a strong present-time orientation with relatively little ability to defer gratification, a sense of resignation and fatalism'. On the family level, life is characterized by 'free union or consensual marriages, a relatively high incidence in the abandonment of mothers and children, a trend towards mother-centred families and a much greater knowledge of maternal relatives'. There are high rates of divorce and desertion by the male family head resulting in matrifocal families headed by women. On the community level, 'The lack of effective participation and integration in the major institutions of the larger society is one of the crucial characteristics of the culture of poverty'. The urban poor in Lewis's research do not usually belong to trade unions or other associations, they are not members of political parties, and 'generally do not participate in the national welfare agencies, and make very little use of banks, hospitals, department stores, museums or art galleries'. For most, the family is the only institution in which they directly participate.

The culture of poverty is seen as a response by the poor to their position in society. According to Lewis it is a 'reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified and highly individualistic society'. However, the culture of poverty goes beyond a mere reaction to a situation. It takes on the force of culture since its characteristics are guides to action which are internalized by the poor and passed on from one generation to the next. As such the culture of poverty tends to perpetuate poverty since its characteristics can be seen as mechanisms which

maintain poverty: attitudes of fatalism and resignation lead to acceptance of the situation; failure to join trade unions and other organizations weakens the potential power of the poor. Lewis argues that once established, the culture of poverty ‘tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effect on children. By the time slum children are age six or seven, they have usually absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime’.

Lewis argues that the culture of poverty best describes and explains the situation of the poor in colonial societies or in the early stages of capitalism as in many Third World countries. He suggests that it either does not exist or is weakly developed in advanced capitalist societies and socialist societies, although others have argued that the idea of a culture of poverty can be applied to the poor in advanced industrial societies.

The American anthropologist **Walter B. Miller** has developed his thinking along lines similar to Lewis. Although not directly concerned with poverty, Miller’s ideas have been linked to the culture of poverty. Miller argues that the American lower class – the lowest stratum of the working class – has a distinctive subculture with its own set of ‘**focal concerns**’. These include an emphasis on toughness and masculinity, a search for thrills and excitement, present-time orientation, and a commitment to luck and fate rather than achievement and effort as a means of realizing goals. He emphasizes the idea of value to a greater degree than Lewis, arguing that members of the lower class are committed to their focal concerns. Miller’s picture is more of a self-contained viable cultural system, without the disorganization and breakdown implied by Lewis. Like Lewis’s culture of poverty, Miller’s lower class subculture is self-perpetuating, being transmitted from one generation to the next. Miller argues that ‘lower class culture is a distinctive tradition, many centuries old with an integrity of its own’. Miller’s catalogue of lower class traits, like that of Lewis, offers no handholds to escape from poverty. From one perspective this may be functional. Miller suggests that lower class subculture is functional in providing the necessary adaptation for a ‘low-skilled labouring force’. Aspects of this adaptation include ‘high boredom tolerance’ and the ‘capacity to find life gratification outside the world of work’. Faced with boring, low paid jobs and high rates of unemployment, members of the lower class have responded by developing their own focal concerns which provide a measure of satisfaction.

The concepts of the culture of poverty and lower working-class subculture have two important factors in common. Firstly, they see the poor as different from

the rest of society, as a group with a distinctive subculture. Secondly, they see this subculture as maintaining the poor in their present circumstances.

Since its introduction, the culture of poverty theory has met with sustained criticism. The actual existence of a culture of poverty has been questioned. Research in low-income areas in Latin American and African countries which are in the early stages of capitalist development and should therefore provide evidence of a thriving culture of poverty, has cast some doubt on Lewis's claims. For example, Kenneth Little's study of West African urbanization reports a proliferation of voluntary associations for mutual aid and recreation organized by poor rural migrants to the cities. William Mangin's research in the *barriadas* of Peru, shanty towns surrounding major cities, reveals a high level of community action and political involvement. Though casting serious doubts on the culture of poverty, the above evidence does not negate its existence.

### **Situational constraints - an alternative to a culture of poverty**

The second and major criticism of the culture of poverty has centred round the notion of culture. Despite the research referred to above, there is evidence from both advanced and developing industrial societies to support Lewis and Miller's characterization of the behaviour of the poor. The use of the term culture implies that the behaviour of the poor is internalized via the socialization process and once internalized is to some degree resistant to change. It also implies, particularly with respect to Miller's 'focal concerns', that aspects of the behaviour of the poor derive from values. Again there is the suggestion of resistance to change. Indeed, Miller argues that members of the lower class have a preference for, and a commitment to their subculture. Thus both Lewis and Miller suggest, with their notion of culture, that despite the fact it was initially caused by circumstances such as unemployment, low income and lack of opportunity, that once established, the subculture of low-income groups has a life of its own. Thus, if the circumstances which produced poverty were to disappear, the culture of poverty may well continue. This is made even more likely by Lewis's and particularly Miller's view that the culture of poverty and lower class subculture respectively are largely self-contained and insulated from the norms and values of the mainstream culture of society. The poor, to a large degree, therefore live in a world of their own.

These arguments have been strongly contested. Rather than seeing the behaviour of the poor as a response to established and internalized cultural patterns, many researchers view it as a reaction to 'situational constraints'. In other words the poor are constrained by the facts of their situation, by low income, unemployment and the like, to act the way they do, rather than being directed by a

culture of poverty. The situational constraints argument suggests that the poor would readily change their behaviour in response to a new set of circumstances once the constraints of poverty were removed. The situational constraints thesis also attacks the view that the poor are largely insulated from mainstream norms and values. It argues that the poor share the values of society as a whole, the only difference being that they are unable to translate many of those values into reality. Again, the situational constraints argument suggests that once the constraints of poverty are removed, the poor will have no difficulty adopting mainstream behaviour patterns and seizing available opportunities.

*Tally's Corner* by Elliot Liebow is a major piece of research which strongly supports the situational constraints thesis. The study is based on participant observation of Black 'streetcorner men' in a low-income area of Washington DC. The men are either unemployed, underemployed (working part-time) or employed in low paid, unskilled, dead-end jobs as manual labourers, elevator operators, janitors, bus boys and dish-washers. Their view of work is directed by mainstream values. The men want jobs with higher pay and status but they lack the necessary skills, qualifications and work experience.

In summary, the criticisms of the culture of poverty are as follows. Firstly, it either does not exist or applies only to particular groups in poverty and therefore poverty life styles are more variable than it suggests. Secondly, the behaviour which characterizes the culture of poverty is due to situational constraints rather than cultural patterns. The poor do not have a distinctive subculture, they are not insulated from mainstream culture and they share the values of society as a whole. Thirdly, if there are cultural aspects to the behaviour of the poor, they are less powerful than situational constraints in directing behaviour and are secondary when compared to the commitment of the poor to mainstream norms and values. Finally, the implication of all these criticisms is that once the situational constraints of poverty are removed, much or all that is distinctive about the behaviour of the poor will disappear. Herbert J. Gans argues that this implication must be tested. He states that, 'the most important method in poverty research is social experimentation which provides people an opportunity to live under improved or more secure conditions, and then measure their response. Only experiments can discover how much the lifestyles of the poor are persistent cultural patterns, and how much they are *ad hoc* responses to the insecurity, instability, and lack of opportunity that mark the social situations in which they live'. In this way, Gans believes, the debate over situational constraints and cultural patterns will be finally settled.

Dear Candidate, the two theories of poverty so far discussed have certain similarities. Both focus on the circumstances and behaviour of the poor. Both claim to show how once the situation of poverty is established, it tends to be self-perpetuating. The positive feedback theory shows how the various circumstances of poverty reinforce each other and so maintain the system. The culture of poverty theory claims to show how a distinctive subculture develops within the situation of poverty and so perpetuates the system. However, neither theory satisfactorily answers the question ‘Why poverty?’ They explain its maintenance rather than its genesis. To explain the basic causes of poverty, sociologists are increasingly focusing their attention on society as a whole and particularly on the stratification system, rather than studying the poor in isolation.

**In addition:**

**Cycle of Deprivation Thesis**

Keith Joseph’s concept of ‘cycle of deprivation’ has some similarity to the Lewis concepts of ‘culture of poverty’ and ‘class culture’, but it lays greater stress on the effect of material factors, such as poor housing and low income, in undermining prospects for self-improvement from generation to generation. Among the cultural factors, Joseph particularly emphasizes the inadequacy of parental upbringing and home background.

The cycle of deprivation thesis became popular in 1970s to explain the persistence of poverty and other forms of socio-economic disadvantage through generations. It postulates that ‘family pathology’ is the principle mechanism for transmitting social deprivation intergenerationally, and that this explains the persistence of bad housing, low education attainment, and unemployment in poorer households and communities.

