

## Competitive Exams: Class System

The class system is universal phenomenon denoting a category or group of persons having a definite status in society which permanently determines their relation to other groups. The social classes are de facto groups (not legally or religiously defined and sanctioned) they are relatively open not closed.

Their basis is indisputably economic but they are more than economic groups. They are characteristic groups of the industrial societies which have developed since 17th century. The relative importance and definition of membership in a particular class differs greatly over time and between societies, particularly in societies that have a legal differentiation of groups of people by birth or occupation.

In the well-known example of socioeconomic class, many scholars view societies as stratifying into a hierarchical system based on occupation, economic status, wealth, or income. According to Ogburn and Nimkoff a social class is the aggregate of persons having essentially the same social status in a given society.

Marx defined class in terms of the extent to which an individual or social group has control over the means of production. In Marxist terms a class is a group of people defined by their relationship to the means of production. Classes are seen to have their origin in the division of the social product into a necessary product and a surplus product.

Marxists explain history in terms of a war of classes between those who control production and those who actually produce the goods or services in society (and also developments in technology and the like). In the Marxist view of capitalism this is a conflict between capitalists (bourgeoisie) and wage workers (proletariat).

Class antagonism is rooted in the situation that control over social production necessarily entails control over the class which produces goods-in capitalism this is the exploitation of workers by the bourgeoisie. Marx saw class categories as defined by continuing historical processes. Classes, in Marxism, are not static entities, but are regenerated daily through the productive process.

Marxism views classes as human social relationships which change over time, with historical commonality created through shared productive processes.

A 17th-century farm labourer who worked for day wages shares a similar relationship to production as an average office worker of the 21st century. In this example it is the shared structure of wage labour that makes both of these individuals working class.

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According to Weber a more complex division of labour made the class more heterogeneous. In contrast to simple income--property hierarchies, and to structural class schemes like Weber's or Marx's, there are theories of class based on other distinctions, such as culture or educational attainment.

At times, social class can be related to elitism and those in the higher class are usually known as the social elite.

For example, Bourdieu seems to have a notion of high and low classes comparable to that of Marxism, insofar as their conditions are defined by different habitus, which is in turn defined by different objectively classifiable conditions of existence.

In fact, one of the principal distinctions Bourdieu makes is a distinction between bourgeoisie taste and the working class taste. Social class is a segment of society with all the members of all ages and both the sexes who share the same general status. Maclver says whenever social intercourse is limited by the consideration of social status by distinctions between higher and lower there exists a social class.

## **Characteristics of Social Class**

A social class is essentially a status group. Class is related to status. Different statuses arise in a society as people do different things, engage in different activities and pursue different vocations. Status in the case of class system is achieved and not ascribed. Birth is not the criterion of status. Achievements of an individual mostly decide his status.

Class is almost universal phenomenon. It occurs in all the modern complex societies of the world. Each social class has its own status in the society. Status is associated with prestige. The relative position of the class in the social set up arises from the degree of prestige attached to the status. A social class is relatively a stable group.

A social class is distinguished from other classes by its customary modes of behaviour. This is often referred to as the life-styles of a particular class. It includes mode of dress, kind of living the means of recreation and cultural products one is able to enjoy, the relationship between parent and children. Life-styles reflect the specialty in preferences, tastes and values of a class.

Social classes are open-groups. They represent an open social system. An open class system is one in which vertical social mobility is possible. The basis of social classes is mostly economic but they are not mere economic groups or divisions. Subjective criteria such as class-consciousness, class solidarity and class identification on the one hand and the objective criteria such as wealth, property, income, education and occupation on the other hand are equally important in the class system.

Class system is associated with class consciousness. It is a sentiment that characterizes the relations of men towards the members of their own and other classes. It consists in the realization of a similarity of attitude and behavior with members of other classes.

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Sociologists have given three-fold classification of classes which consists of upper class, middle class and lower class. Sorokin has spoken of three major types of class stratification—they are economic, political and occupational classes. Lloyd Warner shows how class distinctions contribute to social stability.

Veblen analyzed the consumption pattern of the rich class by the concept of conspicuous consumption. Warner has classified classes into six types—upper-upper class, upper-middle class, upper-lower class, lower-upper class, the lower middle class and lower class. Anthony Giddens's three class model is the upper, middle and lower (working) class.

Maclver and Page defines social class as any portion of the community marked off from the rest by social status. Max Weber suggest that social classes are aggregates of individuals who have the same opportunities of acquiring goods, the same exhibited standard of living. He formulated a three component theory of stratification with social, status and party classes (or politics) as conceptually distinct elements.

