

#### IV. Long answer type questions

1. Describe the characteristics of caste mentioned by G.S. Ghurye.
2. What is traditional theory of caste origin?
3. What is occupational theory of caste origin?
4. Identify those factors which have led to dynamics of caste.

#### V. Very long answer type questions

1. What do you understand by caste? Explain the differences between Caste and Varna.
2. Traditional and Occupational theories of caste origin do not explain the total facts of its origin. How?
3. Identify those changes which raise the possibility of India as casteless society.
4. Mention those examples which reveal that caste is still a dominant system of Indian society.

#### PROJECT

Make a Project Report on the occupations of 10 different caste groups and observe unequal distribution of wealth, prestige and power in relation to different caste groups of your locality.

# Class Inequalities

## 5 Chapter

### Highlights

- 5.1 Concept
- 5.2 Features
- 5.3 Caste, Class, Status Group and Class Hierarchy
- 5.4 Views of Sociologists on Class Structure
- 5.5 Classes in Rural and Urban India

### Introduction

In all societies, one can observe various social groups which are more prosperous, prestigious and powerful than others. These differences constitute social stratification in any society. In cities we observe some residential structures known as posh colonies while on the other hand, there exist some dirty overcrowded areas known as slums. Similarly, in villages too, one can see huge buildings of landlords and Kaccha houses owned by the landless agriculturists. Such inequalities are important fields for sociological analysis. You have read in the previous chapter that in India one of the forms of inequality is caste structure. It is ascriptive in nature. But when certain statuses are achieved by the individuals on the bases of efforts, qualification and distinctive achievements, the class comes into existence.

In a simplified manner, it can be said that the nature of ownership over material resources constitutes classes. Therefore, it is inferred that there are two classes in a society, one which possesses ownership over material resources and another which does not have ownership over material resources. Here, we can also point out that slavery, caste, class and status groups, etc. also refer to those structural inequalities which appear among different groups. In this chapter our objective will be to understand class as one of the forms of social stratification.

### Meaning of Class

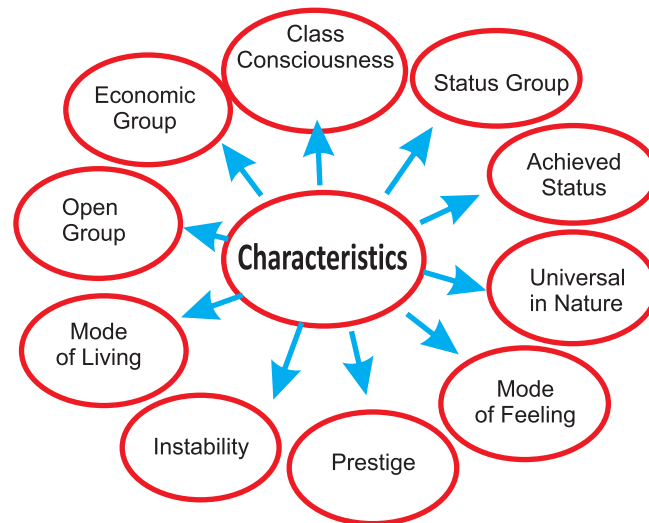
Class, commonly known as social class, is one of the major forms of social stratification along with slavery, status groups and caste. The concept of class in Sociology is basically linked with ideas of Karl Marx. The Marxian proposition of 'haves' and 'have nots' clearly indicates that the ownership issues relating to means of production and the control over relations of production are those important issues, that constitute class in any society. 'Social Class' is one of the principal types of social stratification found especially in the modern civilised societies. If the caste system is found to be unique to India, the class system is universal in nature. In Sociology the

concept of class is defined differently by sociologists. But in simple sense, a class is a category or group of persons having a definite status in society which can be compared with other groups in terms of superiority or inferiority. The relative position of the class in the social scale arises from the degree of achieved prestige attached to it. Class status is determined by property, achievement and capacity of an individual.

