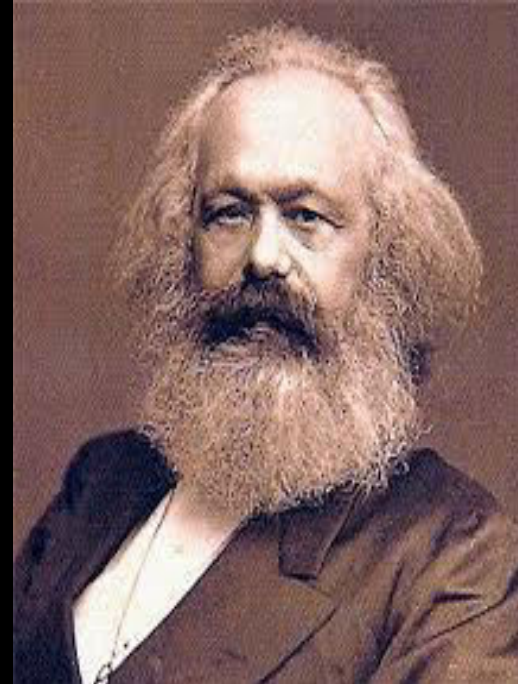


# SOCIAL CLASS

## The view of Weber and Marx



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# Class

- They are characteristic groups of the industrial societies which have developed since 17th century.
- These groups are relatively open not closed. Their basis is indisputably economic but they are more than economic groups.
- 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.

# Karl Marx's view on Class

- Marx suggested that social class is determined by the ownership and non-ownership of the "means of production". He called those who own the means of production "bourgeoisie" (i.e. those who own factories, farms, coal mines, raw materials etc) and those who work for these 'bourgeoisie' 'proletariat' (i.e. the manual workers). So for Marx, private ownership of economic resources is the key factor of distinguishing the two classes.

# Karl Marx's view on Class

- The bourgeoisie or capitalists are the owners of capital, purchasing and exploiting labour power, using the surplus value from employment of this labour power to accumulate or expand their capital.
- It is the ownership of capital and its use to exploit labour and expand capital are key here. Being wealthy is, in itself, not sufficient to make one a capitalist (e.g. managers in the state sector or landlords). What is necessary is the active role of using this wealth to make it self-expansive through employment and exploitation of labour.

# Karl Marx's view on Class

- The proletariat are owners of labour power (the ability to work), and mere owners of labour power, with no other resources than the ability to work with their hands, bodies, and minds. Since these workers have no property, in order to survive and obtain an income for themselves and their families, they must find employment work for an employer. This means working for a capitalist-employer in an exploitative social relationship.

# Karl Marx's view on Class

- This exploitative work relationship recreates or reproduces itself continually. If the capitalist-employer is to make profits and accumulate capital, wages must be kept low. This means that the proletariat is exploited, with the surplus time (above that required for creating subsistence) worked by the worker creating surplus products. While the worker produces, the products created by this labour are taken by the capitalist and sold – thus producing surplus value or profit for the capitalist but poverty for workers. This occurs each day of labour process, preventing workers from gaining ownership of property and recreating the conditions for further exploitation.

# Max Weber's View on Class

- Weber agreed with Marx's view that different classes exist but he suggested that people's class positions are based not simply on whether they own the means of production or not but also based on their market situation and market capacity. Class based upon three factors, power, wealth and prestige.
- Unlike Marx's two-class system, Weber divided "class" into four categories: propertied upper class, propertyless intelligentsia (white-collar workers), the petty bourgeoisie, and the manual working class.
- A propertied class is placed at the top because they own economic power, social status and political influence.

# Max Weber's View on Class

- A propertyless intelligentsia is a professional class. It was placed next because they not only have relatively high social status and some political influence, but also have higher position in the labour market and ownership of lesser forms of property than propertied class (e.g. stocks and shares).
- A petty bourgeoisie was placed third because they have less property ownership, less social status and less political influence (e.g. a small business owner). The manual working class was placed the last because of they are relatively lack of property ownership and lower position in the labour market, and they have lower social status and political influence as well.

