Nature of Social Stratification in Pre-Industrial Societies

Social stratification in pre-industrial societies means that money is distributed in a population unequally. The material conditions for social stratification existed during the late old 'Stone Age' 12,000 to 25,000 years ago. Superior cutting tools were invented and they were great aids in hunting and survival for existence. The advent of the New Stone Age 6,000 to 12,000 years ago, promoted the developments of domestication of livestock and sedentary farming. During this era, no man, woman or child was spared for long and they could have been responsible for the economic surplus where larger shares were claimed by priests and war leaders as incarnations of the whole community.

Undoubtedly, wealth was treated not only as the sole reward but also the means for evaluating men's actions which would warrant stratification and result in an economic surplus which in turn will enable the distribution of prestige or power unequally. This being a case of the extension of social inequality into the economic sector of life.

Type of Social Stratification in Pre-Industrial Society

The Ruled and their rulers: In Wittfogel's view there were
the rulers and the ruled of the power hierarchy. The topmost ruler was an absolute autocrat who could do both good and evil whenever and however he wished. His relatives, servants, courtiers and favourites had more opportunities than others to influence him. Hence their prestige was considerable compared to other grades of rulers and ranks of people.

**The Feudal State**

Despotism and feudalism was observed in Japan from 1192 to 1867, whereby fortunes of the Central Government were less spectacular compared to the feudal lords. In theory, the emperor was the absolute ruler, but in practice, the Feudal lord with his sword was at the helm of power. Power attained by military exploit was made possible by the ownership of land administered by loyal vassals, peasants and artisans who pledged their labour in return for protection. Individuals could alter their rank within an estate and in some cases enter into a higher estate through adoption in a war family or personal service to a lord, which was a major differentiating factor between an estate and a caste system of stratification.

**Caste**

Caste system in India according to Hindu doctrine, as quoted by Hutton comprised of four Varnas; 'The Brahmana who sprang from the mouth of the deity, the Kshatriya who was created from his arms, the Vaishya who was formed from his thighs,
and the Sudra who was born from his feet. Here firmness or relative positions were possible by religious doctrine and traditional law. The concept of ritual purity acted as a chasm between the top three strata and Sudras. Kingsley Davis has summarised an unclean caste as: (1) Inability to be served by clean Brahmins, (2) Inability to be served by barbers, water-carriers, tailors etc., who serve the caste Hindus, (3) Limitations on contact with caste Hindus because of possible pollution, (4) Inability to serve water to caste Hindus, (5) Inability to use public conveniences such as roads, ferries, wells or schools, (6) Inability to enter Hindu temples, (7) Inability to dissociate oneself from a deprived occupation. A more plausible theory of ritual pollution is illustrated by food taboos and ideas of mana, characteristic of exclusive tribal groups. The Aryan invaders, maintained their social distance from the conquered by building and capitalising on these taboos, shortly after, the tribal groups were comprehensively stratified, sanctioned by a religious and magical doctrine of pollution.

Caste may be defined as a social group where membership was ascribed and settled for life. In caste system members were constrained to marry within the major caste but outside their own clan and lineage subdivisions. Each major caste was subdivided; each subdivision was frequently subdivided and so on. Each subdivision being treated as a caste with its own
strict rules concerning food preparation, eating, drinking, smoking bodily contact, spatial proximity to members of other castes, the wearing of ornaments, language, occupation etc. Hutton claims that before the second world war there were 3000 castes, but one does not know the subdivisions.

Consequences of social stratification in Pre-Industrial Societies

Social inequality resulted in conquest or was internally generated. In East African societies differentiation into superior and subordinate positions was furthered by serfdom, whereby weak persons accepted economic burdens and inferior social positions in exchange for protection (Mair 1962).

Social superiority can be achieved without dependence on wealth, although if unequal distributions of wealth are possible superior position may well be buttressed by wealth. Social stratification is through the structural principles or values of a society as they are observed to be implemented through various norms in that society.