### Characteristics of Social Class

On the basis of the above mentioned introduction one can explain characteristics of class in the following manner:

1. **Status Group:** 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 occupations.



2. **Achieved Status:** 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 system provides scope for changing or improving one's status. Factors like income, occupation, wealth, education, 'life-styles', etc. decide the status of an individual.
3. **Universal in Nature:** Class is a universal phenomenon. The class system exists in almost all the modern complex societies of the world.
4. **Mode of Feeling:** In a class system we may observe three modes of feelings.
  - (i) There is a *feeling of equality* in relation to the members of one's own class.
  - (ii) There is a *feeling of inferiority* in relation to those who occupy the higher status in the socio-economic hierarchy.
  - (iii) There is a *feeling of superiority* in relation to those who occupy the lower status in the hierarchy. This kind of feeling develops into class-consciousness and finally results in class solidarity.

5. **Prestige:** Each social class has its own status in every 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. Thus, the status and the prestige enjoyed by the ruling classes or rich classes in every society are superior to that of the class of the poor people. The prestige which a class enjoys depends upon societal evaluations. In many societies knowledge, purity of race or descent, religion, wealth, heroism, bravery and similar other qualities confer a high degree of prestige on the persons possessing them. These qualities on which our evaluations are based vary considerably in different societies, and in the course of time, within the same society.
6. **Lack of stability:** A social class is a relatively unstable group. Status in the case of class may subject to change through hard work and education. It may also undergo radical changes in extraordinary circumstances i.e., in times of wars, revolutions, economic, political and social crisis and so on.
7. **Mode of living:** A social class is distinguished from other classes by its customary modes of behaviour or mode of behaving. This is often referred to as the 'life-styles' of a particular class. 'Life-styles' or the modes of living include mode of dress, the kind of house and neighbourhood one lives in, the means of recreation, the cultural products one is able to enjoy, the relationship between parents and children, the kinds of books, magazines and TV shows to which one is exposed, one's friends, one's mode of conveyance and communication, one's way of spending money and so on. 'Life-styles' reflect the speciality in preferences, and values of a class.
8. **Open Group:** Social classes are 'open groups'. They represent an 'open' social system. An open class system is the one in which vertical social mobility is possible. This means that there are no restrictions, or at the most only very mild restrictions are imposed on the upward and downward movement of individuals in the social hierarchy. However, a completely open class system and a completely closed class system are only hypothetical.
9. **Economic Group:** The basis of social classes is mostly economic, but they are not mere economic groups or divisions. Along with the objective 'measurable' criteria such as wealth, property, income, education, occupation, etc., as well as subjective criteria such as class-consciousness, class solidarity and class identification are equally important in the class system.
10. **Categorisation of Social Classes:** Sociologists have given three-fold classification of classes which consists of (i) Upper Class (ii) Middle Class, and (iii) Lower Class. W. L. Warner in his study has given a six-fold classification consisting of (i) The Upper-Upper Class (ii) The Lower-Upper Class, (iii) The Upper-Middle Class, (iv) The Lower-Middle Class, (v) The Upper-Lower Class and (vi) The Lower-Lower Class. Karl Marx, the supporter of the theory of social class and class conflicts, has spoken of only two major social classes, the 'haves' and the 'have nots', the capitalists and the workers or the Bourgeoisie and the



Proletariat. P. Sorokin has spoken of three major types of classes i.e. economic, political, and occupational classes.

- 11. Class Consciousness:** Class system is associated with class consciousness. Class consciousness involves the emotions and attitudes that denote the relations of men towards the members of their own class and the other classes. Class consciousness is the means by which the integration of persons possessing a similarity of social position is transformed into a common group activity.

#### Activity 5.1

Up to what extent your identity has been shaped by social class background of your family? Discuss your views with your classmates and teachers in the classroom and frame the indicators.