**Dependency Culture Thesis**

The notion of ‘dependency culture’ is essentially a version of the culture of poverty thesis. According to Charles Murry, there are broadly two types of poverty – that of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. It is the latter who have created for themselves a ‘culture of dependency’ and have been able to do this by living off welfare. Murry argues that many poor find it preferable to be ‘on welfare’ (i.e., in poverty) than to work. Such people take advantage of what he calls ‘the generous’ (welfare) revolution. It is often observed that many beggars do not want to leave begging even if they are offered lucrative work. For such people, begging is an easy job than earning money through working somewhere.

### **Capitalist Economic System Thesis**

Scholars of leftist leanings argue that the real cause of poverty is to be found in the way that our society is organized. Marxists claim that poverty is an inevitable feature of the capitalist economic system. A laissez-faire policy (liberalization) or the free market economy allows capitalists who own means of production and businesses to make huge profits while paying low wages to their workers. Sometimes, their workers are bonded labourers who live just on hand-to-mouth existence. The Marxists have not only rejected the culture of poverty theory but also blamed the capitalist system for the inequality and poverty in society.

### **Can poverty be discussed in isolation from the more general question of inequality?**

As Peter Townsend states, ‘the description, analysis and explanation of poverty in any country must proceed within the context of a general theory of stratification’. From this perspective the poor must be seen in terms of the stratification system as a whole. Questions about the nature and functioning of stratification systems are directly related to questions about poverty. Theories of stratification should provide theories of poverty since the poor are part of stratification systems – the bottom part.

### **Poverty – a Marxian perspective**

From a Marxian perspective, poverty in capitalist society can only be understood in terms of the system of inequality generated by a capitalist economy. Wealth is concentrated in the hands of a minority: those who own the forces of production. Members of the subject class own only their labour which they must sell in return for wages on the open market. Capitalism requires a highly motivated workforce. Since the motivation to work is based primarily on monetary return, those whose services are not required by the economy, such as aged and the unemployed, must receive a lower income than wage earners. If this were not the case, there would be little incentive to work. The motivation of the workforce is also maintained by unequal rewards for work. Workers compete as individuals and groups with each other for income in a highly competitive society. In this respect, the low wage sector forms the base of a competitive wage structure.

J.C. Kincaid argues that low wages are essential to a capitalist economy since, ‘from the point of view of capitalism the low-wage sector helps to underpin and stabilize the whole structure of wages and the conditions of employment of the

working class. The employers can tolerate no serious threat to the disciplines of the labour market and the competitive values which support the very existence of capitalism’.

If the low wage sector were abolished by an increase in the real value of the wages of the low paid, several of the possible consequences would be harmful to the capitalist class. Firstly, the delicate balance of pay differentials would be shattered. Other groups of workers might well demand, and possibly receive, real increases in their wages. This would reduce profit margins. Secondly, wages within the working class might become increasingly similar. This might tend to unite a working class which is now fragmented and divided by groups of workers competing against each other for higher wages. A move towards unity within the working class may well pose a threat to the capitalist class. Thirdly, if the real value of the wages of the low paid was increased, the pool of cheap labour, on which many labour intensive capitalist industries depend for profit, might disappear.

Since, from a Marxian perspective, the state in capitalist society reflects the interests of the ruling class, government measures can be expected to do little except reduce the harsher effects of poverty. Thus Kincaid argues that, ‘It is not to be expected that any Government whose main concern is with the efficiency of a capitalist economy is going to take effective steps to abolish the low-wage sector’. Despite claims to the contrary, there is little evidence that the Welfare State has redistributed wealth from the rich to the poor. Westergaard and Resler dismiss the theory that the Welfare State, by using the power of the state to modify the workings of market forces, has created a more equal distribution of wealth. They argue that ‘The state’s social services are financed largely from the wages of those for whose security they are primarily designed. They make for little redistribution from capital and top salaries . . . . they reshuffle resources far more within classes, than they do between classes’. Thus the bulk of monies received by members of the working class have been paid or will be paid in the form of taxes by themselves or other members of that class. What the wealthy at first sight appear to lose in the form of social security payments to the poor, they largely regain in the form of tax concessions on private insurance policies, mortgages and the like. Westergaard and Resler argue that the ruling class has responded to the demands of the labour movement by allowing the creation of the Welfare State, but the system operates, ‘within a framework of institutions and assumptions that remain capitalist’. In their view, ‘the keyword is “containment”’; the demands of the labour movement have been contained within the existing system. Westergaard and Resler argue that poverty exists because of the operation of a capitalist economic system which prevents the poor from obtaining the financial resources to become non-poor.

J.C. Kincaid sees a similar relationship between social security benefits and a capitalist economy. He argues that 'widespread poverty is a direct consequence of the limited effectiveness of social security provision'. Millions in Britain depend on social security but the payments they receive are insufficient to maintain a decent standard of living. In practice, payments function to keep the poor where they are, that is poor and at the bottom of the class structure. The social security system results in little redistribution of wealth from rich to poor. Like Westergaard and Resler, Kincaid sees poverty resulting from the operation of a capitalist economy which produces a particular form of social stratification. Kincaid summarizes the situation in the following way, 'It is not simply that there are rich and poor. It is rather that some are rich *because* some are poor'. Thus poverty can only be understood in terms of the operation of the class system as a whole since the question 'Why poverty?' is basically the same question as 'Why wealth?' Therefore from a Marxian perspective, poverty like wealth, is an inevitable consequence of a capitalist system.

### **Poverty – a Weberian perspective**

The Marxian model of stratification in capitalist society is not particularly sensitive to variations in wealth within the working class. It fails to clearly differentiate the poor from the other wage earners and to provide an explanation for their poverty. Although many of the arguments in this section are provided by researchers committed to Marxian perspectives, their views may be presented within a Weberian framework. Weber argues that an individual's 'class situation' is dependent upon his 'market situation', on the amount of power he has to influence the workings of the market in his favour and on the rewards his skill and expertise can command in a competitive market. From this perspective groups such as the aged, the chronically sick, and single parent families have little power in the market and therefore receive little reward. Indeed, their circumstances largely prevent them from competing in the market.

The following explanations have been put forward to account for the market situation of the low paid. In advanced industrial societies, with increasing demand for specialized skills and training, the unemployed and underemployed tend to be unskilled with low educational qualifications. Liebow's streetcorner men, with few skills or qualifications, can command little reward on the labour market. With increasing mechanization and automation, the demand for unskilled labour is steadily contracting.

It has been argued that the market situation of the low paid is due not so much to the low profitability of the industries in which they work but rather to their

bargaining power. Kincaid argues that, 'A crucial factor determining wage levels is the bargaining power of workers'. Low paid workers are usually older, female, and as a result, traditionally less militant. They often belong to weak trade unions or none at all. In Britain only a quarter of female and just over a half of male employees belong to unions. Low wages are concentrated in the non-unionized sectors of the workforce.

Ralph Miliband examines the bargaining position of the poor in an article entitled *Politics and Poverty*. He argues that in terms of power, the poor are the weakest group competing for the scarce and valued resources in society. Miliband states that, 'The poor are part of the working class but they are largely excluded from the organizations which have developed to defend the interests of the working class'. There are no organizations with the power of trade unions to represent the interests of the unemployed, the aged, the chronically sick or single parent families. Their bargaining position is weakened still further by their inability to mobilize widespread working-class support, since non-poor members of the working class tend not to see their interests and those of the poor as similar.

Ralph Miliband concludes that the key to the weak bargaining position of the poor is simply their poverty. He states that 'economic deprivation is a source of political deprivation; and political deprivation in turn helps to maintain and confirm economic deprivation'.

This section has attempted to differentiate the poor from the working class as a whole and explain their poverty. Although this approach some merit, it also has important drawbacks. As Westergaard and Resler argue, 'it diverts attention from the larger structure of inequality in which poverty is embedded'. Thus the poor must be seen in relation to the class system as a whole, not simply as an isolated group. Ralph Miliband makes a similar point. He argues that the position of the poor is not that dissimilar from that of the working class as a whole. The poor are simply the most disadvantaged section of the working class rather than a separate group. To understand poverty, it is therefore necessary to understand the nature of inequality in a class stratified society. Miliband concludes that, 'The basic fact is that the poor are an integral part of the working class – its poorest and most disadvantaged stratum. They need to be seen as such, as part of a continuum, the more so as many workers who are not "deprived" in the official sense live in permanent danger of entering the ranks of the deprived; and that they share in any case many of the disadvantages which afflict the deprived. Poverty is a class thing, closely linked to a *general* situation of class inequality'.