Hereditary Rank

It is not synonymous to social strata as some units of the rank system which may be individual position rather than groups of positions e.g. the Nootka of North America. They were divided into chiefs, commoners and slaves. Those chiefs fitted into graded positions, one for each member of the group.
The grades selected according to the birth order in individual families and assumed birth order of the founders of each lineage - the first born in the oldest family and lineage receiving the highest rank and so on down the line. The ranks were conferred through the ‘Potlatch’. Ceremonial rights brought high prestige and the first born were the first served according to a hereditary charisma.

Hereditary Strata

Certain people inherently have social superiority feelings. The Trobrianders of Melanesia were conscious of social inequality which accrued from clan membership. Here clans and sub-clans formulated the stratification, because they cut across the local and political divisions. In Kiriwana for example four clans existed each with different grades of prestige. The Trobrianders believed that the world was populated by people from underground and lived in villages, recognised clans, observed rank distinctions and owned property.

The rank of an individual vis-à-vis another individual depended upon membership in a major clan, in a subclan, in a lineage and sometimes even in a village, so that, stratum affiliation shifted depending upon which of these ranks was relevant in a particular situation. Clans were homogeneous only with respect to other clans and in activities involving clan participation, strict account of services rendered and payments received were maintained by each sub-clan and by each individual
within each sub-clan. This stratification has been linked to both caste and class types, but it is significantly different from each of these.

In a caste system, occupations were inherited on a group basis while amongst the Trobrianders, largely because of the narrow range of occupations these were individually inherited. In a class system as well as in a caste system, all family members are accorded the same social rank; but amongst the Trobrianders, ranks were always two ranks in each house as the husband had to be of a different sub-clan from the wife. Therefore, although the sub-clans did constitute strata for some purposes, this form of social stratification does not fit under any of these major categories of estate, caste or class.

Nature of Social Stratification in modern Industrial Society

Inequalities of status and power are to be regarded as universal principles in human societies. Hierarchical values in some societies than in others have been organised much more efficiently in some countries than in others, the elements of dominance remain same everywhere. Regarding consistency, there is a tendency to grow within the stratification system, towards what Inkles terms as ‘equilibration’ where the relative positions of an individual or group in stratification order is similar to other orders. With industrialism, the occupational structure takes on overwhelming primacy. Occupational role of
an individual is in close proximity with his attributes which are relevant to his position in the stratification hierarchy, his economic situation, education level etc.

Occupational performance is closely related to the distribution of prestige and economic rewards of industrial society. It presupposes an over-riding upon achievement and entirely depending upon social position and achievement in the sphere of production. With the advancement of technology, occupational achievement depends upon education thereby promoting closer ties between economic standing and life styles and sub-culture. Hence in the overall stratification a tight nexus is formed where occupation is the central element – bridging a gulf between the objective and subjective aspects of social inequality. Highly integrated stratification systems are to be found in industrial societies where class differences are paralleled by status differences and the change in the former with effect a change in the latter pattern.

It may also be observed that there is a decrease in the degree of differentiation in each stratified sub-systems. A marked increase is visualised in each stratification order in the proportion of the total population falling into the middle ranges of distribution. Hence the stratification hierarchy assumes a pentagonal or diamond shape and ceases to be pyramidal.

The obvious logic of this trend in industry is due to the
changing division of labour. With the progress of technology and economy, occupational structure has changed in ways which help to expand the occupational roles. The roles with high educational standards and training warrants high economic rewards and social status. Consequently the middle of the stratification hierarchy becomes expanded.

The overall rates of social mobility in a society with advanced industrial progress tend to be relatively high compared to pre-industrial societies. Emphasis is given on occupational achievement due upward movemental opportunity from the lower levels. Here the educational system is the allocative mechanism, sieving ability and matching capacity of the occupational role.

Types of Social Stratification in modern Industrial Society

Social stratification is divided into two forms: class and status. Class primarily signifies economic division of people in the society while social status is not limited to the division of society but also some sorts of positions governed by different factors, but not limited to economic ones.