### Views of Sociologists on Class

#### Karl Marx's views on Class

According to Marx two classes under capitalism are the capitalist (or ruling) class who own and control all productive processes, and the working class who, have to sell their labour for wages. Thus, there are mainly two classes in society – one, the *bourgeoisie* who own the means of production and the other called the *proletariat* or the working class. Marx believed that the history of all societies in the world has been the history of class struggles. That is, ever since human society came into existence, it has been divided into classes who clash in the pursuit of class interests. Conflicting groups have existed in the slave society and feudal system. However, it is in a capitalist society that the opposition of social classes can be best seen. For Marx each society has its own mode of production (nature of its technology and division of labour). Each mode of production produces a typical class system in which one class controls the process of production while the other class acts as the producers and providers of services to the dominant class. Factory becomes the primary site of history between the two classes, namely, the capitalists or the *bourgeoisie* and the workers or the *proletariat*. The two classes represent the haves and the have-nots, the exploiters and the exploited, the buyers and sellers of labour power, the oppressors and the oppressed, the powerful and the powerless.

When conflicts become extreme, and the working class gains a class consciousness (self-awareness and the capacity to act in its own rational interests), due to which it challenges the dominance of the capitalist class who are the existing rulers of society. Marx distinguished between a 'class in itself' and 'class for itself'. A 'class in itself' is simply a social group whose members share the same relationship to the forces of production. Marx argues that a social group only fully becomes a class when it becomes a 'class for itself' when its members have class consciousness and class

solidarity. Consequently, the opposing interests of the two classes and consciousnesses eventually lead to class conflict, resulting in a socialist revolution and the establishment of a classless society.

### **Class Consciousness and Class Struggle**

Karl Marx, who championed the cause of workers, laid great emphasis on 'class consciousness' among the working classes. According to Marx, the rise of class consciousness among the workers leads to their class identification, class solidarity and finally to class struggle. Hence he gave a call to the workers for International unity by stating "Workers of the world, unite!, you have nothing to lose, but your chains, you have a world to win". Class consciousness can be transformed into same group activity with the help of some organ or instrument. Political party is one such organ. Hence, Vladimir Lenin added the idea of a party in Marxism to prepare the workers for class struggle.

### **Weberian Concept of Class**

According to Weber, wealth, power and status form the basis of inequality. Class is associated with the economic aspect, status with community and power with politics. Like Marx, Weber also considers class in economic terms. According to Weber, those who share a similar class situation also share similar life-chances. Thus, the concept of class is based on the fact of owning property and not owning any property. Weber makes a distinction between:

1. Ownership or Propertied classes who own cattle, slaves, capital goods, stocks, money, land and buildings, etc.
2. Working class whose labour is directly exploited by capitalists.
3. Acquisition classes who have no property but special skills on the basis of which they offer various services such as specialists, persons with rare skills, entertainers, sportspersons etc.
4. Commercial class comprising privileged person such as merchants, bankers, professionals, industrial and agricultural entrepreneurs etc. who possess similar financial resources.

Weber in his theory on capitalism and class structure states that the unequal distribution of power is the basis of social stratification. Classes are stratified on the basis of their relations with goods produced for market. Status groups represented by similar styles of life are stratified on the basis of their income. These elements express a class situation.

While discussing class power Weber believes it is an "unequal access to material resources." For example, the relationship between an employer who is in a dominant position and the employee who is in a subordinate position is a relationship based on power.

### **W. Lloyd Warner's Views on Class**

Warner examined the class structure in United States of America. He conceptualised three social classes namely: the Upper class, the Middle class and the Lower class. These classes are further divided into Sub-classes. Warner explained class structure on the basis of income and wealth. He also accepted the fact that there are inherited privileges which, in the form of inherited wealth constitute the section of upper- middle class. Upper class is financially the best compensated and possesses the most influential status in American society. In present framework, the corporate elite are also a part of upper class structure. Middle class is composed of educated salaried professionals. A highly educated salaried professional whose work is largely self-directed is a part of upper-middle class. Warner admits that middle class is most vaguely defined. Working class is composed of that population which acts as workers in manufacturing, retail and service sectors.