# Max Weber's View on Class

- Weber rejected Marxist's view that proletarian revolution is inevitable but only a possibility. He thought there was no point for those people sharing a similar class situation to develop a common identity. If manual workers were dissatisfied with their class, they would carry out a series of actions to struggle for what they expected for. These actions may be complaint, take strike action, etc. which could lead to the destruction of capitalism.

# Max Weber's View on Class

- A 'status' is any group of people who have similar cultural and social interests and common consumer patterns. In other words, people who have similar 'lifestyle'. Unlike class, which is based on individual economic situation, status would rather involve degree of esteem or social honour possessed by an individual. According to Weber, in contrast to classes, status groups are communities. People recognize each other as belonging to the same group. They are not determined by economic situation but by the distribution of social honour. Economic elements can be a type of honor; however, similar class position does not need to have similar status. Both propertied and propertyless people may be members of the same status group and make social demands on each other, if they share the same specific style of life.

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# Differences between Class and Caste Systems

- In Max Weber's phraseology, caste and class are both status groups. While castes are perceived as hereditary groups with a fixed ritual status, social classes are defined in terms of the relations of production. A social class is a category of people who have a similar socio-economic status in relation to other classes in the society. The individuals and families which are classified as part of the same social class have similar life chances, prestige, style of life, attitudes etc.
- In the caste system, status of a caste is determined not by the economic and the political privileges but by the ritualistic legitimation of authority. In the class system, ritual norms have no importance at all but power and wealth alone determine one's status (Dumont, 1958).
- Class system differs in many respects from other forms of stratification—slavery, estate and caste system. In earlier textbooks such as written by Maclver, Davis and Bottomore, it was observed that caste and class are polar opposites. They are antithetical to each other. While 'class' represents a 'democratic society' having equality of opportunity, 'caste' is obverse of it.

# Following are the main differences between class and caste systems

- 1. Castes are found in Indian sub-continent only, especially in India, while classes are found almost everywhere. Classes are especially the characteristic of industrial societies of Europe and America. According to Dumont and Leach, caste is a unique phenomenon found only in India.
- 2. Classes depend mainly on economic differences between groupings of individuals—inequalities in possession and control of material resources—whereas in caste system non-economic factors such as influence of religion [theory of karma, rebirth and ritual (purity-pollution)] are most important.
- 3. Unlike castes or other types of strata, classes are not established by legal or religious provisions; membership is not based on inherited position as specified either legally or by custom. On the other hand, the membership is inherited in the caste system.
- 4. Class system is typically more fluid than the caste system or the other types of stratification and the boundaries between classes are never clear-cut. Caste system is static whereas the class system is dynamic.

# Following are the main differences between class and caste systems

- 5. In the class system, there are no formal restrictions on inter-dining and inter-marriage between people from different classes as is found in the caste system. Endogamy is the essence of caste system which is perpetuating it.
- 6. Social classes are based on the principle of achievement, i.e., on one's own efforts, not simply given at birth as is common in the caste system and other types of stratification system. As such social mobility (movement upwards and downwards) is much more common in the class structure than in the caste system or in other types. In the caste system, individual mobility from one caste to another is impossible.

This is why, castes are known as closed classes (D.N. Majumdar). It is a closed system of stratification in which almost all sons end up in precisely the same stratum their fathers occupied. The system of stratification in which there is high rate of upward mobility, such as that in the Britain and United States is known as open class system. The view that castes are closed classes is not accepted by M.N. Srinivas (1962) and Andre Beteille (1965).

# Following are the main differences between class and caste systems

- 7. In the caste system and in other types of stratification system, inequalities are expressed primarily in personal relationships of duty or obligation—between lower- and higher-caste individuals, between serf and lord, between slave and master. On the other hand, the nature of class system is impersonal. Class system operates mainly through large-scale connections of an impersonal kind.
- 8. Caste system is characterised by 'cumulative inequality' but class system is characterised by 'dispersed inequality.'
- 9. Caste system is an organic system but class has a segmentary character where various segments are motivated by competition (Leach, 1960).
- 10. Caste works as an active political force in a village (Beteille, 1966) but class does not work so.