- Social class is based on economic relationship to the market (owner, renter, employee, etc.)
- Status class has to do with non-economic qualities such as education, honour and prestige
- Party class refers to factors having to do with affiliations in the political domain

## **Jajmani System**

William H Wiser introduced the term Jajmani system in the vocabulary of Indian sociology through his book *The Hindu Jajmani system* where he described in detail how different caste group interact with each other in the production and exchange of goods and services. In different parts of India different terms are used to describe this economic interaction among the castes for example in Maharashtra the term Balutadar is used.

However in sociological literature jajmani system has come to be accepted as a general term to describe the economic interaction between the castes at the village level. This system is also a ritual system concerned with the aspects of purity and pollution as with economic aspects. It functions so that the highest caste remains pure while the lowest castes absorb pollution from them.

Villages are composed of number of jatis each having its occupational speciality. Jajmani system is essentially an agriculture based system of production and distribution of goods and services. Through jajmani relations these occupational jatis get linked with the land owning dominant caste. The jajmani system operates around the families belonging to the land owning dominant caste the numbers of which are called jajmans.

The land owning caste occupy a privileged position in the jajmani relations. The interaction between occupational castes and the land owning castes take place within the framework of non-reciprocal and asymmetrical type of relations. The land owning castes maintain a

paternalistic attitude of superiority towards their occupational castes that are called Kamins in North India. The term Kamin means one who works for somebody or serves him.

In terms of Karl Polanyi's classification of exchange system-Jajmani exchange can be termed as redistributive system of exchange. The Functionalist view of jajmani system regards it as the basis of self-sufficiency, unity, harmony and stability in the village community.

However the Marxist scholars hold a very different opinion. They regard the jajmani system as essentially exploitative, characterized by a latent conflict of interest which could not crystallize due to the prevalent social setup. Thus if in future the conditions of the lower caste improve an open conflict between the lower and upper caste is inevitable.

Oscar Lewis who studied Rampur village near Delhi and Biedelmn has been critical of the Jajmani system which they regard as exploitative. According to them the members of occupational jatis are largely landless labourers and have no resources to wage a struggle against the dominant caste out of the compulsion of the need for survival.

They succumb to all injustice perpetuated by the landowning dominant caste who enjoy both economic and political power. Scholars like Berreman, Harold Gould and Pauline Kolenda etc accept that there is an element of truth in both the functionalist and Marxist views of the jajmani system. They believe that consensus and harmony as well as conflict and exploitation are prevalent in the village society.

According to Dumont jajmani system makes use of hereditary personal relationships to express the division of labour. This system is a ritual expression rather than just an economic arrangement. S. C Dube refers to the system as corresponding to the presentation and counter presentation by which castes as a whole are bound together in a village which is more or less universal in nature. Leach believes that the system maintains and regulates the division of labour and economic interdependence of castes.

## **Definitions & Things to Remember**

- **Peculium:** An institution in the estate system where a sum of money or some property was given to a slave by his master.
- **Cartel:** A group of industrialists who together monopolize or gain complete control over the market.
- **Differential mobilization:** A process takes place when the changes that caste has and undergoing carries it beyond the traditional ascriptive definition.
- Dahrendorf held that the differential distribution of authority leads to class formation and class conflict.
- Hiller observed that when a class system becomes closed to vertical mobility, it becomes a caste.
- Marx was the first one to introduce the concept of alienation into sociological theory.

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- Srinivas termed independence among castes as vertical unity.
- It was Hutton who pointed out that the exclusivity and range of the caste panchayat led to an arrangement in which the members of the caste ceased to be members of the community as a whole.
- Aristotle classified the society into three strata-guardians, auxiliaries and workers.
- Max Weber characterized caste as a closed status group.
- Davis and Moore stressed that stratification served to ensure effective role allocation and performance.
- Senart advocated the religious theory of the origin of caste.
- Parsons held that society would rank highly and reward those who perform successfully in terms of society's values.
- According to Tawney in estate system inequality is not primarily economic but judicial.
- Nesfield gave the concept of occupational theory of caste.
- Marx categorized India under the Asiatic Mode of Production.
- Pelham stated that the higher the class one belongs the less is the pretence because there is less to pretend to. This is chief reason why our manners are better than other persons.
- Proudhon stated property is theft.
- Durkheim advocated a form of guild socialism.
- Utilitarianism is a theoretical outlook associated with the name of J Bentham.