### **Eric Olin Wright's views on Class**

Wright presented a theory of class based on synthesis of ideas of Marx and Weber. He argued that there are three criteria of control over economic resources in a capitalist society. These criteria are:

1. Control over money capital
2. Control over land, factory, and offices
3. Control over labour class

These aspects create classes like employer, blue collar worker, white collar workers, professional employees, manual workers etc.

He further added that on the basis of traditionalities and modernities you can point out different class locations. According to him middle class worker (mainly managers and supervisors) enjoy relationship with authority, while working class faces exploitation and oppression.

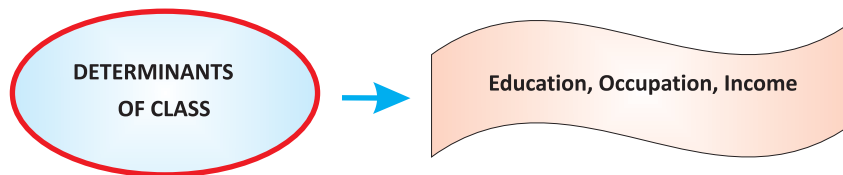
### **Education, Occupation and Income as Determinants of Class**

#### **Education as a Determinant of Class**

Formal education has played a vital role in the growth and development of human beings. Especially higher education, as well as, professional and technical education can help people access economic opportunities in a much better way and market their abilities and respond to challenges.

### Occupation as a Determinant of Class

Occupation is the direct outcome of one's educational attainment. Occupation is used as an indicator of social class and occupations can also be classified in terms of the prestige and the economic status attached to them.



### Income as a Determinant of Class

It is assumed that higher education, and socially valued occupational status, would consequently improve earning. Income is not directly proportional to occupation and education. Income reflects one's ability to "earn". This index is an obvious and radical index of one's class. However income, especially 'white' money truly indicates one's class. People who earn though "parallel" means, if caught, might lose their class, position and social standing.

### Caste and Class

Structurally caste and class are status groups. Status group is known for a common life style and similar kind of consciousness. In class structure the mobility through education becomes an important social fact. The educational attainment leads to possibilities of inter-class mobility. In fact, in all modern societies the concept of middle class is basically a product of educational attainment. All liberal professions and specialisations are by and large education based. Thus the classes of employer and employees, the class of supervisor, the class of elites are all products of educational attainments. Education can also be used for making a distinction between agrarian/rural classes and industrial/urban classes.

The prestige of social classes in any society is based upon principle of accumulation. Accumulation of means of production also gives rise to control over prestige and power. The capitalists, the professionals and the elites enjoy prestige in society as they possess economic, cultural, political and social power. Class hierarchy is

based upon economic, educational and political achievements which at the same time determine prestige linked hierarchies.

#### Differences between Caste and Class

1. Caste and class are exclusive categories because of ascriptive orientation and achievement orientation respectively.
2. Caste refers to prestige differential while class refers to ownership differential.
3. One can have upward and downward status mobility in classes while such mobility is not possible in caste.
4. Caste gives basic importance to purity-pollution principle while in class structure no such importance is given.

However, in Indian society upper castes such as castes associated with Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya Varnas control the social and cultural resources. They were linked with intellectual labour. Thus, these castes are, by and large, upper and middle Indian classes. The castes related with Shudra Varna did not have ownership over the resources and were compelled to sell their manual labour to the upper and middle castes. The processes of economic, industrial, educational and political modernisation initially influenced upper and middle castes. Lower caste experienced backwardness (what we call 'cultural-economic-technological and political lag') and thus, faced exploitation and inequalities based on class lines, as well.

