

Bangladesh Society and Culture: Social Stratification

Dr Samina Luthfa

Department of Nuclear Engineering

University of Dhaka

Outline

- Defining Social Stratification
- Systems of Social Stratification
- What determines Social Class?
- Poverty and mobility

Social Stratification

- Social Stratification refers to a hierarchy of privilege based on property, power and prestige.
- Every society stratifies its members
- In every society, men-as-a-group are placed above women-as-a-group.
- On the basis of gender, people are allowed or denied access to resources offered by their societies.

Systems of Stratification

- Slavery
- Caste
- Estate
- Class

Slavery

- Slavery is a system where *some individuals own other people*. It has been common throughout history.
- The Old Testament even lays out rules for how owners should treat their slaves. So does the Koran. The Romans had slaves, as did the Africans and Greeks.
- Slavery was most widespread in agricultural societies and least common among nomads, especially hunters and gatherers (Landtman 1938/1968; Rowthorn et al. 2011).

Slavery: Causes and Conditions

- Causes: Slaves were not viewed as inherently inferior, in stead if they had the following:
 - Debt that they could not repay
 - Committed Crime
 - Defeated in War
- Conditions: Varied around the world
 - Slavery was temporary
 - Not necessarily inheritable
 - Slaves were not necessarily poor and powerless

Slavery: Contemporary

Slavery in the US:

- Racism didn't lead to slavery but, rather, slavery led to racism.
- U.S. slave owners developed an ideology, beliefs that justify social arrangements, making those arrangements seem necessary and fair for owners:
 - slaves were presented as inferior, not fully human.
 - slave states passed laws that made slavery *inheritable*.
 - it was illegal for slaves to hold meetings or to be away from the master's premises without carrying a pass.
- The Civil War did not end legal discrimination. For example, until 1954, many states operated separate school systems for blacks and whites.

Slavery in other parts of the world

- Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Niger, and Sudan have a long history of slavery that continues today.
- The enslavement of children for work and sex is a problem in Africa, Asia, and South America
- *A unique form of child slavery in some Mideast countries involves buying little boys around the ages of 4 or 6 to race camels.*

Caste

- In a caste system, birth determines status, which is lifelong.
- Someone who is born into a low-status group will always have low status, no matter how much that person may accomplish in life.
- In sociological terms, a caste system is built on ascribed status.
- Societies with this form of stratification try to make certain that the boundaries between castes remain firm. They practice **endogamy** prohibiting the marriage of members of different castes.
- Rules about *ritual pollution* also keep contact between castes to a minimum. Touching a member of an inferior caste, for example, makes a member of the superior caste unclean.

Varied Caste Systems

- **India's Religious Castes**
 - Based not on race but on religion
 - India's caste system has existed for almost three thousand years
 - India's main castes: Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, Dalit (untouchables)
- **South Africa:** Europeans of Dutch descent, a numerical minority called Afrikaners, used to control the government, the police, and the military. They used these sources of power to enforce a system called apartheid (ah-PAR-tate), the separation of the races.
- Everyone was classified by law into one of four groups: Europeans (whites), Africans (blacks), Coloureds (mixed races), and Asians.
- These classifications determined where people could live, work, and go to school. By law, whites and the others were not allowed to mix socially.

Estate: Medieval Europe

- **Three Estates:**
- The *first estate: the nobility*, the wealthy families who owned land and ruled the country. Their responsibility was to administer their lands, to defend the king (and, in doing so, their own position), and to live “genteel” lives worthy of their high position.
- The *second estate: the clergy*. The Roman Catholic Church was a political power at this time and owned vast amounts of land.
- The *third estate: the commoners*, known as serfs, who belonged to the land. The rare person who made it out of the third estate was either a man who was knighted for extraordinary bravery in battle or someone “called” into a religious vocation.
- **Women belonged to the estate of their husbands.**

Class

- **A class system, in contrast, is much more open**
 - it is based primarily on money or material possessions, which can be acquired.
 - This system, too, is in place at birth, when children are ascribed the status of their parents.
 - Unlike the other systems, however, individuals can change their social class by what they achieve (or fail to achieve) in life.
 - In addition, no laws specify people's occupations on the basis of birth or prohibit marriage between the classes.

What determines class?