## **The ‘functions’ of poverty**

In *More Equality*, Herbert J. Gans argues that ‘poverty survives in part because it is useful to a number of groups in society’. Poverty benefits the non-poor in general and the rich and powerful in particular. They therefore have a vested interest in maintaining poverty. From this perspective, Gans outlines the following ‘functions of poverty’ for the non-poor.

Firstly, every economy has a number of temporary, dead-end, dirty, dangerous and menial jobs. The existence of poverty ensures that such work is done. Gans argues that ‘poverty function to provide a low-wage labour pool that is willing – or rather, unable to be unwilling – to perform dirty work at low cost’. Without the low paid, many industries would be unable to continue in their present form. Raising wages would increase costs with ‘obvious dysfunctional consequences for more affluent people’. Thus at one and the same time, poverty ensures that ‘dirty jobs’ are done and, by getting them cheaply, subsidizes the non-poor sections of the population.

Secondly, poverty directly provides employment and financial security for a fast growing section of the labour force. In Gan’s words, ‘Poverty creates jobs for a number of occupations and professions that serve the poor, or shield the rest of the population from them’. These include the police, probation officers, social workers, psychiatrists, doctors and the administrators who oversee the ‘poverty industry’. In Britain, the social security system employed some 80,000 staff in 1976 and the cost of administration amounted to £649 million. However altruistic their motives, Gans suggests that those employed to deal with the poor have a vested interest in poverty.

Thirdly, Gans argues that the presence of the poor provides reassurance and support for the rest of society. They provide a baseline of failure which reassures the non-poor of their worth. Gans claims that ‘poverty helps to guarantee the status of those who are not poor’. It does this by providing ‘a reliable and relatively permanent measuring rod for status comparison’. Since they are relatively powerless, the poor also provide an effective scapegoat for the non-poor. Gans maintains that, ‘The defenders of the desirability of hard work, thrift, honesty and monogamy need people who can be accused of being lazy, spendthrift, dishonest and promiscuous to justify these norms’. Gans argues that the poor function to reinforce mainstream norms since norms ‘are best legitimated by discovering violations’.

From a somewhat different perspective, Gans has reached a similar conclusion to those who argue that poverty must be analysed in terms of class inequality. From both viewpoints poverty exists because it benefits the rich and because the poor are powerless to change their situation. Gans concludes that poverty persists 'because many of the functional alternatives to poverty would be quite dysfunctional for the more affluent members of society'.

### **Poverty – solutions and ideology**

In this section, government measures to deal with poverty and proposals to solve poverty will be considered together with the ideologies which underlie them. First, the ideological aspects of the culture of poverty thesis will be examined, since it formed the basis for government policy in the fight against poverty in the USA.

Like all members of society, sociologists, despite their attempts to be objective, see the world in terms of their own values and political beliefs. This is particularly apparent in the area of poverty research. Herbert J. Gans has suggested that 'perhaps the most significant fact about poverty research is that it is being carried out entirely by middle-class researchers who differ – in class, culture and political power – from the people they are studying'. Some observers argue that the picture of the poor presented by many social scientists is largely a reflection of middle-class value judgments. In particular, the idea of a culture of poverty has been strongly criticized as a product of middle-class prejudice. Charles A. Valentine in *Culture and Poverty*, a forceful attack on bias in poverty research, states, 'Scarcely a description can be found that does not dwell on the noxiousness, pathology, distortion, disorganization, instability or incompleteness of poverty culture as compared to the life of the middle classes'. From the viewpoint of the culture of poverty, the poor themselves are a major obstacle to the removal of poverty. It therefore follows that at least a part of the solution to poverty is to change the poor, since, by implication, they are partly to blame for their situation. The direction in which the poor are to be changed is also influenced by middle-class values. They must adopt middle-class norms and values and in short, as Valentine puts it, 'the poor must become "middle class"'.

Many observers argue that this line of reasoning formed the basis of USA's government policy towards poverty. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a 'war on poverty' with the passing of the Economic Opportunity Act and the formation of the Office of Economic Opportunity to coordinate measures to fight poverty. The comments of the American anthropologist Thomas Gladwin represent the views of many social scientists on this campaign, 'The whole

conception of the War on Poverty rests upon a definition of poverty as a way of life. The intellectual climate in which it was nurtured was created by studies of the culture of poverty, notably those of Oscar Lewis . . . (which) provide the basis for programs at the national level designed very explicitly to correct the social, occupational and psychological deficits of people born and raised to a life of poverty’.

The Office of Economic Opportunity created a series of programmes designed to re-socialize the poor and remove their presumed deficiencies. The Job Corps set up residential camps in wilderness areas for unemployed, inner city youth with the aim of ‘building character’ and fostering initiative and determination. Many ‘work experience’ programmes were developed to instil ‘work habits’. The Neighbourhood Youth Corps created part-time and holiday jobs for young people. A multitude of job training schemes were started to encourage ‘work incentive’ and provide the skills required for employment. The aim of many of these schemes was to undo the presumed effect of the culture of poverty by fostering ambition, motivation and initiative. To counter the culture of poverty at an earlier age, government money was pumped into schools in low-income districts with the aim of raising educational standards. Operation Head Start, begun in January 1965, was intended to nip the culture of poverty in the bud. It was an extensive programme of pre-school education for the children of low-income families. According to Charles Valentine, ‘Head Start is one of the many current programs designed to inculcate a middle-class “culture” among the poor with the hope that so equipped they may eventually arise from their poverty’. Much of the effort of the Office of Economic Opportunity was directed towards ‘community action’, the idea of local community self-help. The Office encouraged and financed self-help organizations run by poor which covered a range of projects from job training and community business ventures to legal services and youth clubs. The idea was for the poor, with help, to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, to throw aside the culture of poverty and become enterprising and full of initiative like their middle-class mentors. Compared to the above programmes, direct aid in the form of cash payments to the poor received low priority.

The war on poverty was not designed to eradicate poverty by providing the poor with sufficient income to raise them above the poverty line. Lee Rainwater argues that, ‘The goal of the war was not to directly provide resources that would cancel out poverty, but to provide opportunities so that people could achieve their own escape from poverty’. By changing the poor it was hoped to provide them with the opportunity to become upwardly mobile and thus promote intergenerational and intragenerational mobility. The war on poverty is a typically

American solution reflecting the values of American culture with its emphasis on individual achievement in the land of opportunity.

By the late 1960s many social scientists felt that the war on poverty had failed as did the poor. The poor remained stubbornly poor despite the energy and resolve of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Increasingly sociologists argued that solutions to poverty must be developed from stratification theory rather than the culture of poverty theory. They argued that poverty programs must be recognized as efforts to engineer changes in the stratification profiles of the United States. Once poverty is recognized as an aspect of inequality, and not merely a problem of the poor, solutions involve restructuring society as a whole. It can now be argued that the main obstacle to the eradication of poverty is not the behaviour of the poor but the self interest of the rich. Thus Herbert J. Gans maintains that, 'the prime obstacles to the elimination of poverty lie in an economic system which is dedicated to the maintenance and increase of wealth among the already affluent'.

From the perspective of stratification theory, the solution to poverty involves a change in the stratification system. This war on poverty would be far harder to wage than the previous one since it would require considerable sacrifice by the rich and powerful.

The war on poverty has its basis in traditional American liberalism. It is American because of its insistence on individual initiative, its emphasis on opportunity and its distaste for direct provision of cash payments to the poor. It is liberal because the reforms it attempted did not seek to alter the basic structure of society. American capitalism was taken for granted and any change in the situation of the poor must take place within its framework.

Unlike USA, the UK government has not done anything as dramatic as declaring a war on poverty. It has simply added to the provision of the Welfare State which has gradually developed throughout this century. Benefit provided by the state has taken the form of financial aid to the poor and services given by welfare professionals such as social workers. The British government has been less averse than its American counterpart to providing cash payments to the poor. Whatever the differences in policy and style between Britain and America, the results are similar: the poor stay poor.

Westergaard and Resler argue that many politicians make the fundamental error of assuming that 'the causes of poverty can be read off from the characteristics of the poor'. This has led to the conclusion that poverty is largely the result of old age, family break-up, larger families, unemployment, physical or

mental handicap or chronic sickness. In this way, 'individual conditions' are regarded as the 'causes' of poverty. It therefore follows that remedies must be directed towards the individual and particular conditions are given particular aid and treatment. For example the unemployed receive financial aid and 'problem families' receive the services of social workers and psychiatrists. This diagnosis of the problem forms the basis of government policy. Westergaard and Resler argue that the diagnosis 'is false precisely because it closes one eye firmly to the total pattern of inequality, only the bottom end of which is visible under the poverty line'. Poverty is not an individual condition, it is a class phenomenon. The poor are working class, not middle class. The mechanisms which generate inequality throughout society are the same mechanisms which generate poverty.