In rural India the big landlords, the absentee landlords, the upper and middle peasantry and the capitalist farmers basically belong to upper and middle castes. And low peasantry, marginal farmers and landless agriculturists belong to lower castes. The class of moneylenders in rural India is basically composed of castes related to Vaishya Varna. At the same time it is also a reality that because of protective discrimination (e.g., reservations), new opportunity structures based on industries and education and spatial mobility, some sections of lower castes have entered into the sphere of middle and upper classes. However, class status can be altered since it is usually achieved but caste status can never be changed due to its ascriptive nature.

Difference between Caste and Class	
Caste	Class
Caste is an ascriptive status.	Class is an achieved status.
Caste is basically an Indian phenomenon.	Class is universal phenomenon.
Caste gets legitimacy from Hindu religion through purity pollution principle.	Class gets legitimacy from ownership over the means of production particularly the material assets.
Caste reveals restrictions in mobility.	Class accepts all forms of upward and downward mobility.
Caste gives importance to Traditional-inherited occupations.	Class gives importance to achievement based occupations.
In caste, endogamy is a social norm. Caste gives importance to Gotra based exogamy.	There are no such restrictions in Class System.

### Relation among Class, Caste and Status group

It is also important to understand the relationship and differences between class, caste and status group. The status group refers to those organised or semi-organised social categories comprising individuals having same statuses/offices. The term status group is generally used for professionals who have acquired positions because of achievement (for example, status group comprising all bureaucrats). The status groups based upon achievement develop own life style and patterns of living. They are also based on same income category. Their ranking is based upon prestige which they have because of nature of professions. The higher category within a status group is generally known as the 'Elite'. They are highly specialised persons who play directional and leadership roles in own status group and in the society. Thus, it can be described as:

1. Class, caste and status groups are analytical categories having distinctiveness.
2. In reality these three structures are interrelated and interdependent. It means in class we can find castes and in caste several classes. The same thing can be observed in status group. For example, a Brahmin IAS officer having income of 15 lakh rupees per year conveys caste (Brahmin), status group (bureaucrat) and upper class (income structure).

We have already mentioned that caste is also a status group but this status group is based upon ascription. It means ascriptive status group and achieved status group may constitute classification of status group itself. It also reveals that prestige is based upon both the birth and the achievement (known as quality and performance respectively).

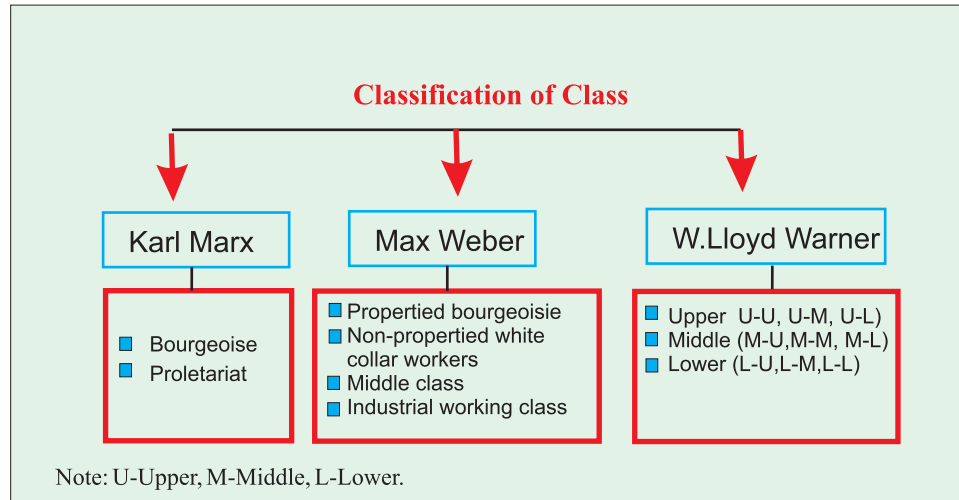
### Class Hierarchy

Like caste, class is also a hierarchical structure. In caste system the caste relating to Brahmins are at the top while Shudra are placed at the bottom of the ranking. In similar fashion 'haves' (having monopoly over material resources) are at the top in the structure of class hierarchy while 'have nots' (the non-owner of the resources) are placed at the bottom of the structure. Besides, this several other groups are also found in the castes and the classes.

