

The Slavery System

It is an extreme form of inequality in which some individuals are owned by others as their property. The slave owner has full control including using violence over the slave. L.T Hobhouse defined slave as a man whom law and custom regard as the property of another. In extreme cases he is wholly without rights. He is in lower condition as compared with freemen. The slaves have no political rights he does not choose his government, he does not attend the public councils. Socially he is despised. He is compelled to work. The slavery system has existed sporadically at many times and places but there are two major examples of slavery - societies of the ancient world based upon slavery (Greek and Roman) and southern states of USA in the 18th and 19th centuries. According to H. J. Nieboer the basis of slavery is always economic because with it emerged a kind of aristocracy which lived upon slave labour.

The Estate System is synonymous with Feudalism. The feudal estates had three important characteristics. In the first place they were legally defined; each estate had a status with legal rights and duties, privileges and obligations. Secondly the estates represented a broad division of labor and were regarded as having definite functions. The nobility were ordained to defend all, the clergy to pray for all and the commons to provide food for all. Thirdly the feudal estates were political groups. An assembly of estates possessed political power. From this point of view the serfs did not constitute an estate until 12th century. This period saw the emergence of third estate -burghers who were a distinctive group within the system. Thus the three estates -clergy, nobility and commoners functioned like three political groups.

Caste System is closely connected with the Hindu philosophy and religion, custom and tradition. It is believed to have had a divine origin and sanction. It is deeply rooted social institution in India. There are more than 2800 castes and sub-castes with all their peculiarities. The term caste is derived from the Spanish word caste-meaning breed or lineage. The word caste also signifies race or kind. The Sanskrit word for caste is Varna that means color.

The caste stratification of the Indian society had its origin in the chaturvarna system. According to this doctrine the Hindu society was divided into four main varnas - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Varna system prevalent during the Vedic period was mainly based on division of labor and occupation. Earlier there were only three varnas, the Shudras were added later and occupational division was not rigid. A fifth group that falls outside the Varna system and is called Avarna or outcaste or untouchable also exists. Caste is an endogamous group having a relatively independent culture and structural existence. The caste system owns its origin to the Varna system.

Ghurye says any attempt to define caste is bound to fail because of the complexity of the phenomenon. According to Risley caste is a collection of families bearing a common name claiming a common descent from a mythical ancestor professing to follow the same hereditary calling and regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.

According to Maclver and Page when status is wholly predetermined so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then the class takes the extreme form of caste. Cooley says that when a class is somewhat strictly hereditary we may call it caste.

M. N. Srinivas sees caste as a segmentary system. Every caste for him divided into sub castes which are the units of endogamy whose members follow a common occupation, social and ritual life and common culture and whose members are governed by the same authoritative body viz the panchayat.

According to Bailey caste groups are united into a system through two principles of segregation and hierarchy.

For Dumont, caste is not a form of stratification but as a special form of inequality. The major attributes of caste are the hierarchy, the separation and the division of labor. Weber sees caste as the enhancement and transformation of social distance into religious or strictly a magical principle.

For Adrian Mayer, caste hierarchy is not just determined by economic and political factors although these are important.

Nesfield gave a theory of caste based on occupation.

Caste is also viewed from two broad perspectives:

1. ATTRIBUTIONAL

Inherent qualities associated with the caste system. Bougle used this perspective to focus on key features of caste.

2. INTERACTIONAL

How castes are actually ranked with respect to one another in a local empirical context. Its prime focus is on interactions. Beteille subscribe to this view.

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 Nimk off 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". Maclver and Page defines social class as any portion of the community marked off from the rest by social status. Max Weber suggests 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.

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.