As noted earlier, the Welfare State has largely failed to redistribute wealth from rich to poor. It simply shuffles resources within social classes rather than between them. Kincaid argues that the only solution to poverty involves a 'massive redistribution of resources away from wealthier classes'. This view sees poverty as a social problem rather than as an individual condition. It argues that the problem is society as a whole and therefore society must be changed. Westergaard and Resler adopt a similar position. They argue that government measures to deal with poverty cannot succeed because 'they are not designed to produce wholesale change in the general structure of inequality'.

From a Marxian perspective, the official identification and treatment of poverty can be seen as a means to disguise the true nature of exploitation and oppression. Westergaard and Resler argue that the state, by focusing on one aspect of inequality – the situation of the poor – tends to 'obscure reality' by diverting attention from the larger structure of inequality. The definition of poverty as an individual condition rather than a class phenomenon has the same effect. In this way the privileged position of the wealthy, which rests ultimately on working-class poverty, is protected. In addition, the creation and development of the Welfare State has contained working-class demands for an improvement in their position. Governments have conceded just enough to take the edge off working-class militancy. The role of welfare professionals can also be seen as a means to control the working class and protect the privileged. Kincaid argues that many social workers still attribute poverty to a 'defective personality structure, inability to relate to others, and impaired capacity to make realistic judgments of self and others'. This places the blame for poverty squarely on the shoulders of the poor. Some Marxists go even further by seeing welfare professionals as agents of the ruling class who tend to reinforce the myth that poverty is due to personal inadequacy rather than the nature of society.

From a Marxian perspective, the solution to poverty does not involve reforms in the social security system, in the provision of additional payments or services to those defined as poor. Instead it requires a radical change in the structure of society. Thus, Ralph Miliband argues that poverty will only be eradicated with the removal of inequality in general which 'requires the transformation of the economic structures in which it is embedded'. Westergaard and Resler take a similar view maintaining that no substantial redistribution of wealth can occur until capitalism is replaced by a socialist society in which the forces of production are communally owned. As long as free market system of capitalism determines the allocation of reward, they argue that inequality will remain largely unchanged. Kincaid concludes that since capitalism is based on the maximization of profit rather than the satisfaction of human need, 'Poverty cannot be abolished within capitalist society, but only in a socialist society under workers' control, in which human needs, and not profits, determine the allocation of resources'.

Clearly Marxian views are ideologically based. Sociologists who adopt them are committed to the principles of socialism and equality. They regard capitalism as an exploitative system and condemn the inequality it generates. In their favour, it can be argued that Marxian views may stem less from self-interest than other perspectives on poverty which seek only to modify rather than significantly change the profile of privilege.

Sociology is Simple  
Sociology is Scoring  
provided that you  
Study Sociology Systematically

## Social Exclusion, Poverty, Deprivation and Inequality

\* Social exclusion, according to Amartya Sen, refers to the process through which individuals or groups are, wholly or partially, excluded from full participation in the society in which they live.

\* Poverty is a situation in which income plays a major role. Inadequate income prevents the affected from leading standard acceptable life. It exists when someone's actual income is below a poverty line.

\* Deprivation, in literal sense, implies 'taking away of something' or 'the state of being dispossessed'. The term is loosely used for the condition of not having something whether or not it was previously possessed, with the implication that the person in question could reasonably expect to have it. Of what precisely the individual is deprived varies, but basic welfare needs for food, housing, education, and emotional care receive much of the attention.

Like the narrower notion of poverty, deprivation can be viewed in absolute or relative terms. **Absolute deprivation** refers to the loss or absence of the means to satisfy the basic needs for survival – food, clothing, and shelter. The term **relative deprivation** refers to deprivations experienced when individuals compare themselves with others: that is, individuals who lack something compare themselves with those who have it, and in so doing feel a sense of deprivation.

Consequently, relative deprivation not only involves comparison, it is also usually defined in subjective terms. The concept is intimately linked with that of a comparative reference group – the group with whom the individual or set of individuals compare themselves – the selection of reference group being crucial to the degree of relative deprivation.

The concept of relative deprivation was introduced by Samuel Stouffer and his co-workers in their classic social psychological study *The American Soldier* (1949); it was also used by Robert K. Merton in his standard text *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949), and was widely used by sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s. Not surprisingly it was invoked in discussions of poverty and in the arguments about the need for relative definitions of poverty.

\* Inequality: Social inequality refers to the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social positions or statuses within a group or society. Currently, the existence of inequality, its causes and consequences,

particularly as they relate to social class, caste, gender, and ethnicity, continues to occupy the sociological foreground.

Dear Candidate, the concept of social exclusion is often used in the studies relating to electoral participation, access to societal resources and opportunities, unemployment, poverty, education, health care, etc. It is further widening today. Whether social exclusion is a cause of poverty or poverty causes social exclusion – is a vexed issue. But, that both these concepts are deeply interrelated is a fact.

While poverty is a distributional outcome, social exclusion is a relational process of declining participation, solidarity and access. For some scholars, exclusion is a broader term encompassing poverty; for others it is a cause or a consequence of poverty. Here the paradox is that people who are socially excluded need not to be poor, but all the poor are socially excluded. For example, caste in India and race in the United States are some of such instances which are not accurate grounds for poverty but produce social exclusion. Indeed it shows that poverty is one aspect that the broader concept of social exclusion covers.

No one likes to be excluded from his environs and social situations. Social exclusion is thus an involuntary condition, imposed by the state or society, and particularly by the privileged few. Social exclusion causes conflict and dissension, and certainly it disturbs social harmony and cohesion. The fact is that social exclusion amounts to disadvantage and deprivation. In the Indian context, social exclusion is reflected in lack of distributive justice, caste-based distances and discrimination, unequal access to opportunities, and weak policies of the state. In other words, society and state create ground for social inequalities in terms of caste hierarchy and poor welfare policies, respectively.

The poor are excluded everywhere from access to life chances and dignity. They are dehumanized in all walks of life. Thus, the concept of social exclusion overlaps with poverty and marginalization, and it also embraces the relational as well as distributive aspects of poverty. One can make out the condition of social exclusion based on the indicators such as multidimensional nature of poverty, psycho-social elements of disadvantage, importance of agency and participation, violence and personal insecurity, vulnerability and self-esteem, etc.

The state is responsible for exclusion of the people from participation in its economic, political and social activities. Veiled rationalizations of persistence of inequality could be seen in the Constitution of India and also in the institutional structures and practices. The poor remain excluded from the mainstream activities, and today due to social and political awakening, they have attained a sense of

realization about their low standing in the society. No one gets self-excluded except those who are truly saints and renounced the world (remember Weber? – other worldly asceticism). Such people are a rare entity. History shows that there have been movements and protests against the exploiters and the privileged. Our view is that poor remain socially excluded, and only exceptionally rich are socially excluded. Those who are socially excluded are not because of their volition, but are because of the hegemony and supremacy of the dominant section of society.

Thus, social exclusion is an evocative, ambiguous, multidimensional and expansive concept. It explains who are denigrated, alienated, isolated, “outsiders” in a given society. Since society is not a static entity, not only the concept of social exclusion needs to be amended corresponding to structural and cultural changes, the nature of social exclusion and inclusion also undergoes a change.

Nutrition, elementary education, basic health care, access to housing, water supply, sanitation and social security are the main issues of social exclusion in India today. Let us admit that exclusion-inclusion is an age-old reality in Indian society. Hierarchy of castes is rooted in the principle of distance and inclusion-exclusion. The principle of pure-impure is nothing but that of excluding the people by declaring them as “impure”, and including others by calling them as “pure”. The socially excluded groups, namely, lower castes, have been addressed as exterior castes, dalits, untouchables, etc. The dynamics of the concept and process of social exclusion are evident in the changing matrix of India’s lower castes.

Tribal people and indigenous communities have been alienated from land and forest resources. Several movements and agitations launched against the exploiters testify the exclusion and struggle of the excluded for their insertion and inclusion. Women are alienated and excluded in their homes. Recent attempts for “feminification” are against women’s exploitation and subjugation. Patriarchy has been a cruel tool in the hands of male-dominated society. Poor are deprived of proper nutrition, education, healthcare, employment, participation in decision-making, and other related activities. Who is responsible for this malady? We may have to see carefully the dynamics of the state since independence. Why the rich remain rich and become richer, while the poor remain poor and become poorer?