- **Karl Marx** – The most important class theorist – has talked about the classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat in capitalistic society. Within these two classes petty bourgeoisie, composed of professional groups and people attached with intellectual labour. Marx considers them opportunists and states that during the process of class struggle a small component of petty bourgeoisie formed an alliance with the bourgeoisie while a large section of petty bourgeoisie took the side of the proletariat.
- **Max Weber** – another important class theorist– wrote about propertied bourgeoisie, non-propertied white collar workers, middle class and industrial working class. Non-propertied white collar workers mainly comprise technocrats, managers and liberal professionals.
- **W. Lloyd Warner** – an American sociologist – on the basis of income criteria discussed the upper class, the middle class and the lower class. These three classes can be divided further into three sub-classes, such as upper-upper, upper-middle, upper-lower, middle-upper, middle-middle, middle-lower and lower-upper, lower-middle, lower-lower.



These classes constitute different patterns of ranking. It is also important to note that in India classes are mainly products of colonial order.



### Classes in Rural and Urban India

In contemporary India we can find the following classes in rural society of India:

1. Big Landlords
2. Absentee Landlords
3. Capitalist Farmers
4. Peasants
5. Rentiers
6. Marginal Farmers
7. Formal/Registered Land less Agriculture
8. Informal/ unorganised landless agriculturists
9. Moneylenders
10. Traders
11. Businessmen
12. Middle and Low order Bureaucrats
13. Small Shopkeepers
14. Self-Employed Persons
15. Manual Working Class Engaged With Non-Agricultural Activities
16. Contractual/Part time workers

We can find the following classes in urban society of India.

1. Corporate capitalists
2. Industrial capitalists
3. Financial capitalists

4. Bureaucrats/academia of upper category
5. Cultural, Political and Economic elites
6. Middle class – managers, traders, businessman, small shopkeepers, self employed people, bankers
7. Lower class – assistants, mechanics, low grade supervisors
8. Industrial working class in organised sector
9. Working class in unorganised/semi-organised sectors
10. Construction workers on daily wages
11. Unemployed persons

Basically, the above constitute class structure in urban India.

These classes can be categorised further into sub-classes (for example, in private sector, in public sector and in private-public partnership). As a result, class structure in rural and urban India is of heterogeneous character. These theoretical propositions of classes and related class divisions indicate that ownership over means of production constitutes the basis of classes while class divisions are based on similar kind of ownership. On the other hand, non-ownership over the resources also prevails. Members of social groups always aspire to become the part of classes having upper ranking in the hierarchy. Thus social mobility, that is, inter-class mobility becomes an important feature of society. As a result, there is always a relationship between class, social mobility and hierarchy.

When you think about yourself and aspire to get upper positions in society class, stratification and mobility become visible before you. When you compare classes you can also become aware about inequalities. Unequal sections in society lead to unequal differences in way of life. It is also possible that in certain cases deprivation and denial may exist to the extent of social exclusion.

## **Conclusion**

Due to globalisation the traditional structure of class is weakening but in any case economic inequalities are basis of class divisions and these classes make impact on our life. Education and health status makes us stronger and as a result mobility gets fast paced resulting into changes in the membership of class. Hence, an understanding of class structures is necessary to understand social realities.

## Glossary

- **Bourgeoisie** A social class that owns the means of production and whose societal concerns are the value of property and preservation of capital, to ensure the perpetuation of economic supremacy in the society.
- **Class Struggle** It is the tension or antagonism which exists in society due to competing socio-economic interests and desires between people of different classes.
- **Elite** They are highly specialised persons who play directional and leadership role in own status group and in the society. Their direction/role creates the process of social transformation.
- **Petty bourgeois** It refers to a social class that comprised small-scale capitalists such as shop-keepers and workers who manage the production, distribution, and/or exchange of commodities and/or services owned by their bourgeois employers.
- **Proletariat** It is a class of wage-earners (especially industrial workers) in a capitalist society.
- **Slavery** Individuals owned by others as their property.
- **Social mobility** It is a movement of individuals or groups between different socio-economic positions.
- **Social stratification** The existence of structured inequalities between groups in society in terms of wealth, power and prestige.