- Karl Marx
- Seeing great disparity between owners and workers, Marx concluded that social class depends on a single factor: people's relationship to the **means of production—the tools, factories, land, and investment capital** used to produce wealth.
- Distinctions people often make among themselves camouflage the only dividing line that counts.
- There are just two classes of people: the **bourgeoisie (capitalists), those who own the means of production, and proletariat (workers), those who work for the owners.**
- Marx predicted that the capitalists will grow even wealthier and hostilities will increase. When workers come to realize that capitalists are the source of their oppression, they will unite and throw off the chains of their oppressors. In a bloody revolution, they will seize the means of production and usher in a classless society—and no longer will the few grow rich at the expense of the many.

What determines class?

- **Max Weber**
- *Social class has three components: property, power, and prestige. Some call these the three P's of social class. (Although Weber used the terms *class, power, and status*)*
- ***Property***: ownership is not the only significant aspect of property. For example, some powerful people, such as managers of corporations, *control the means of production even though they do not own them.*
- ***Power***: *ability to control others, even over their objections.* Weber agreed with Marx that property is a major source of power, but he added that prestige can be turned into power too.
- ***Prestige***: *often derived from property and power, since people tend to admire the wealthy and powerful, however, can be based on other factors.* Olympic gold medalists, for example, might not own property or be powerful, yet they have high prestige. Some are even able to exchange their prestige for property.
- In other words, property, power and prestige are not one-way streets: Although property can bring prestige, prestige can also bring property and power and vice versa.

Global Stratification

- Three Worlds: layering represents relative resource ownership (3 Ps)
 - The most industrialized
 - The industrializing
 - The least industrialized
- Two processes maintain global stratification
 - Neocolonialism: **the economic** and political dominance of the Most Industrialized Nations over the Least Industrialized Nations
 - Multinationals: companies that operate across national boundaries; also called *transnational corporations*

Global Superclass

- The growing interconnections among the world's wealthiest people have produced a *global super class, one in which wealth and power are more concentrated than ever before.*
- There are only about 6,000 members of this superclass.
- *The richest 1,000 of this superclass have more wealth than the 21/2 billion poorest people on this planet.*
- Almost all are white, and, except as wives and daughters, few women are an active part of the superclass.
- *The wealthiest 10 percent of adults worldwide own 85 percent of the Earth's wealth.*
- *The wealthiest 1 percent of adults worldwide own 40 percent of the Earth's wealth.*

Poverty

- Approximately one out of every nine people in the United States lives below the poverty line.
- One in five households has trouble meeting basic needs, from paying the utility bills to buying dinner.
- The efforts of sociologists and other social scientists to better understand poverty are complicated by the difficulty of defining it.

Types of Poverty

- Two types of Poverty
- **Absolute poverty:** a minimum level of subsistence that no family should be expected to live below.
- **Relative poverty:** a floating standard of deprivation by which people at the bottom of a society, whatever their lifestyles, are judged to be disadvantaged *in comparison with the nation as a whole*.
- Therefore, even if the poor of 2012 are better off in absolute terms than the poor of the 1930s or 1960s, they are still seen as deserving of special assistance.
- If noncash benefits such as Medicare, Medicaid, tax credits, food stamps, public housing, and health care and other employer-provided fringe benefits were included, the reported poverty rate would be lower.
- On the other hand, if out-of-pocket medical expenses and mandatory work expenses for transportation and child care were included, the poverty rate would be higher.

Feminization of Poverty

- Since World War II, an increasing proportion of the poor people of the United States have been women, many of whom are divorced or never-married mothers.
- In 1959, female householders accounted for 26 percent of the nation's poor; by 2010, that figure had risen to 51 percent.
- This alarming trend, known as the **feminization of poverty** , is evident not just in the United States but around the world.

The underclass

- **Underclass** is the long-term poor who lack training and skills.
- According to an analysis of census data, in the US 8.7 million people live in extremely impoverished areas. Although not all of them are poor, living in such disadvantaged neighborhoods means limited educational opportunities, greater exposure to crime and health risks, reduced access to private investment, and higher prices for goods and services.
- About 45 percent of the population in these neighborhoods is Black, 34 percent Hispanic, and 17 percent White.

Social Mobility

- social mobility refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one position in a society's stratification system to another.
- *open versus closed stratification system*
 - An open system implies that the position of each individual is influenced by his or her *achieved status*. Such a system encourages competition among members of society.
 - closed system, which allows little or no possibility of individual social mobility

Types

- Horizontal
- Vertical
 - Upward
 - Downward
- Intergenerational
- Intra-generational