## **Poverty and Inequality**

Poverty and inequality go together and coexist, though in different measures, in different societies. Poverty is generally caused by the same set of factors which account for persistence of inequality. However, social impediments in achieving equality or in alleviation of poverty may vary from society to society. Caste,

ethnicity and race may be found as pronounced hurdles in some given societies, whereas lack of economic opportunities and resources and persisting economic and political inequalities may be found as stumbling blocks in other societies. The fact is that the poor are denied access to opportunities for their betterment or because the people are poor, they remain incapable to compete with those who are not poor and are capable to have successful access to opportunities and resources.

The Constitution of India, in the Directive Principles of State Policy states:

Article 38 (1): “The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic, and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life.”

Article 38 (2): “The State shall, in particular, strive to minimize the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities, and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.”

Article 39: “The State shall, in particular, direct its policy toward securing –

- (a) that the citizens, men and women equally have right to an adequate means of livelihood,
- (b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good,
- (c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment, and
- (d) that there is equal pay for work for both men and women.

Dear Candidate, according to the Marxist view, the major cause of poverty is inequality or uneven distribution of wealth and income – a main consequence of capitalism. Weber also recognized the inequality of capitalist society, though he did not attribute it essentially to capitalism. Rather, he thought that large, rational organizations or bureaucracies, including the capitalist corporations, are responsible. These are necessarily hierarchical and unequal. Weber anticipated that socialist societies would also be marked by inequality since these societies too would develop large-scale bureaucracies for organizing the activities.

There is a considerable controversy about poverty and its relationship within inequality. From one point of view, any society with inequality is bound to have poverty. In other words, poverty is more likely to occur in a society which accepts inequality. Sociologists who adopt a relative definition of poverty accept that for the eradication of poverty, it is necessary to first abolish all inequality in income.

From another point of view, there are scholars who do not find any relationship between poverty and inequality. A wealthy businessman and a well-paid government official (IAS) or a teacher are materially unequal but the teacher or official are not poor. Thus, poverty and inequality are not the same. **Social inequality means that certain individuals or groups have more material or cultural resources than others, whereas poverty implies some insufficiency in the material or cultural resources of an individual or group.**

Please note that **poverty is an absolute concept, while inequality is a relative one.** It is possible for poverty or head count ratios to decline (so that everyone is better off), while inequality simultaneously increases, because income growth for richer segments is relatively more. But if inequality increases, it causes resentment because of the perception that deprived class, castes, women, ethnic or religious groups and backward geographical regions are not gaining enough from the trickle-down benefits of growth.

National Sample Survey Organization's (NSSO: 2005) data shows that while poverty figures are down, in absolute terms poverty is still rampant. One of every four Indians lives below the line of poverty at less than a dollar (about Rs 50) a day. The income levels of the poor may be rising but they do not come even closer to the rate at which the rich are getting richer. According to a survey conducted by *India Today* (2007), the top 20 percent of salary earners in India earn 50 percent of the country's total salary income while the bottom 20 percent earn less than 5 percent. This gap shows that how inequality is increasing in spite of the poverty figures are down.

As regards the expenditure, the bottom 20 per cent in rural India in 1993-94, enjoyed 9.61 per cent of the total expenditure and in 2004-05 this declined further to 9.40 per cent. Conversely, the share of the top 20 per cent of rural India in total expenditure was 38.59 per cent in 1993-94 which increased to 40.23 per cent in 2004-05. In rural India, the expenditure of the relatively rich increased more than that of the relatively poor. The detailed figures show that shares declined for all except the top 20 per cent. That is the reason inequality has increased. The urban Indian picture is no different (Debroy and Bhandari, 2007).

## **Poverty and Progress**

It is alleged that poverty is associated with progress. With material progress, poverty grows more serious. As we move from rich to richer regions in the so-called developed nations, the poverty goes worse. Although discovery has followed discovery and invention has followed invention, neither has lessened the numbers of poor, nor the toil of the masses who most need respite. Following this line of argument, Henry George (1839-1897), a great champion of socialism, associated poverty with land situation. He said as ‘land increases in value, poverty increases’. Land is more valuable in Mumbai than in Jaipur or Ajmer and there is more squalor and misery in Mumbai than in Jaipur or Ajmer. When increasing people live in limited area under a system of private property in land, rents are raised and land values go up. The cost of living mounts, wages are kept to a minimum, overcongestion of population and development of slums ensues, and again rents and land values are increased. To some extent the above assertions of George seems to be true. The poverty that we see today in urban areas is mostly the result of industrialization and its concomitant process of urbanization – development of centres of trade, commerce and education.

## **Causes of Poverty**

There are many causes of poverty. Different scholars have placed emphasis on different causes. For an easy understanding, all these causes may be grouped into two main divisions:

- i. individual causes (causes pertaining to the individual himself), and
- ii. societal causes or social structural view of poverty

## **Individual Causes**

This ideology ascribes poverty to be the result of an individual’s working abilities or lack of motivation. This view finds the causes of poverty within the individual and contends that it is the fault of the individual poor because he is lazy, dull, and inefficient or lacks initiative. Liberal reformists believe that poverty is frequently the result of the situation an individual experiences. According to this ideology, success and failure in life depends upon individual’s inherent qualities and as such poverty is a personal matter. The 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century writers on poverty and other social problems commonly attributed their causes to individual pathology – weakness of either a physical, mental or moral kind. Belief in self-help

and the idea of ‘survival of the fittest’ (Spencer) supported this view on general ground that the deserving should succeed and the weak and worthless fail. So, if anybody fails in his life or caught in the grip of poverty, nobody is to be blamed but he himself – his laziness, dullness, bad habits (such as alcoholism, gambling) and other vices are responsible for his poverty. The 19<sup>th</sup> century thinker, Max Weber had also attributed the development of capitalism to hard work, honesty, punctuality, discipline, etc. – the core of ethics of Protestantism. Individualistic explanations of social problems (including poverty) flourished again in the 1970s and 1980s in western world, including United States of America. After the adoption of the policy of liberalization in 1990s, India also vigorously campaigned for the philosophies of individual enterprise and reward and cut back on many welfare programmes.

### **Societal Causes**

Protagonists of this view link poverty to social structure – social institutions, belief system, economy, large family structures (joint family), education, and social practices, such as child marriages, dowry system, ritualism, etc. This view emphasizes that the cause of poverty does not lie in the individual but in the social structure itself. Structural approaches look for the social causes which produces fundamental social problems including poverty.

### **Causes of Poverty in India**

The causes of poverty in India are mainly high population growth, slow job growth, slow economic growth, chronic unemployment, natural calamities, unequal distribution of wealth and rampant corruption.

The ever-increasing population is the main cause of many ills of Indian society. Religious attitude, child marriages, preference for male child, joint family system, illiteracy and to some extent the agricultural economy are the main causes of population increase. The growth of population has a direct effect on the standards of living of the people.

There is a relationship between poverty and age structure of the society. The older we are, the more difficult it is to obtain employment. Older people, particularly those over 60 years of age, are often without adequate savings and have to depend on their children for economic support.

Poverty is also related with the size of family. Many large families (having more children) than small ones are poor. This is even truer if the head of the family

is a female. The larger the family, the lower the per capita income and the standard of living. Everywhere we see poverty and large families going hand in hand.

The educational level of the people also contributes to poverty. Functionally illiterates who have meagre education and lack job skills do not find employment and thus they are forced to remain poor. It is sometimes said that poor are poor because they are uneducated. Poverty is also one of the main determinants of health. The greatest impediment to better health is the lack of adequate income. If people can get employment and good incomes, they would secure better health for themselves.

In India, besides general demographic factors (age structure, family size, educational level etc.), the factors of casteism, communalism, fatalism, regionalism, discrimination, prejudices also affect poverty indirectly by impeding the employment opportunities. People still stick to their traditional occupations, even if it is not gainful and do not want to leave their place of origin. The feeling of casteism and communalism also sometimes put hindrance in providing jobs to the members of other castes and religion. Recently, the sentiments of regionalism have driven people from Assam, and other North-East provinces and Maharashtra due to upsurge of regional agitations. Not only these factors, Indian people are prone to spend large amount of money on (unproductive) social ceremonies like marriage (dowry, pomp and show), death feast, religious rituals, etc., even at the cost of incurring heavy debt, which ultimately leads them towards the evil of poverty.