In this context, we visualise the birth of the concept of social class of the hierarchical system formed on industrial basis. Regarding Marxist doctrine, division of modern industrial societies was hinged on the basis of ownership or non-ownership of capital. Besides capitalist class and working
class, there is the middle class, the proximity and membership of which cannot be determined easily. Marx explained further that the existence of classes is bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production and the conflict in capitalist societies will lead to the victory of the working class and the inception of a classless socialist society.

Status groups are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods with special 'styles of life'. Status group may be taken as an occupational group. Classes and status groups overlap simultaneously. In status stratification, goods based on acquisition and distribution are relatively stable. Every technological repercussion and economic transformation is threatened and pushes the class situation into the foreground. In countries where the class situation into the foreground. In countries where the naked class situation is predominant, the periods of technical and economic transformations occur. Every slowing down of the shifting economic stratification leads to the growth of the status structures and makes for resuscitation of the role of social honour.

Modern industrial societies are divided into 'capitalist' societies of USA and Western Europe and the 'socialist' societies of USSR and Eastern Europe. Their occupational structure represent similar features as visualised in their general stratification shape. Their difference lies in their political regimes, social doctrines and the historical changes of social
structure. There is a considerable range of variation between the socialist and capitalist forms of industrial society viz. nature of social mobility, magnitude of economic inequalities, situation of the working class and degree of unification of the elite. The common features in socialist and capitalist societies result mainly from the three important influences namely: the rapid progress of industrialisation, the growing size of organisations in the economic sphere and the increasing part played by Governments in the moulding of economic and social life.

In the recent debate on the 'convergence' of industrial societies, intriguing issues concerning differences in the class system of socialist and capitalist societies were discussed. Goldthorpe summarised in favour of the view of difference of class stratification between totalitarian systems of the communist variety and also in modern capitalist societies. The important thing is the principal social cleavage of this type of system which occurs between party and non-party personnel. Class formation would be deliberately discouraged by the state apparatus, since any independent grouping outside the orbit of the party threaten the monopoly of social control. Through these conditions a society is divided between party elites and non-party masses with no intermediate groups between the two.

Soviet Union other than European socialist states is
related to the classlessness model. Recently, some important transformations are observed in many societies in relation to the Soviet Union and in their internal structures. It seems doubtful about the division of stratification order between a unified elite and a mass population which lacks internal class differentiation of the Western kind. In European socialists states class system is discussed in terms of classlessness model and class system of modern western capitalism. The former deals with the early phase of 'socialist reconstruction' while the latter reflects the participation of socialist states in modern industrialisation.

We see the major differences which exist between the Soviet countries and the capitalist democracy that is to be observed in the character of the elites and its political consequences among all other aspects of social stratification. The contrast between the unified ruling elite of USSR and the divided elite in the capitalist democracies, emphasized by sociologists that in one of these types of society there is a completely monolithic ruling party while in the other no ruling group at all.

The Soviet societies follow the pattern of unified elite wherein it suppresses political or intellectual opposition from other social forces as well as any conflict within its ranks, but these societies have experience in practice very serious
conflicts between different interest groups and in recent years the opportunities for such groups to express criticism and to influence policy matter have increased.

In the capitalist societies however, the elite is subdivided into divergent interest groups at level does not preclude the existence at another level of important common interests and aspirations which tend to produce a uniformity of outlook and action on fundamental issues of social policy. A big number of elites of the societies belong to the upper class with separate economic and cultural interests. Their provenance take the shape of common pattern the ends and forms of action which they adopt. It is not the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the ruling elite, as the possibility of forming and establishing organisations which oppose elites in power and basically this is the difference between the Soviet societies and capitalist democracies.

We may conclude first, that in the Soviet societies, we visualise the expansion of conflict and coercive government indicating whether classes or class antagonisms have survived or were degenerated. Besides class feelings, there are also important sources of social conflicts which are denied expression though a doctrine but accomplished through violence.

However, in the modern capitalist societies, the main source of political and ideological conflicts have been the
opposition between classes and if such conflicts have helped to establish some of the vital condition of democracy - the right of dissent and criticism, the right to create associations independently of the state then it must be considered whether the abolition or even the decline of social classes does not open the way for the growth of a mass society in which the political elite has infinite power, sufficient for the creation of an egalitarian and a democratic society.

