

Mid-Semester Examination

HSO.202: Thinking and Knowing in the Human Sciences - II

Max Marks: 30

22 September 2025

NOTE: Students are allowed to bring printouts of assigned readings to the exam hall. These printouts can have handwritten notes.

Instruction for students: In your answers, reflect on how the authors characterise the nature of classes and the processes of class formation.

1. What analytical framework has Salim Lakha used in his article on labour employed in the textile sector in Bombay? Explain with references from the article. (15 marks, 200-300 words, CO-3, CO-4)

3 marks? Depending 12

Salim Lakha uses a Marxist framework to understand the nature of labour employed in the textile sector in Bombay. 'Class' in his analysis is largely an economic category. Class (and class formation) is determined by relative access to raw materials, ownership and decision-making power around the manufacturing process. The main struggle delineated in the article is the struggle of workers (demanding wage increases, dearness allowance, bonus, regularisation of badli workers, allowances, benefits and better working conditions) against the industrial management, and the state which tends to support the management. The 'economic' base of capitalism shapes the nature of worker-state-industrialist relations. The workers, as a class, are identified in terms of their relative lack of ownership of raw materials as well as the relative lack of decision-making power on the factory floor. Classes are identified in terms of these precise distinctions. **Class, in Lakha's analysis does not consist of 'status' groups.**

In addition, Lakha argues that the 'economistic' demands of wages and bonuses become 'political' when employers and the state refuse to accommodate workers' demands (pp. 42-43). The fall of the Congress-backed RMMS happens because workers recognise their collective power (again, a reference to the traditional Marxist framework of class struggle), marking a break from older traditions of unionism (pp. 44-46). Also in an attempt to refine the Marxist framework, Lakha shows how the urban industrial working class is deeply connected through kinship ties to rural agricultural labour. There is, therefore, what Lakha calls, a "partial urban-industrial transformation" (pp. 43, 53).

2. What analytical framework does Jonathan Parry use to explain the nature of class formation in the shop floor in Bhilai? Explain with references from the article. (15 marks, 200-300 words, CO-3, CO-4)

Jonathan Parry, in his study of industrial labour employed in the Bhilai Steel Plant, uses the Weberian framework rather than the Marxist framework. The 'classes' of labour that Parry identifies are defined by those having 'naukri' (permanent workers) and those doing 'kaam' (contractual labour). Parry argues that this distinction of Naukri/kaam is not merely a distinction of manual/non-manual

labour. In fact, both classes could be doing the exact same work. The distinguishing feature is more cultural rather than economic.

The 'naukri' class has different 'life chances': it enjoys differential access and material AND symbolic advantages in accessing education, the marriage market and housing. This class differentiates itself in both economic as well as cultural (Parry refers to it as 'life chances') terms. Naukri refers to secure, permanent employment with regular salaries, legal protections, and more importantly **social prestige (the former can be Marxist parameters, but the latter, prestige is where the Weberian framework is revealed).**

By contrast, kaam denotes insecure, casual, daily wage labour typical of contract workers, who lack security, are poorly paid, and are **socially stigmatized** – often even described as **berozgar** (unemployed) despite their hard work (pp. 349–350). Parry shows that this distinction, which mirrors the formal/informal sector divide, creates two separate and opposed social classes: regular BSP workers see themselves (and are seen by others) as middle class, while contract workers are relegated to the "labour class" (pp. 350–351).

The Naukri-kaam distinction plays out outside the factory floor. Regular BSP employees live in company housing, send their children to better schools, accumulate assets, and secure favourable marriage alliances; contract workers, by contrast, live in poorer settlements, their children often drop out of underfunded government schools, and their economic precarity limits both savings and marital stability (pp. 352–354). The two classes do not socialise with each other. Patterns of sociability are also different – Naukri is characterised by economic class-based socialisation across castes and regional differences, kaam is characterised by kinship and caste based socialisation (pp. 363–368). In the process, two separate social worlds are created. In this way, Parry's analytical framework demonstrates that class in Bhilai is best understood through the **cultural and structural divide between secure naukri and insecure kaam. Status, security, and opportunity structure cause class division according to this analysis and therefore the Weberian framework has been used.**