It is argued that belief in the Hindu concept of rebirth and other worldliness is an important contributing factor of poverty in India. According to this philosophy, suffering of all kind including poverty flows from deeds of the past life and is the God's justice. It is only means of salvation. A Hindu attaches more importance to the other-world than this-world. Such beliefs tend to foster a fatalistic attitude among men towards life, and kills entrepreneurship.

*Dear Candidate, for the comprehensive coverage of the topic, please also refer to the various poverty alleviating programmes launched by the government from time to time.*

## **Why are the Poor Still Poor?**

In spite of the government welfare measures and so many schemes and programmes of poverty alleviation (about one lakh crore of rupees yearly are being spent on different programmes), in conjunction with government policies for uplifting the conditions of poverty-stricken people (people below 'poverty line') set by the government, why are the poor still poor? Why the picture of rural India has not much changed even after 69 years of our independence? Based on CIA World Factbook, about 30 per cent (2010) poor people of the world live in India. Many answers have been given to this question.

Besides the theoretical explanations discussed earlier, the practical reasons that are keeping the poor still poor in spite of so many programmes of alleviating poverty are the followings:

- (a) Rampant corruption at every stage and in every scheme of development has affected the poor in many ways. Corruption and inefficiency mean that little of the allotted money reaches the poor. Our late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi once remarked that out of every one rupee, it is only 15 paise that reaches to the needy poor.
- (b) Utter indifference and apathy of the officials towards poor people.
- (c) Partiality in all schemes of development, such as in selecting BPL families, allotting water and electric connections.
- (d) Lack of initiative in the leaders as well as at every level of administration.
- (e) Most of the programmes are based on ideologies rather than the ground realities and requirements of the poor people.
- (f) Uncertainty of developmental schemes because of the uncertainty of the government. With the change of the government, priorities also undergo changes.
- (g) Lack of co-ordination between different developmental schemes related to poverty alleviation.
- (h) Growing population which makes all our efforts of removing poverty futile.

In the end, it may be stated that planning by itself is not enough. What matters most is sincere and honest efforts along with commitment on the part of the implementing agencies and authorities in making the anti-poverty drive a success. Last but not the least, unless India's population growth is checked, rather frozen, no scheme of development can make headway in the achievement of its objectives and for this, it is necessary to build a political consensus on population control and put a stern check on the immigration of people from the neighbouring countries. After every five years, the old government goes and the new one comes with some new schemes (sometimes just change in the name of the scheme) and slogans like '*Garibi Hatao*', but nothing changes substantially except some figures relating to the number of poor and rich people or GDP, etc.

### **Feminization of Poverty**

The gap between women and men in the cycle of poverty is a phenomenon commonly referred to as 'the feminization of poverty'. This term is used by social scientists to refer to the increasing proportion of the female poor in a country. Women are increasingly dominating the ranks of impoverished. Worldwide, women on an average are only slightly over 50 per cent of male earnings. Women experience unequal treatment almost in all fields. They are often denied inheritance rights. Though women are not segregated from men, they are the victims of prejudice and discrimination in the labour force, in family matters, in the legal system (inheritance laws), and in other areas. Their labour goes unrewarded and unrecognized (domestic labour is unpaid and their paid work is poorly rewarded). They are the first to be dismissed from paid work in any economic crisis. They are the first to die of hunger or poverty. In India, they are the last to eat (as per custom) and that too if something remains after eating by the males of the family. Their health care and nutritional needs are not given priority. They lack sufficient access to education (in India, they had been denied education until some decades ago) and support services. Their participation in decision-making at home and in the community is minimal. They have the lowest degree of personal autonomy. They are not allowed to have any rights regarding property. They are obliged to be isolated or veiled for religious reasons or to expose their bodies for commercial profit.

The life chances of women belonging especially to low income groups are very pitiable. They have to earn their livelihood, tender their children along with doing all domestic work. In many such families the menfolk do not work at all and depend on the earnings of female members. Moreover, the menfolk often beat and harass their wives for satisfying their sexual and material needs. The burden of

supporting a family is very difficult for women who have not adequate source of income. Children whose mothers live in poverty run an increased risk of birth defects and malnutrition. They are deprived of education and even if they somehow get admitted in schools, they fare poorly in elementary (government) schools and drop out of secondary schools or even earlier than children from other types of families. Low income women suffer higher level of stress than other women and are less likely to receive adequate medical care. Like western countries, households headed by divorced or never-married women are not much common in India but by widowed women in low income groups are much in numbers. Though the exact figure of female-headed households is not available, but it is estimated about half of Indian women in poverty are in 'transition' coping with an economic crisis caused by the departure, disability, or death of a husband. The other half tends to be economically dependent either on the relatives (members of the joint family or her own parents or other nearest kith and kin), leaving nearby, or on the welfare system of the state (schemes like BPL, old age pension, etc.).

It must be emphasized that poor women share many social characteristics with poor men—low educational attainment, lack of skilled or unskilled jobs, and residence in economically deteriorating areas, named as slums. They experience more sexual harassment, victimization and abuse at the workplace. Such women are at a clear disadvantage in the labour market too in terms of both horizontal and vertical social mobility.

### **Globalization and Poverty**

Globalization has evoked very different reactions in different fields across the world. It has yielded mixed results in India and other nations. It has affected almost all aspects of one's life – social, economic, political, educational, familial, religious, communal and health care, and even day-to-day life. So far as the poverty is concerned, globalization is generally seen in negative terms – a great source of increasing inequality in the society. From the international magazine *Fortune*, we learn how many Indians have been included in the list of very wealthy (super rich) persons. The small minority owns most of the wealth in India. While there is a multitude of poor, there are very few people who are rich. This exposes the process of concentration of wealth in the hands of tiny minority and resulting into the increasing inequality in India. After liberalization, along with globalization, the disparities between the poor and the rich are more and more increasing. According to one estimate, every fifth young Indian is without job (unemployed) and every fourth farmer is a destitute. Not only this, a new

phenomenon of suicide by farmers, which was never heard before, has taken roots in Indian soil.

But there is also a bright side of globalization. It has for the first time in history made poverty an advantage (Swaminathan, *The Times of India*). It obliges companies to search the globe for the ways to cut costs. The lower the wages in any country, the more competitive production there is, other things being equal. Once it does so, poverty becomes advantage and global jobs and production shift to it. China and India and many other Asian countries have long provided it. China is leading in manufacturing while India in services. What we are witnessing a boom, especially in IT (BPO) sector, in India is the result of this globalization. More and more jobs are being created to meet the demands of America and other western countries.

### **Some vital facts about poverty in India**

Poverty is the greatest socio-economic problem of India, yet there is a great contradiction about its estimate between the national and international agencies. This problem becomes all the more complicated and confusing when every day a new definition of poverty is proposed. To identify who is poor, sometimes the criterion of expenditure and at other time the income of a person is adopted.

- According to NSSO, the people living below poverty line (BPL) is:

|         |                                                                  |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1977-78 | 51.3 per cent                                                    |
| 1993-94 | 36.0 per cent                                                    |
| 2004-05 | 27.5 per cent (28.3% in rural areas and<br>25.7% in urban areas) |
| 2010    | 37.2 per cent (UNDP)                                             |
- According to the latest Planning Commission data a person is considered living under BPL who earns less than Rs 28.65 per day in urban areas and Rs 22.42 in rural areas. It is estimated that the urban poor are some 80 million in comparison to the rural poor, who are some 120 million.
- According to an Economic Survey of Government of India (2007), about 86.2 crore of people spend less than Rs 20 per day. In rural areas, their population is 71.9 per cent and 32.3 per cent in urban areas. In rural areas, a person spends Rs 356.30 per month and in urban areas this is Rs 538.60 per

month. In this expenditure food, fuel, light, rent, tax, clothes, education, medical care and all items of permanent utility are included. About 72 per cent of population still lives in villages.

- According to UNDP Report (2010), 37.2 per cent people in India still live below poverty line.
- In the last one decade more than one lakh farmers have committed suicide.
- An average expenditure per man is Rs 625 per month in rural areas while in urban areas, it is just double, i.e., Rs 1,171 per month. Kerala leads in expenditure per man. In villages 19 per cent of the villagers still live in huts, however 50 per cent of the people now live in their own *pucca* house.
- According to International Food Policy Research Institute's World Poverty (Hunger) Index, 2007 in a list of 118 countries, India ranks at 94th, Pakistan at 88th and China 47th.
- In Human Development Index Report (2011), India ranks at 134th position among 187 countries.
- On the basis of GDP, India ranks at 9th position in a list of rich countries of the world according to United Nations (2010) data.
- The number of millionaires in India is more than China.
- According to *Forbes* magazine, 2010, number of billionaires is 57 in India.
- India has per capita income of Rs 54,835 per annum in 2010-11.