Consequences of social stratification in modern Industrial Society

Industrial society is distinctly divided into two major classes - a small number of wealthy capitalists and a growing mass of propertyless and impoverished wage-earners. A rift between the two has evolved owing to the decline of the middle classes. According to Marx's controversial theory, middle class meant independent producers and professionalists whose members were being transformed into dependent employees. There are three principal aspects of the theory. First, there is the criticism which questions the pre-eminence that Marx assigned to social classes and class conflicts in explaining the major historical changes in human society, thereby neglecting social relationships which bind men together in national communities.

Class antagonisms have lost its popularity in industrial countries as expected by Marx. In 1914, the European socialist parties, of Marxist doctrine, unanimously supported the war
waged by their own governments. During the twentieth century, the same phenomena has been revealed by the changes from revolutionary to reformist ideas and actions in the working class. Here the social bond of nationality has proved more effective in creating a community than has that of class. A second criticism of Marx points that although his theory of class relations fit reasonably well in modern capitalist societies, it is not so in other types of social stratification. In the Carman doctrine, he contrasts a class system with a system of estates and observes, 'The distinction between the personal and the class individual, the accidental nature of conditions of life for the individual appears only with the emergence of class which in itself is a product of the bourgeoisie'.

Marx was widely criticised as his theory - the development of modern capitalism was not comprehensive and later on Marxists abstained from examining its limitations and usefulness applicable to other historical situations. Further, Marx predicted that the social gulf between the bourgeoisie and proletariat would widen owing to the continual disparity between their conditions of living and partly because of the elimination of the intermediate strata of the population. A revolutionary character is developed through the way of class consciousness of the proletariat. The reign of the bourgeoisie would be ousted by a revolution of the immense majority of the population.
It is argued further, however, that the distribution of national income has changed in favour of the working class thus reinforcing those tendencies. The extent of redistribution of income and wealth in modern societies is controversial. A modest redistribution along with the income rise, the expansion of social services, the greater security of employment would clearly bring about an important change in the position of the working class. It seems no longer possible in the second half of the twentieth century to regard the working class as being alienated from society. Another change which presents difficulties for Marx's theory is the growth of the 'new middle class'.

Managers, technicians, scientists, office-workers constitute the growth of the new middle classes. Many of them are employed in providing services of one kind or another. The result evolved from economic development manifests the greater complexity of social stratification in modern industrial societies, introducing or re-introducing social prestige - an important element of stratification based on occupation, consumption and style of life. Max Weber, the first sociologist made a comprehensive alternative to Marx's theory where he distinguished between different modes of production in modern societies. In society the distribution of political power will be treated independently and viewed by Marx as a product of class stratification. Weber, however, conceived that status groups are formed
by stratification of prestige, whose origin lay in the preca-pitalist groups which enjoyed social honour via. the mobility, the scholarly professions and high officials, but the new middle classes exhibit same features in basing their claims, social position upon educational and cultural characteristics, occupation status and particular lifestyle.

Max Weber opined that class stratification and status stratification coexist in modern societies, but the relation varies with changes in technology and economic conditions. Modern Sociologists viewed that status groups occupy an important place than that of social classes in the stratification system. One of the sociologists asserted that the amount of social mobility in industrial societies may be taken very considerably in preventing the consolidation and persistence of class in Marxian attitude. Conversely, it makes plausible the social hierarchy as a series of levels of prestige which individuals may ascend or descend according to their might. The quantum and range of social mobility being assessed like the income distribution in conflicting ways.

The second argument according to Weber is based on dis-tinction between class stratification and distribution of po-litical power, which according to F. Dahrendorf was concerned with the coincidence of economic conflict and political con-flict - the very base of Marx's theory which has ceased to exist and consequently termed as 'Post capitalist Societies'.
Dahrendorf argues that in capitalist society industrial and political conflict were superimposed. The opponents of industry-capital and labour met again as bourgeoisie and proletariat, in the political arena: Dahrendorf's criticism of Marx's theory are more plausible as conflict groups in society besides social classes, which may at times assume great importance, that the association between industrial and political conflict must be investigated separately and with the development of the capitalist industrial societies, some significant changes have occurred in the nature of political conflicts themselves which could not be clearly foreseen by Marx.