### I. Objective type questions

#### A. Multiple choice questions

1. "The history of all existing societies is the history of class struggle" is stated by:  
(a) Karl Marx (b) V. I. Lenin  
(c) Antonio Gramsci (d) Rosa Luxemburg
2. Who propounded the concept of Class-in-itself and Class-for-itself ?  
(a) Marx (b) Weber  
(d))Durkheim (d) None

3. The class theory given by Eric Olin Wright is synthesis of ideas of:
  - (a) Marx and Durkheim
  - (b) Marx and Weber
  - (c) Marx and Spencer
  - (d) Marx and Engels
4. Property-less white collar professionals as one of the classes is discussed by:
  - (a) Karl Marx
  - (b) Max Weber
  - (c) Lloyd Warner
  - (d) Vilfredo Pareto
5. Which does not reveal the distinction between caste and class:
  - (a) Ascription and achievement
  - (b) Closed and open mobility
  - (c) Sacred and secular
  - (d) Ruling and ruled
6. Which does not constitute the means of production:
  - (a) Land
  - (b) Culture
  - (c) Labour
  - (d) Capital
7. Who gives importance to life chances and market situation for class analysis:
  - (a) Karl Marx
  - (b) Max Weber
  - (c) Alfred Weber
  - (d) C.W. Mills
8. The ownership over the means of production is a determinant of:
  - (a) Status group
  - (b) Class
  - (c) Caste
  - (d) Social category
9. The class of serf is opposite to:
  - (a) Lords
  - (b) Petty-bourgeois
  - (c) Bourgeois
  - (d) Master

#### B. Fill in the blanks

1. Class system is \_\_\_\_\_ in nature.
2. Class system is \_\_\_\_\_ in status
3. Weber considered class in \_\_\_\_\_ term.
4. Class status is determined by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of an individual.

#### C. True/False

1. Class system is one of the major forms of social stratification. ☐
2. A social class is essentially a status group. ☐
3. According to Weber wealth, power and status form the basis of inequality. ☐
4. Social Classes are open groups. ☐

**D. Match the columns.**

**Column A**

Social classes  
Capitalist  
Determinant of class  
Class Consciousness  
Mode of living

**Column B**

Bourgeoisie  
Life styles of particular class  
Open group  
Occupation  
Self awareness

**II. Very short answer type questions**

1. In which social group members share the same relationship to the forces of production?
2. Can one have upward and downward mobility in classes?
3. Individual or groups between different social economic positions are known as.
4. Which social class broadly composed of people involved in blue collar or manual occupations?
5. Identify two important features of class.
6. What do you mean by ownership over the resources?
7. Identify means of production.
8. Name two classes which were found during slavery.
9. Who is a bourgeois?

**III. Short answer type questions**

1. What do you mean by class?
2. Differentiate between Caste and Class.
3. Identify those classes found in rural India.
4. What is the meaning of this statement of Marx that “the history of all existing societies is the history of class struggle”?
5. Name those classes which have been discussed by Max Weber.

**IV. Long answer type questions**

1. Discuss the views of Eric Olin Wright on Class.
2. What is the relationship between caste and class?
3. Briefly write about those classes which are found in Rural India.
4. Briefly write about those classes which are found in Urban India.
5. Explain the middle class phenomenon.

#### V. Very long answer type questions

1. Explain the Marxian theory of class.
2. Explain the Weberian theory of class.
3. What is the relationship between class, social mobility and social stratification?

#### PROJECT

Make a chart of social composition of ten families of your neighbourhood on the basis of caste, class and status group.