According to a pilot survey of BPL people, conducted by Planning Commission (2011), based on the representative sample of 166 villages across 22 states, SCs and STs constitute half of the total "poor, deprived households". The parameters used to identify the poor were ranging from huts, *kaccha* housing to illiteracy to homelessness, destitution and landlessness. Eminent sociologist Prof. Vivek Kumar commented that the findings proved that caste and class identities in the country overlapped. He said, "economic deprivation depends on social identity" (SCs and STs form about 22 per cent of the total population and which is half of the rural people). The above results concurred Y.B. Damle's conclusions who said that social identity has an impact on the economic performance of people.

There is no reason to believe that the things will change radically in near future. Economic growth by itself largely benefits the middle classes, and arouses resentment among the rest. We need to rethink and find ways of creating an egalitarian society. Social equality generates mutual respect, trust and shared identity which moderates conflicts.

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## Race and Ethnicity

Race refers to a classification of the human species in terms of observable physical differences resulting from inherited biological characteristics. Such physical characteristics may include a particular skin colour, eye or nasal shape, hair texture, etc. The popular classification of human races recognizes three groups: Caucasoid, Mongloid and Negroid. These three are also referred to as “White”, “Yellow” and “Black” races, respectively. However, there are at least two problems with this classification of races. First, some groups fit into none of these categories. For example, natives of India and Pakistan have caucasoid facial features but dark skin. Another problem with the biological classification of races is that there are no pure races. People in these groups have been interbreeding for centuries. (Miscegenation - process of intermixing of races)

Further, with the scientific development of genetics and the human genome as fields of study, most scholars now recognize that the differences in physical characteristics found among racial groups are probably the evolutionary result of environmental adaptation. For example, the dark skin of Negroid people protects them from the burning rays of the sun; the relative lack of body hair aids the cooling action of evaporation when they perspire. Similarly Eskimos, a Mongoloid people, have compact frames and tendency towards heaviness, which helps insulate them from their cold climate.

Although it is true that people can be differentiated by their inherited physical characteristics, racial identities are often more due to cultural factors than biological characteristics. According to **Alex Thio**, “race is not a biological or genetic fact, but a socially constructed myth”. Race is socially defined on the basis of biologically determined characteristics. There is no statistically significant difference in the genetic makeup between racial groups, thus it is often said that race is socially constructed. There is in fact more genetic variation within a particular racial group than between racial groups. Nonetheless, the perception of racial differences is a powerful social force.

Since there are no clear-cut biological distinctions between racial groups - in physical characteristics or genetic makeup - sociologists define race as a social rather than a biological phenomenon. Defined sociologically, a race is a group of people who are perceived by a given society to be biologically different from others. People are assigned to one race or another not necessarily on the basis of logic or fact but by public opinion, which in turn, is molded by society’s dominant group.

More than “race”, it is “racism” that is practiced through a false attribution of inherited characteristics of personality. Racism is an ideology which correlates the racial or physical characteristics of people with negative valuated social and psychological traits, and therefore gives rise to the idea of racial superiority. In other words, racism is an ideological orientation and a form of ethnocentrism in which it is maintained that one’s own group is a distinct race that is inherently superior to other races.

In light of the disagreement among scholars with regard to the definition, identification and classification of pure races, the term ‘ethnic group’ is being more commonly used in contemporary sociological literature. The term ‘ethnic group’ refers to a collectivity or group of people who share common racio-cultural traits. Whereas race is based on popularly perceived physical traits, ethnicity is based on cultural characteristics. Sociologists use the term ethnic group to refer to any kind of group, racial or otherwise, which is socially identified as different and has developed its own subculture. In other words, an ethnic group is one recognized by society and by itself as a distinct group. An ethnic group, then, is a collection of people who share a distinctive cultural heritage. Member of an ethnic group may share a language, religion, history, or national origin. They always share a feeling that they are a distinct people.

According to **Anthony Giddens**, an ethnic minority is the one:

1. sense of belonging together (group solidarity)
2. usually to some degree, it is physically and socially isolated from the large community (endogamy)
3. its members are disadvantaged, as a result of discrimination.

Sociologically, an ethnic minority is characterized by its experiences of prejudice and discrimination at the hands of the dominant group in modern plural societies. Prejudice comes from two Latin words, *prae* (before) and *judicium* (a judgement). It implies a judgement expressed before knowing all the facts. Prejudice is a negative attitude toward a certain category of people. Whereas prejudice is an attitude, discrimination is an act. More specifically, discrimination is an unfavourable action that is taken against certain individuals because they are members of a certain category. Sometime, even state may actively promote such discriminatory policies and programmes. Such prejudiced and discriminatory attitude toward ethnic minorities has serious implications on their access to opportunities and share in social resources.

In most cases, however, ethnic differences overlap with socio-economic and political discrimination thus giving rise to ethnicity-based inequality. For example, Muslims in India – low on educational parameters, government employment, political representation, etc. – Sachar committee report. However, in some cases, minorities are prosperous – Jews, Jains, Parsis, Sikhs, etc. – ahead in socio-economic indicators such as per capita income, gender equality, sex ratio, education, etc. This leads to inequality in society based on ethnicity, which in turn, gives rise to ethnic conflict.

Please note that an ethnic minority is not necessarily a small percentage of the population. Blacks are considered a minority in South Africa, even though they make up about 70% of the population, because they are the subordinate group. Similarly, the dominant group need not make a large part of the population. People of English descent in the USA today constitute only about 13% of the population. But because of their continuing social and cultural influence, they are still considered the dominate group.

**Prejudice and discrimination against minorities may take many forms:**

- **Segregation** – defined as the involuntary separation of residential areas, services or other facilities on the basis of the ethnic or racial characteristics of the people using them. For example, Jim Crow Laws in USA (1876- 1965), separate hamlets for untouchables in the traditional caste society in India.
- **Expulsion** – forcing people out of an area. For example, in 1970s, expulsion of non- Africans from Uganda by its President Idi Amin.
- **Partition** – Hindus and Muslims (India and Pakistan, 1947)
- **Annihilation** – the ultimate form of discrimination (Genocide). Genocide implies the deliberate and systematic extermination of an entire ethnic or racial group. For example, Hitler – extermination of Jews in Germany – “Holocaust”.

**Contemporary relevance:** India – Hindus vs Muslims – communal riots  
Bangladeshi migrants (Muslims) in  
Assam Tamils in Sri Lanka

**Remedial measures:**

- **Policy of Affirmative Action (USA)** – The Civil Rights Acts of 1960, 1964 and 1968 outlawed discrimination. Government action against discrimination was followed by a policy of affirmative action, which required not only that there be no active discrimination but that positive preference be given to groups who are victims of past discrimination. It also requires employers and educational institutions to make special efforts to recruit qualified minorities for jobs, promotion and educational opportunities.
- **Welfare and social legislations** (cite examples)

**Interlinking concepts:** Relative Deprivation, Social Exclusion

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## UPSC: Previous Years' Questions

### Paper I. Topic 5. Stratification and Mobility

### Paper II. C. (vii). (b) Poverty, Deprivation and Inequalities

Q. What do you understand by gender-based domestic division of labour? Is it undergoing a change in the wake of increasing participation of women in formal employment? Clarify your answer with illustrations. (2025/20)

Q. Compare capability deprivation approach with that of social capital deprivation in understanding chronic poverty. (2025/20)

Q. What are the Indian government's schemes launched for poverty alleviation after the United Nations's Declaration of 'Sustainable Development Goals – 2015'? Briefly describe. (2025/10)

Q. Do you think that the formal workspaces are free of gender bias? Argue your case. (2025/10)

Q. Does the structural-functionalist perspective on social stratification promote a status quo? Give reasons for your answer. (2025/10)

Q. Is the social stratification theory gender-blind? Elucidate. (2025/10)

Q. Analyse the changing nature of caste as a status group. (2024/10)

Q. Discuss the dimensions of power in the construction and maintenance of social hierarchies in a society. (2024/10)

Q. What is social mobility? Critically examine the classification of 'closed' and 'open' models of social stratification. (2024/10)

Q. How is poverty a form of social exclusion? Illustrate in this connection the different dimensions of poverty and social exclusion. (2023/20)

Q. Do you think that the boundary line between ethnicity and race is blurred? Justify your answer. (2023/10)

Q. Social stratification is claimed to contribute to the maintenance of social order and stability in society. Critically assess. (2022/20)

