

Quiz 1

Introduction to the Human Sciences [HS8.102]

Max Marks: 30

3 February 2023

Read the following passage:

Earlier, we used the primary source of household income to identify the labouring households. These households, *negatively privileged* in both property and the labour markets, were eliminated from the analysis of the middle classes. To categorise occupational classes among the remaining households, it is possible to apply a schema formed by relations in both the property market (differentiation on the basis of income generating property) and the labour market, which distinguishes between manual and non-manual work and is further differentiated by types of employment and the degree of education and skills required. John Goldthorpe developed seven occupational classes ... where occupation was mainly differentiated on the basis of income and the degree of economic security, employment status, and degree of authority in the workplace.

...The non-labouring households fit into nine occupational categories: (a) farmers, who earned their income primarily from agricultural activities (this class was further divided into two sub-categories based on area of land owned: farmers owning more than 10 acres of land, and farmers owning less than 10 acres of land); (b) PCPs [petty commodity producers], including petty shop keepers and those earning their living from livestock; (c) skilled workers, including managers, supervisors and foremen (some of whom had a university degree and had mostly secured permanent employment contract); (d) government employees, including primary school teachers, police and army officers (there were only retired ones) and other low-ranked government employees (the government employees were categorised in one group because they all shared the same features of permanent employment – they enjoyed job security and retirement benefits); (e) entrepreneurs or the owners of workshops and other business units; (f) rentiers, who earned their living from leasing out their land, agricultural equipment or other property; (g) skilled industrial machine operators working on automated machines, who had acquired technical diplomas in private institutes and whose employment was characterised as 'casual' and 'rotational'; (h) independent workers, including plumbers, electricians and drivers; and (i) semi-skilled factory 'helpers', who acquired quick training on the job and were engaged in various manual activities in industrial units, such as packing and handling, and worked on short-term contracts.

The category of farmers owning more than 10 acres of agricultural land, and rentiers were distinguished because of their 'positive privileges' in the property market. The category of entrepreneurs was distinguished because of their 'positive privileges' in the labour market. This group did not necessarily own the production-site on which they established their non-farm economic activities. The remaining occupations in each category shared a broadly similar employment status, required education and skills, with a degree of manual work involved.

I suggest that ...middle classes are broadly situated between big landowning farmers, entrepreneurs and rentiers on the one hand, and the landless and near-to-landless unskilled wage labourers and semi-skilled manual industrial workers on the other. The former group owned profitable property and invested their surplus in expensive education for their children (the positively privileged propertied and commercial classes); they were characterised by ownership of large operational holdings and other productive property such as manufacturing workshops and other production units. Their economic activities mainly involved the large-scale appropriation of surplus in the form of agricultural labour and produce. The latter group neither owned profitable property nor any marketable educational qualification. Their only marketable capital was their manual labour power (the negatively

privileged propertied and commercial classes). The rural middle class thus consisted of self-employed farmers (owning less than 10 acres of agricultural land), PCPs, independent workers, government employees, skilled industrial employees including supervisors and managers (whose occupations required formal education and skills, which tended to be exceptional in the village), and industrial machine operators (who required special training and skill credentials, and whose physical labour was not reduced to commodity forms).

...A further difference between other skilled employees and skilled machine operators is their reliance on labour contractors. The recruitment process for casual employment for machine operators and semi-skilled workers ('helpers') in these factories takes place through various labour contractors. Vijay, a machine operator in Nandur, told me:

"Only those who are powerful in our village become industrial labour contractors. People like us who have no power do not have such possibilities. In Nandur, there are several contractors, all well connected to the Gram Panchayat office. The Gram Panchayat members hold all the power; they bully the factory managers, pressurising them, or demanding that the factories give them the contracts for recruitment. The owners of factories are afraid of the local Gram Panchayat because they fear if they do not give in to such demands they may face barriers in production process. So to avoid any local troubles, they meet the demand of the Gram Panchayat committee and give the contracts to fixed X, Y, and Z persons chosen by the Gram Panchayat members. So what the factory manager does is to select two, three or four people suggested by the Gram Panchayat committee to act as labour contractors, so that their production can be operated smoothly. That is how some people become labour contractors; and then they take the local and nearby boys to be hired in factories"

I thought that the absence of labour contractors in Rahatwade was positive for village residents because their pay would not have to go through the hands of middlemen. I soon realised, however, that despite their negative role, the presence of local labour contractors had some advantages for local industrial workers because it facilitated access to employment through local connections and kinship. Overall, the presence of labour contractors was disadvantageous in relation to their dominant economic role in the labour market, and through the exploitation of labour due to their taking commissions (also the process of recruitment might be mediated through kinship and caste). On the other hand, gaining access to industrial employment appeared to be impossible without them – they are as gatekeepers to industrial works. This made the role of labour contractors paradoxical: despite their disadvantageous economic role, they acted as local social network hubs for the village working population seeking industrial employment.

To sum up, in this chapter I shifted the conceptualisation of class from 'relations of production' to 'life chances' and occupational mobility through possession of non-propertied capital such as education and skill differentials, social networks and caste privileges. I sought to provide a preliminary guide to the varied ways in which members of aspirant rural households seek upward social mobility, to gain access to the middle-class labour market.

Answer the following questions based on the above passage:

- 1) What does the author mean by "positive privilege"? How is it acquired? [5 marks]
- 2) Who, according to the passage, can become a labour contractor? What do you think is the social and economic profile of the labour contractor? [5 marks]
- 3) How, according to the author, do contractors recruit workers? What is the implication of this system? [5 marks]
- 4) What is the analytical framework (~~Marxist~~, Weberian or Durkheimian) used by the author in the above passage? What tools of sociological analysis have been used? Identify and elaborate. [15 marks]