Working class conditions change and it appears to be likely a great damaging factor to Marx's theory. Solidarity of the working class has undermined due to greater chances of social mobility. Embourgeoisement of the working class is led by the improvement of the living conditions. Now it becomes easier to adopt middle class standards and patterns of life. It has been observed by Goldthorpe and Lockwood 'a picture has been built up - and it is one which would be generally accepted - of a system of stratification becoming increasingly fine in its gradations and at the same time somewhat less extreme and less rigid. Due to further economic progress, working class 'affluence' as argued by several writers is losing its identity as a social stratum and is merging with the middle class, which would bring about a far-reaching change
in class structure than any which could ensue from secular trends in occupational distribution, in the overall distribution of income and wealth or in rates of intergenerational social mobility.

A recent French study by Serge Mallet, points to some conclusions which supplement those reached by Goldthorpe and Lockwood. Mallet distinguishes the conditions of the worker in the spheres of consumption and production. In the former, `the working class has caused to live apart. Its level of living and its aspirations for material comfort have led it out of the ghetto in which it was confined at the beginning of industrialisation. The worker ceases to regard himself as a worker when he leaves the factory.' In the process of production itself on the contrary, `fundamental characteristics which distinguish the working class from other social strata seem to have remained unchanged.'

In Industry, factory organisations and trade Unions help to maintain or change the outlook and characteristics of the working class. Mallet's studies of three industrial enterprises, argues that the direction of the `new working class' becomes possible through its trade union representatives, as a consequence of technological and economic changes for assuming greater responsibility in the production arena, and thus to see itself as the complete controller instead of the present capitalist owners.
A criticism of Marx's theory as expressed by the Polish sociologist late Stanislaw Ossowski: There are other reasons why the nineteenth century conception of social class in both the liberal and the Marxian interpretations, has lost much of its applicability in the modern world. In situations where changes of social structure are to a greater or lesser extent governed by the decision of the political authorities, we are a long way from social class as interpreted by Marx, Ward, Veblen or Weber from classes conceived of as groups determined by their relations to the means of production, or, as other would say, by their relations to the market. We are a long way from classes conceived of as groups arising out of the spontaneously created class organisations. In situations where the political authorities can overtly and effectively change the class structure where the privileges that are most essential for social status including that of a higher share in the national income are conferred by a decision of the political authorities, where a large part or even the majority of the population is included in stratification identical to a bureaucratic hierarchy - the nineteenth century concept of class becomes more or less an anachronism and class conflicts yield to social antagonism. This is clearly contrary to the USA and similar other societies where role of a single party unchecked by any organised opposition has allowed an authoritarian order of doctrine and rank in an inequitable system, but it also has some relevance to the modern capitalist societies in which the
state has acquired a degree of independence from social classes and is now a source of change in stratification through its own social legislation. This is contrary to Marx's theory as he did not foresee that the dictatorship of the proletariat would eventually become dictatorship of a property, and eventually as a bureaucratic regime controlled by a single individual or that in the capitalist countries of the working class movement itself would help to bring about a form of society the welfare state, which may be transitional or enduring which is not socialist, but the economy and social conditions are controlled by the Government with a resultant influence on the stratification system.

Max Weber's distinction of class stratification and prestige stratification, criticising Marx's theory along with alternate views do not constitute a new theory sufficient enough to supplement Marx's proposal. They provide a systematic inventory of the outstanding problems viz. social stratification in the Soviet Societies compared to capitalist societies the relative importance of property ownership, educational selection, occupational differentiation and political power in creating and maintaining social distinctions; the extent and consequences of social mobility and income inequalities and a conceptual scheme which attempts to draw more careful distinctions between social classes, status groups and elites, and between the economic, political and other elements
in social stratification. The value of these new concepts along with Marx's theory, can be better assessed if we now make use of them in an examination of the changes which have taken place in the class structure of some modern societies.