Q. Discuss social mobility on open and closed system. (2022/10)

Q. Explain the concept of social mobility. Describe with suitable illustrations how education and social mobility are related to each other. (2021/20)

Q. Critically assess social mobility in closed and open systems. (2020/10)

----- Dialectics IAS (Sociology) -----

Q. How are Hierarchy and Exclusion the major impediments in the transformation of societies? Discuss. (2020/20)

Q. Compare and contrast the contributions of Marx and Weber on social stratification in capitalist society. (2019/20)

Q. Why is gender a dimension of social stratification? How does gender intersect other dimensions of inequality based on caste, class, race and ethnicity? (2019/20)

Q. Modernization presupposes class society; however, caste, ethnicity and race are still predominant. Explain. (2019/20)

Q. Present a sociological review on the 'new middle class'. (2019/10)

Q. Davis and Moore made it clear that social stratification is a functional necessity and also an unconscious device. Discuss. (2019/10)

Q. What is 'social security'? Examine recent security measures adopted by the Government in India. (2019/10)

Q. What is the difference between natural and social inequality examples from caste and class dimensions. (2018/10)

Q. Evaluate if social stratification is functional for society. (2018/10)

Q. Schooling does not ensure upward mobility of all members of this society. Discuss with reference in class societies. (2018/20)

Q. Is social mobility possible in closed systems of stratification? Illustrate from research work. (2018/10)

Q. What, according to you are the two fundamental axes of social discrimination in Indian society? Are they changing? (2017/20)

Q. What is Weberian critique of Marxist notion of social stratification? (2017/20)

Q. What, according to you, are the two fundamental axes of social discrimination in Indian society? Are they changing? (2017/20)

Q. Explain the issues relating to ethnicity and sub-ethnicity. (2017/10)

Q. Write a short note on 'changing means of production and increased rural poverty.' (2017/10)

Q. Can we equate 'poverty' with 'poor living'? Elaborate your answer. (2017/10)

Q. Examine gender, ethnicity and race as major dimensions of social stratification. (2017/20)

Q. "Vertical mobility brings structural change even in a closed system." Comment. (2016/10)

----- **Dialectics IAS (Sociology)** -----

- Q. Elucidate the basic premises of Davis' structural- functional theory of social stratification. How far is it relevant in understanding contemporary Indian society? (2016/20)
- Q. Discuss the relationship between poverty and social exclusion. (2016/10)
- Q. Discuss the emerging forms of 'inequalities' and 'acute poverty' as major challenges of social transformation in India. (2016/20)
- Q. "No society can either be absolutely open or absolutely closed." Comment. (2015/10)
- Q. Explain the inter-linkages between poverty, deprivation and inequality. (2013/15)
- Q. How do Karl Marx and Max Weber differ in terms of their analysis of social stratification? (2013/20)
- Q. Distinguish between people being socially excluded and people excluding themselves socially in societies? (2013/10)
- Q. How are open and closed systems of stratification undergoing transformation in the emergence of new hierarchical social order in societies? (2013/20)
- Q. Write short note on the following from a sociological perspective: Stratification of Classes (2012/12)
- Q. In our society hierarchical relations are influenced by social mobility. Explain how? (2012/20)
- Q. What is class? Do you think that Weber's contributions to social stratification are different from that of Marx? (2011/30)
- Q. What do you mean by social mobility? Discuss the major sources and causes of mobility? (2011/30)
- Q. Examine how open and closed systems of stratification are undergoing transformation in the emergence of new hierarchical social order in societies. (2010/30)
- Q. Distinguish between people being socially excluded and people excluding themselves socially in societies. (2010/15)
- Q. What are the reasons for calling Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore's theory of social stratification a functional theory? (2009/30)
- Q. Do you think that poverty, deprivation and inequalities are the major challenges in the process of social transformation? What are your suggestions to address and resolve these problems? (2009/60)
- Q. How does hierarchy get built into the systems of natural and social inequalities? (2008/60)
- Q. Write short note: Social mobility in open and closed systems (2008/10)
- Q. Write short note: Role-conflict and its resolution (2007/20)
- Q. Write short note: Caste-system as a principle of social stratification (2006/20)
- Q. Write short note: Vertical social mobility (2006/20)

----- **Dialectics IAS (Sociology)** -----

- Q. How is vertical and horizontal social mobility problematic in society? Suggest solutions. (2005/60)
- Q. 'Socialization and social control are complementary to each other in maintaining social order.' – Elucidate your answer with appropriate illustrations. (2004/60)
- Q. Write short note: Class within Caste and Caste within Class (2004/20)
- Q. Briefly discuss the conflict perspective on social stratification and examine the view that social inequality in India is the function of rigid social stratification system. (2004/60)
- Q. Examine the conceptual distinction between social inequality and social stratification. How do the nature and forms of the social stratification system determine the patterns of social mobility? (2003/60)
- Q. Explain Melvin Tumin's critique related to the theory of social stratification. (2002/60)
- Q. Write short note: Social mobility and social change (2002/20)
- Q. Write short note: Inter-generational mobility (2000/20)
- Q. Write short note: Role conflict (2000/20)
- Q. Discuss the nature and characteristics of social mobility. Can the nature and the rate of social mobility be treated as an index of economic development? (1999/60)
- Q. How would you distinguish between the stratified and the unstratified social position? What explanation would you prefer for the universal existence of the social stratification in human society? (1999/20)
- Q. Write short note: Role conflict as a source of deviation (1999/20)
- Q. Analyze critically the functional theory of social stratification (1998/60)
- Q. Write short note: Caste as a class (1998/20)
- Q. Write short note: Vertical and horizontal mobility (1998/20)
- Q. Write short note: Types of mobility (1997/20)
- Q. Write short note: Role-Conflict and its resolution (1996/20)
- Q. Describe the factors responsible for increasing economic inequalities in India and discuss their social consequences. (1996/60)
- Q. Write short note: Social class and social status (1995/20)
- Q. Write short note: Social class and vertical mobility (1993/20)

----- **Dialectics IAS (Sociology)** -----

Q. 'Social inequality is the device by which societies ensure that the most important positions, are filled by the most qualified persons.' Explain this view point and state the grounds on which it is refuted. (1992/60)

Q. Elaborate the concepts of 'status-consistency' and 'status-inconsistency'. State the factors responsible for status-inconsistency in modern societies. (1992/60)

Q. Write short note: Functional theory of stratification (1991/20)

Q. Write short note: Intergeneration mobility (1991/20)

Q. Write short note: Status inconsistency (1990/20)

Q. Write short note: Open and Closed Models of Mobility (1989/20)

Q. Write short note: Functional theory of stratification (1988/20)

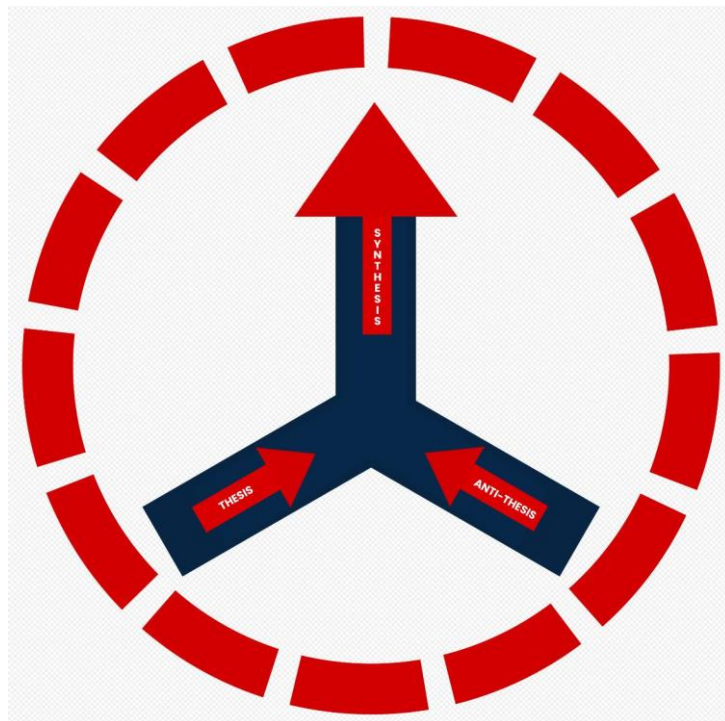
Q. Write short note: Intergenerational mobility in a caste society (1986/20)

Q. Write short note: Social Mobility (1985/20)

## Online Module I: 15 August 2026

### Test Series Batches (Online): June, October and January

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